

AJC Box
American Jews and Israel
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REBUILDING JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

Where Do We Go From Here?



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A Symposium in the Wake
of the Rabin Assassination



The American Jewish Committee

The American Jewish Committee protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.

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Contents

Introduction 5

Responses

Yehuda Amital 7

Steven Bayme 10

Gerald Bubis 16

Stephen P. Cohen 19

Arnold Eisen 23

Stuart Eizenstat 26

Daniel Elazar 31

Emil Fackenheim 33

Leonard Fein 36

Daniel Gordis 39

David Gordis 42

Alfred Gottschalk 45

Irving Greenberg 48

Arthur Hertzberg 51

Ammiel Hirsch 52

Paula Hyman	55
Francine Klagsbrun	57
Norman Lamm	60
Deborah Lipstadt	63
Alfred Moses	66
Letty Cottin Pogrebin	68
Emanuel Rackman	73
Joseph Rackman	75
Jehuda Reinharz	78
Anne Roiphe	80
Jonathan Rosenblatt	83
Jonathan Sarna	86
Ismar Schorsch	88
Chaim Seidler-Feller	91
David Teutsch	94
David Wolpe	97
Eric Yoffie	99

Introduction

The shocking, tragic assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin exposed a deep fissure within the Jewish people. The dividing lines, which to some extent coincide with secular/religious, Orthodox/non-Orthodox, and hawk/dove distinctions, also transcend them, cutting to the very definition of membership in the Jewish people and the meaning of its covenant. There are conflicting, strongly held visions of Judaism and the Jewish future involved here that often appear irreconcilable.

As one response to the assassination's highly charged aftermath, the American Jewish Committee projected a written symposium of leading Jewish intellectuals and communal leaders encompassing a broad spectrum of ideological opinion. We invited sixty individuals to participate, hoping to ensure a relative balance across political and denominational lines and between Israeli and American Jews. To our pleasure, thirty-two accepted our invitation. They were asked to respond to the following questions:

- 1. Given the divisions within the Jewish people today, what is there that can serve as the basis for Jewish peoplehood? What can be done to strengthen the sense of a common Jewish destiny?**
- 2. The assassination demonstrates that incendiary words can lead to even more incendiary deeds. What can the Jewish community do—both in Israel and the Diaspora—to ensure that freedom of expression stops short of the demonization of the opposition?**
- 3. There are those who believe that Jewish religious teachings at times conflict with the principles of democracy in a Jewish state. If so, what steps can be taken to prevent each from seeking to delegitimize the other?**

To be sure, our symposium does not strive for absolute inclusivity. No one who condoned the murder or who had previously invoked extremist rhetoric was invited to participate. This decision is in line with the AJC's interest in "strengthening the center"—stimulating a dialogue that includes all Jews who

are prepared to assert their personal Jewish identity and their commitment to continue to participate in the collective Jewish enterprise, and who reject extremism.

This publication reflects one AJC contribution to the vital process of rebuilding peoplehood. Our hope is that Israeli and Diaspora Jews will utilize it as a resource to develop the dialogue between Jew and Jew, a dialogue that is as necessary today as it has ever been.

David A. Harris, *Executive Director*
The American Jewish Committee

Yehuda Amital

At this cruel hour in Jewish history, in the wake of the terrible assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin z'l, we stand stunned, shamed, crushed. The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:5) states that every murderer strikes a blow at both the victim and his posterity. But the bullets fired at the prime minister have struck the entire house of Israel. They constitute a blow to *malkhut yisrael*, the sovereign authority of Israel, that is so important an element in the process of Redemption that we pray we are part of.

I believe that in spite of the chasm of differences within the Jewish people today, a sense of Jewish peoplehood remains. Indeed, perhaps the very intensity of concern on all sides over the future and character of Israel signifies what Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook called the *nitzotz yehudi*, the divine spark in every Jew. In secular terms, it might be seen as the persistent tribal feeling of belonging. Paradoxically, as our world becomes more international, more of a global village, we realize how much people need to cling to their primal identities.

This *nitzotz yehudi* in every Jew provides the basis to believe that each Jew is sincere in his/her concern for the Jewish people. Each Jew, therefore, must be judged *l'khaf zekhut*: it must be assumed that he/she is sincerely motivated by a desire to promote the welfare of the Jewish people. Amid the heat of democratic debate, we often lose sight of this in relation to public figures. We tend to judge them superficially, with little recognition of their deep commitment to our people. It is common knowledge, for example, that Prime Minister Rabin z'l was a man of great political and military accomplishment, that he devoted his life to his people. But few realize that he was also a man concerned with the Jewish character of the state, and worked hard to strengthen it.

Once we realize that every view has legitimacy, we pave the way for dialogue. If we know that all of us care about the destiny of the Jewish people, we will listen to each other more attentively, discuss issues in a more moderate tone. Our rabbis tell us "*habaim v'hamavet b'yad halashon*"—life and death are determined by the tongue.

One may certainly criticize the government. But we must remember that our nation has always related to its leaders with respect, even those who did not act according to the Torah. Maimonides, at the beginning of his discussion of the

Yehuda Amital

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laws of Hanukkah, notes that the importance of the holiday is that “it brought sovereignty back to Israel for more than two hundred years.” And this despite the fact that many opposed, on religious grounds, the Hasmonean dynasty that exercised that sovereignty.

Altogether, there must be an end to the demonization of one Jew by another. We must stop reading out of the Jewish people those who differ from ourselves. I refer particularly, of course, to what is happening in Israel in regard to the peace process. Since I consider Israel a unifying element for Jews throughout the world, what happens here radiates out to the Diaspora. If we can forge unity here, it will be a model of Jewish solidarity elsewhere; but if schisms divide Israelis from one another, they will reverberate in other Jewish communities.

We cannot afford schisms because the threat to Jewish survival is too great. Our very will for Jewish continuity binds us in a common destiny, and must galvanize us to common action. Never before has dialogue between Jews been so important. The dangers we face unite us. Assimilation erodes our people in the Diaspora, while in Israel we grapple with the question of Jewish identity for the majority of Israelis who are nonobservant. Together, we must face these existential issues.

As for the relation between halakhah and democracy, I believe there is no contradiction. True enough, there has been much discussion within the religious camp over whether, in a case of real conflict, halakhah takes precedence over civil authority. But this need not imply a contradiction between halakhic considerations and democracy. The principle of majority rule, in fact, guided the decisions of the Sanhedrin, the ancient Jewish court system. An apparent contradiction in Deuteronomy (17:15) about appointing a king highlights the Judaic value of democracy. First the Torah says, “You shall appoint for yourselves a king,” indicating that the people choose the king. But immediately following are the words “that the Lord your God will have chosen,” clearly stating a divine appointment. Ramban (Nahmanides), the great 13th-century commentator, resolves the difficulty by suggesting that a nation’s choice on earth signifies God’s choice in heaven. In other words, the popular selection of a political leader includes a spiritual dimension.

Democratic process is also vital for religion in pragmatic terms. Democracy provides a just mechanism whereby citizens subordinate their individual wills for the good of the collective. Undermining democracy—the authority of the government or the Knesset—can bring anarchy and the collapse of law and order,

threatening the state itself and all of its citizens. Such a situation is literally *pikuah nefesh*, danger to human life, which, according to the Torah, takes precedence over other considerations.

The view that halakhah and democracy are in conflict does not take into account the actual process of halakhic discourse. There is no such thing as *the* halakhic approach to a political issue. In matters pertaining to the state and its government, the Torah does not have one fixed law relevant to every situation in every generation. When it comes to the fateful questions that government deals with, the halakhist must consider the whole range of variables—spiritual, military, social, economic, and more. Only a government, calling on all its resources, can develop the broad overview that is needed. For a Torah authority to pronounce on political issues, he must be privy to the whole range of considerations that the government is taking into account.

In cautioning rabbinic authorities about the dangers of enunciating political stands on halakhic grounds, I do not mean to imply that the State of Israel lacks religious import. And I certainly do not believe that Israel's ceding land constitutes a surrender of faith in the spiritual redemptive process. Israel remains the fulfillment of a religious vision. The restoration of Jewish sovereignty in its homeland, our reentry into history, marks the beginning of the Redemption, *at'balta d'geulah*.

Steven Bayme

The Jewish people have suffered an enormous loss. Questions persist not only regarding how this happened but where do we go from here in healing the serious rifts and breaches that have so sorely torn the Jewish world.

To be sure, there are those who argue that this is not the time for repairing divisions. Tom Friedman, in a *New York Times* column, urged that in the aftermath of the assassination we choose up sides between those who favor peace and its opponents. Similarly, Leon Wieseltier in a *New Republic* article commented that this is "no time for healing." The American Jewish Committee has expressed a pronouncedly different view. In an ad printed in the *New York Times* entitled "Beyond Grief," AJC urged that we reassert the unity of the Jewish people, acknowledging significant diversity within our ranks but at the same time underscoring that what unites us as a people is far more important than what divides us.

The tragedy itself must be understood on multiple levels. First, it was a personal tragedy. The prime minister, of blessed memory, had spared no efforts to break the cycle of warfare between Israel and her neighbors. His vision of peace in the Middle East was far from realized. He deserves enormous credit for initiating a process that at least held out the hope for an alternative reality in the Middle East of the 21st century. His assassination signals not the end of the process he initiated but rather that he, like Moses of old, would be able only to glimpse the Promised Land and not enter it.

On a political level, the assassination underscored the significant opposition to the peace process within Israel itself. No overwhelming consensus exists in support of Prime Minister Rabin's policies. Certainly no linkage ought be drawn between legitimate disagreement about the peace process and the assassination itself. But some elements within Israeli society do maintain that the peace process failed to account for their security needs and sensibilities. Politically, therefore, the assassination signals the need to create a broader consensus in support of governmental policies.

On a national level, the assassination exposed deep fissures within the Jewish people and body politic. It signaled the conflicting visions of what is a Jew and what is a Jewish state. Since the assassination, "Orthodox-bashing" has prevailed in a wide variety of circles. Israel and the Jewish people are divided not only along

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political lines but also along far more existential lines—questions such as what it means to be a Jew today, and what is the definition of a Jewish society.

Lastly, the assassination signaled a tragedy of Judaism and Jewish teaching. That the assassin invoked Jewish heritage to justify murder constitutes a grave desecration of Torah. Nor can the assassin be dismissed as a lunatic—or a loner like Lee Harvey Oswald. Rather, he came from circles which stand at the very center of classical Jewish education.

What are the implications and where do we go from here? First, there is a need for accountability—to determine what went wrong, and how. For one thing, the political debate had become excessively polarized. The tendency to demonize one's opponents prevailed. Words like "traitor," "Judenrat," "Judeo-Nazi," and "murderer" became part of the lexicon. To be sure, this vocabulary was by no means the monopoly of the religious right. However, actual events—e.g., the Hebron massacre in 1994—had broken taboos and made the unthinkable possible. The effect of these murders internationally was to cede the moral high ground on which Israel had positioned itself. We must acknowledge, painful as it is, that we do have our own terrorists. They are not simply an aberration, but must be confronted and dealt with forthrightly. No society can exist unless it is prepared to defend itself against those who would take the law into their own hands.

Second, we have to look at Jewish education and the messages it transmits. Jewish education stands at the center of efforts to preserve Jewish continuity. There can be no Jewish continuity absent serious commitment to Judaism as faith and teaching. However, for Jewish education to fulfill that imperative, it must incorporate and emphasize Judaism's humanistic dimension—that all human beings are created in the image of God. Effective Jewish education requires a constant balance between particular Jewish needs and universal imperatives. The mantle of Torah cannot be permitted to justify hatred. Yet when Yigal Amir intoned "I have been studying Talmud all my life; I have all the data," he uncovered a dark undertone within Jewish educational circles that speaks in terms of absolutist certainty, and prevents serious dialogue between groups. Prominent Talmudic scholars issued harmful statements castigating supporters of the peace process as sinners. Rather than encourage absolutism, Jewish education needs to recognize the serious differences among Jews, among different Jewish texts, and within a common sense of Jewish peoplehood. As Dr. Norman Lamm emphasized to the students of Yeshiva University:

Beware of ever lightly cloaking political views, no matter how much you believe in them, in the mantle of halakhah And keep far away from excessive self-confidence that leads to arrogant self-righteousness that, in turn, persuades us that our ideals are greater and better than those of the other fellow; that we are sincere and he is not; that we are unquestionably right and he is indubitably wrong; that we are therefore entitled to force our views on him—by “eliminating” him if need be, in order to have our “truth” prevail.

Third, religious Zionism must undergo its own self-appraisal and reckoning. All too often religious Zionists have placed the unity of land over the unity of the Jewish people. Messianism has, in recent years, prevailed within many religious Zionist circles, ignoring some of the lessons of Jewish history in which messianic imperatives had provided some of the most dangerous currents in the annals of our people. Predominant opinion within rabbinic Judaism has always discouraged messianism as futile and potentially destructive. The irony of recent years was that some of the most fervent apostles of rabbinic Judaism ignored the dangers of “forcing the end” and hastening the imminent arrival of the redeemer. And the ugly racism and cult of violence articulated by Meir Kahane all too often permeated religious Zionist circles. Kahane in his last years continued to be received within synagogues and Jewish schools even after he had been ostracized for his racism by the organized American Jewish community and the Israeli Knesset.

The left too must face its own accountability. All too often, the left downplayed the security concerns of West Bank residents. In truth, it had often been the Labor party that built settlements and encouraged people to move to them. Perhaps most significantly, the left had little empathy for the religious and historical claims of the settlers. Even if one takes the settlement in Hebron, which is perhaps the least justifiable of settlements, the fact remains that Hebron was the sole place where Jews maintained continuous settlement from biblical times into the 20th century, and the only reason there were no Jews there after 1929 was that they had been massacred by Arabs. In that sense, the initiative to settle in Hebron, as misguided politically as it may have been, reflected an authentic concern with preserving historical Jewish attachments to one of the most storied cities of Jewish history.

Nor has the left lacked for extreme language and incivility. Some of its spokespersons claim innocence on the ground that no one on the left has fired a shot. The response to that is twofold: First, the lessons of the assassination prove that we can never take for granted the sanctity of life. Second, and perhaps more impor-

tant, we ought to acknowledge that extremist language must be marginalized no matter from where it emanates. When politicians use phrases like “We will crush them,” they are guilty of violating basic democratic norms that acknowledge the right of dissent and the imperatives of preserving minority rights. Let us recall that it was a prominent dovish philosopher, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who coined the term “Judeo-Nazi.” Similarly, at an AJC meeting some years ago, an Israeli politician condemned Lubavitch as “the Nazis of our time.”

Beyond facing up to what went wrong, we also must revisit what we mean by common Jewish peoplehood and collective Jewish experience. The reality of a Jewish state challenges the Jewish people to fulfill the responsibilities of sovereignty while acting in an ethical and moral fashion. Powerlessness, to be sure, always has the virtue of the moral high ground. Yet, in many ways, it only signals the classic image of sympathy for the Jew as victim. Zionism posited a much more difficult challenge—what the Zionist philosopher Ahad Ha’am referred to as the unity of ethics and politics—namely, fulfilling the responsibilities of power and sovereignty while preserving Jewish ethics. Israel as a Jewish state constitutes a statement that Jewish history continues, that its most exciting chapters are taking place at this very moment. Jewish peoplehood in this age means that every Jew has a share in that ongoing history, and responsibility to be part of that collective endeavor. Yet we cannot content ourselves with statements of unity. We must acknowledge divisions between us over politics, religion, and even our very definition of who is a Jew. These divisions are by no means necessarily harmful. On the contrary, some ideological controversy is healthy, for it means that at least we care passionately about these issues and values. Unity should not mean uniformity of opinion. On the contrary, for democracy to survive, a government must have an opposition. In terms of our religious disputes and controversies, an ethos of pluralism does not mean we must agree with one another. Rather, as Irving Greenberg has argued, a “contentious pluralism” means the freedom to engage passionately over these issues, debate with one another their merits and demerits, all in a collective endeavor to enhance the Jewish people.

Controversy, in short, is by no means the enemy of the Jews. On the contrary, we have far more to fear from religious indifference than from religious pluralism. But our challenge is to work these disagreements and divisions out in the spirit of shared excitement of the Jewish enterprise, loyalty to the Jewish people and Jewish state, and love for all Jews. Let all Jews recognize that we are all in this business together of preserving and enhancing the Jewish people. For all that we may vigorously disagree over means, our overarching ends and purposes

remain the welfare of the Jews as a people and the nurturing of justice for humanity generally.

We must reclaim the Judaic heritage as the treasure of the entire Jewish people. The assassination was not a sign of the normality of the Jews as a people, that, like all other states, they have their fanatics. Rather, the assassination signaled a violation of the Jewish covenant and Judaic teaching. There can be no Judaism without ethics. That humanistic thrust within Judaism, unfortunately, was lost in the circles that fomented hatred within the Jewish people.

The right today articulates a language of Jewish unity. The left is speaking a language of democracy and majority rule. Both sides must work toward bridging that gap. There is no contradiction between unity of the Jews as a people and democracy as a political value. From its very beginnings, Zionism contained deep divisions over vision and self-definition. Some maintained that the Zionist endeavor was creating a state for Jews. Others claimed that the endeavor was meaningful only if it resulted in a Jewish state—informed and guided by Jewish heritage and teaching. Some Zionists were optimistic about the Gentile world and looked to fulfill Zionist aims through friendly Gentile assistance. Others were pessimistic and claimed that Zionism required self-reliance and self-emancipation. Perhaps the finest moments in Zionist history occurred when these contrasting visions were shared—when those who had known the reality of war were prepared to make peace. Our task today is to nurture and further develop these competing visions of Zionism and peoplehood—to take the best of each, to synthesize tradition and modern culture, and at the same time to critique and engage both value systems—to incorporate those aspects that speak to us and to criticize those aspects that may be foreign to us.

For the Jewish world needs both currents. It needs a vibrant Orthodoxy to sustain Jewish continuity. Yet, for the very same reason, Orthodoxy requires vibrant Conservative and Reform movements to preserve Jews as Jews. Orthodoxy cannot sustain the entire Jewish people alone. By the same token, Israel requires the energies of the entire Jewish world. It too needs Orthodoxy to nurture Jewish tradition and articulate its voice within a Jewish state. Greater religious pluralism within Israel would help counter prevailing religious indifference. Similarly, Israel benefits from a creative and healthy Diaspora. And Israel benefits from the resources of secular Jews who remind us of our obligations to humanity at large and to the protection of minorities.

Thus no single sector of Jews possesses all the answers to today's Jewish agenda. A true pluralism requires not a surrender of principle but rather a recognition that different Jews working together for similar purposes can accomplish much more than a house divided.

The assassination did not create our divisions. They have been with us from time immemorial. Yet the lessons of Jewish disunity have also been with us. The Talmud attributes the collapse of the Second Jewish Commonwealth to internal Jewish disunity. Our job 2,000 years later and fifty years after the Holocaust is to sustain and rebuild that unity and peoplehood even as we acknowledge our serious differences and disagreements.

Gerald Bubis

One of the greatest taboos of Jewry, one that has lasted with but few exceptions from the destruction of the Second Temple to our day, has been broken. A Jew has assassinated another Jew.

The shattering of this shared norm has also shattered the innocence of most Diaspora Jews, laying bare the realities that separate Israel and Diaspora. Most of us in America live in a postideological Jewish world, as contrasted to our counterparts in Israel. Dialogue and consensus are our well-honed tools for resolving differences. The often rancorous debates in Israel, so common to the political process, are born of differing approaches to conflict resolution.

Israel is, after all, a sovereign nation. The sometimes brutal, oftentimes raw use of political trade-offs, buyouts, and metaphoric murdering of person and position, resonates to the echoes of comparable political battles in the American public arena yesterday and today.

The very premises of peoplehood have been most betrayed by American Jewish leadership and its illogical stance regarding Israel. The Zionist premises were that Israel belonged to a Jewish people; the people in turn were to relate to Israel through the prisms of varying visions for the Jewish future. These premises are now weak and inconsistent.

The conventional wisdom of American Jewish "leadership" can be reduced to the formulation of supporting Israel's government "right or wrong." Over the years, as a result of the search for consensus, the lowest common denominator of thinking produced the astounding conclusion that Diaspora Jews had no right to think, speak, or write about *their* visions of Israel and its possibilities as a Jewish state.

Rather, with the encouragement (and sometimes disparagement) of whatever government was in power, Diaspora Jews were asked uncritically to support Israel's government. The rationale was born of the notion that only Israelis could decide what is best for Israel because only they took responsibility for the ultimate consequences of their actions.

The result has not only been a muting of criticisms or cautions when they were

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most indicated (the Lebanon war debacle, for example) but also an alienating and demonizing of those in America who chose to maintain fidelity to deeply held ideas, values, and positions, regardless of who was in power in Israel.

It *is* true that Israelis take the consequences for their actions to a far greater degree than do Diaspora Jews. Nevertheless, if we are one people, then *all* of us have a right and a responsibility to have our voices heard, from right, center, and left, realizing that Israelis will make the ultimate decisions for actions. There can be naught but diminishing respect for a Diaspora leadership which rarely holds to any position that differs from the government of Israel. So it comes to pass that the Conference of Presidents, which supported a government whose policies were intended to ensure that a Palestinian "entity" never comes into being, now supports a government that is trying to bring such an "entity" into being, and seemingly would be ready to revert to supporting a hypothetical succeeding government committed to stopping the present policy in its tracks.

The basis for peoplehood, then, lies in better understanding what it is that Jews believe about themselves, and about their counterparts across the ocean. More importantly, we must celebrate and encourage the diversity of religious and political positions that characterize the lives and thoughts of caring and engaged Jews everywhere.

Teaching materials about Jewish diversity must be expanded. Organizations must celebrate the differences by offering platforms and other opportunities for expounding the varied positions. Our destiny is ultimately grounded in what the late social psychologist Simon Herman called a sense of interdependence of fate. That sense can only be intensified by the respectful decision to disagree when appropriate. At the same time we must use to best advantage the rare moments of unity.

Above all, the innocence born of ignoring the growing presence of extreme voices must come to an end. Not all traditional Jews are extremists. The fact remains, however, that most extremists today are to be found within the Orthodox community. To be sure, such questions as how to deal with Palestinians, settlers, and boundaries, indeed, the very question of the place and power of Orthodox Judaism in the Israeli body politic, are legitimate issues for all Jews, including the Orthodox. All those who believe in diversity should speak loudly and work mightily for our respective positions. But to support those institutions and religious figures who engage in excess by calling for radical actions against others is not only naive, but dangerous.

Let the radical yeshivas and rabbis be identified by name. Just as we want our food to be identified as kosher or not, so should we insist on labeling *treif* (unkosher) those teachings and teachers that exceed the bounds of decency. While the left must not demonize, it should counter the toxicities of excesses that call for destructive behavior.

Those who argue that Judaism and democracy are incompatible must be countered by reputable scholars of all the religious streams. Curricular materials developed by a consortium of rational and respected scholars for American and Israeli schools could play a significant role. The Internet, World Web, and other new technologies must be utilized in this effort.

I see no institutionalized messages or modalities of hate developed by the left. Rabin was insensitive at times in his dealings with the settlers, who were, after all, encouraged to live in the territories by both major political parties. Today, Peres must recognize and deal with legitimate concerns regarding safety and geopolitical realities. While he may not convince all or most of the settlers, he must try to convince Israelis and Jews worldwide that his vision for a future Israel is grounded in Jewish *and* democratic teachings.

Yes, the taboo is broken. Those who sang the song of peace that night of our tragedy must remember that Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau were reconciled as a result of death. Can we hope that the reconciliation that is painfully developing between Israel and the Palestinians be extended between Jew and Jew?

Stephen P. Cohen

The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin demonstrated that there was a subcommunity within the Israeli religious body politic that was willing to use violence against the leadership of the state in an attempt to prevent the peace process from going forward. That subcommunity came to believe that it had religious sanction if not religious obligation to carry out this act and many other acts of violence and rebellion because the government had lost any legitimacy in its eyes.

There are very few voices at this time which support that subcommunity openly. One element of strong common commitment has been affirmed: that no disagreement legitimates premeditated political murder. I would like to believe that a much wider consensus has been reinforced: that the Israeli democratic system will not accept its preemption by violence of any sort.

There remains a deep disagreement as to how extensive that subcommunity is which arrogates to itself the right to violently subvert democracy. How much has this subcommunity developed as a part of the mainstream religious Zionist community? How much have the forms of teaching common to that mainstream community been the seedbed for the ideology and actions of this rebellious subcommunity? How much active and passive support for this violence and delegitimation has been provided in the Diaspora by Orthodox Jews and elements of the right goading them on?

What is more uncertain is whether the principles of democracy are as yet fully internalized by the Jewish people when it comes to issues of Israel and Judaism. The question as put by the AJC questionnaire only reinforces that problem. The issue is not of religious teachings as such. Sources of authority compete. The legitimacy of state authority and law in the face of interpretations of the imperatives of religious law and belief is the key. These issues of authority of the state vis-à-vis religious requirements are not only an issue in the Jewish state. They are an issue in the Islamic world, and in America. Too many Jews flirted with the idea of requiring a Jewish majority—excluding Israeli Arabs from legitimacy—for deciding Israel's core issues; too many Jews flirt still with the idea that Israeli democracy should stop at the doorstep of the rabbi and of halakhah.

Stephen P. Cohen
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ment

When the issue is extremist Christian groups in America, there is a Jewish consensus. On Islamic fundamentalism, we are united in condemnation. Our own complex experience about respecting the realm of religious authority while at the same time forcefully advocating individualism, individual rights, the primacy of democracy, and the rule of law should now be more judiciously applied to the dilemmas of others and to our own challenge of Orthodoxy.

The Orthodox community has come to expect and to receive a special status in relation to public norms of Israeli life and Jewish institutional life. Here the rule of the majority is suspended out of respect for the religious sensibilities of a minority of the community, sometimes a very small minority. The norm is accepted for two reasons: If such things as kashrut and Shabbat were not accepted, then a certain group would be excluded a priori from participation. This would violate the value of inclusiveness, which is an important value for the non-Orthodox Jewish majority in the Diaspora and in Israel. The second reason is respect for the authenticity of the demand and, by implication, respect for the religious and cultural authenticity of the Orthodox. Respect for this authenticity appeals to many in the non-Orthodox majority as a way of assuring the continuation of tradition at a time when their own beliefs and practices are in a state of uncertainty and suspended belief, not rejection.

However, this exceptionalism produces resentment, and a balance must be struck. To maintain this norm of deference to the Orthodox, the Orthodox community must not abuse the rights of the majority on issues that go beyond religious and cultural practice and are of primary significance to the whole people. The leaders of religious Zionism understood that balance well in the heady days of the founding of Israel and in the tough years of struggle to make it militarily and economically viable. They established and maintained the religious "status quo," the threshold norm of religious sensibility that continues to infuse Israeli life with a recognizable Jewish rhythm and public face.

This wise restraint was gradually abandoned in the last several years, in part because of a misperception by religious Zionists that, in alliance with the secular right, they could be part of a new semipermanent ruling majority in Israel. Given such an assumption, overengagement in the political battle of peace versus territory, far from constituting a danger to the status quo, might lead to a new status quo more favorable to the Orthodox. In the aftermath of the assassination, the religious Zionist leadership seems to have backed away from

this risky assumption, realizing that the status quo was vulnerable from both sides. The Israeli political leadership has also quietly reverted to upholding the much maligned but even more necessary status quo, even as the Supreme Court of Israel tinkers at including non-Orthodox Jews in that status quo.

This misjudgment committed by the Israeli Orthodox leadership bears a lesson for American Orthodoxy. There is a tempting temporary coalition between elements of American Orthodoxy and secular neoconservatives which is grounded in a common distaste for liberalism.

However, the main issue goes beyond liberalism. It is one of exclusionism versus inclusionism. American Jewish sensibility is inevitably inclusionist, since living in an open society means that there will always be many Jews who will live lives far from normative Judaism though they often feel very deeply as Jews. Not only in religious behavior, but in family structure, in sexual orientation, and in relation with the non-Jew, they will be the vanguard of new openness and new norms.

Most sweeping of all is the issue of women's equality, the core inclusionist issue. The misogynist mood will not last. The neoconservative critique of feminism is a misleading basis for an Orthodox comfort zone: the insistence on a fundamental change in the status of the Jewish woman within Jewish society and religious culture will not wane.

The Orthodox do not want an assault on their right to differ, nor do they wish the deference to the Orthodox to diminish. Thus prudence calls for them to resist the temptation to be embraced too tightly by the antiliberal mood, the anti-inclusionist fashion of a few intellectuals and politicians.

If many Orthodox Jews in the Diaspora joined the Israeli Orthodox in underestimating the cultural importance of peace to Israel, it was because Diaspora Orthodoxy could not grasp the positive meaning of the search for normalcy in Zionism and Israeli culture. "Normal" seemed to the Orthodox a pursuit of assimilation at the national level, an abandonment of the uniqueness of Jewish experience for some illusion of universal acceptance.

But "normal" can mean just the opposite. It can connote a belief that the goal of modern Jewish nationalism is the achievement of a status of full equality and participation with the other on the basis of assertion of one's own unique

group identity. This is the norm for the French or the English or the Americans. Expressing one's group pride and interacting with the other are normative expectations, not alternatives. In this perspective, the antidote to ghettoization and to assimilation are the same: strong group identity accepted and respected by the other.

In the pursuit of peace, Diaspora and Israel do not grow further apart, but converge. American Jewry has achieved an unprecedented level of acceptance, and now seeks to enhance and reinforce its unique identity; Israel, having become a remarkable and unique assertion of Jewish vitality and viability in a century when the greatest fury of hatred toward Jews flourished, is now courageously reshaping its environment. Peace is gradually moving Israel from uniform hostility to a normal mixture of cooperation and competition, to a nonviolent resolution of conflict, to a normal range of friendship, indifference, and dislike in place of the monochrome of hatred. Thus the two central Jewish societies of our day both want an openness to the world combined with a strong, assertive Jewish identity.

The Orthodox community and the idea it embodies can play central roles in this convergence of the political-cultural challenges of Israel and Diaspora. As American Jewry focuses on keeping the next generation Jewish, Orthodoxy has institution-building experience of great relevance to the larger community. As Israel digs deeper into its encounter with the Arab world beyond leadership to the Muslim citizenry, the Orthodox could help navigate through the troubled waters, distinguishing between threatening and nonthreatening forms of religious commitment in Arab Islam. However, such central roles require wholehearted, forthright rejection of the idealization of the purist, holistic dismissal of democratic authority in favor of religious authority. It also demands the end of the illusion that the Orthodox will, in either society, become the dominant culture as a result of the struggles, foibles, uncertainties, and mistakes of the secular and/or non-Orthodox majority and its leaders.

The Jewish people is more alive and well as the century closes than at any previous time in this century. We need more strongly held and strongly expressed views, but without the fear that someone else's Jewish view is about to destroy the Jewish people. We are stronger than that. Even assassination did not stop the determination of this generation Jews to be fully in the world and to be fully assertive, affirmative Jews as individuals and as a collective.

Arnold Eisen

After the assassination of Israel's prime minister, as before, there is only one firm basis for unity among the Jewish people and strong relations between Israel and Diaspora in particular: the conviction that we *are* a people, meaning that we are linked to one another indissolubly by our history until now, and by our commitment to carrying on—in various ways, to be sure—the tradition that is our common inheritance. This realization has over the past generation or so become problematic in many respects. In Israel, as outside it, many Jews feel little connection to Jewish tradition, have little knowledge of what the conversation begun at Mt. Sinai has involved over the centuries in all its diverse forms, and have little information about or feeling for Jews outside their own communities. Few outside Israel speak Hebrew, or read it with any fluency. Few Israelis know any more than stereotypes about American Jews—or about the history of Judaism. Few Orthodox Jews know much about, or take seriously, forms of Judaism other than their own—and the same can be said of many other Jews about Orthodoxy. The problems are many, and well known.

While I am not hopeful about achieving unity any time soon, precisely because the Jews who do care about Judaism care so deeply, and therefore cleave fervently to their own interpretations of it to the point of delegitimizing others, neither do I think we need unity. What we need instead is threefold: knowledge, conversation, and cooperation. My experience has been that modern Jewish history provides the easiest entree to these. The facts, as it were, speak for themselves. It is not hard to impress upon people on all sides of these divides that Jewish existence in the modern period has proven possible in two and only two frameworks. One can either have a nation-state, the Zionist option, or one can live in a Diaspora community. Nondemocratic Diasporas have subjected Jews consistently to the demon of anti-Semitism. Democracy, of course, means that we must face up to assimilation; only a minority of Jews will place Judaism at the center of their lives. Social and cultural currents are too strong to resist. Statehood has immense advantages in that respect, for the calendar is Jewish, the media are Jewish, etc., but it also means dependence upon force of arms and allies. Neither option is without risks. Such are the ground rules of life in the modern world. All Jews can understand this.

In order for us to play by these rules and win—i.e., live substantial Jewish lives, free to be obligated to one another and our tradition—we need each of the three

Arnold Eisen

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things I mentioned earlier. We need cooperation in order to maximize our chances to survive, let alone to thrive, as a tiny people struggling as usual against enormous odds to maintain our very distinctive way of life. We need knowledge of each other, because the intellectual and cultural resources required exceed what any one community in any one generation can acquire. My Judaism, my insight into what my tradition requires of me and offers to me, has been enhanced immeasurably by teachers from all streams of Judaism, in Israel as well as the Diaspora. A moment's reflection will show that this is true for almost all of us. Finally, and most of all, we need dialogue, frank discussion for the sake of heaven, not only to accomplish the cooperation and convey the knowledge, but because the possibilities open to me as a Jew are much wider when I do not simply read about them in books, but see them embodied in actual lives. Human beings are more interesting than books, more surprising. They make better teachers.

Most American Jews at present have no direct experience of these three; indeed, most Israelis have not crossed the divide separating their small society to know from the inside Jews living Jewish lives different from their own. Bridges are no longer a desideratum. They are an absolute necessity. "Missions" to Israel should be redesigned, in a way already begun, to link Americans to Israelis who are like them—physicians with physicians, parents with parents, lay leaders with lay leaders—rather than with representatives of the government. Every journey should have a strong educational component, and politics is the least of what these people need to study. Jewish peoplehood becomes a reality only when one experiences it firsthand, as in the faces on an Egged bus. Israelis visiting the U.S.A. in their hundreds of thousands should have comparable stopovers in Jewish homes and institutions as part of their time here. The sense of common destiny is strengthened most when one knows the people who embody it. We have to increase the number of Hebrew speakers on our side, the number of Israel visits. And Israeli classrooms must be transformed so that Judaism becomes the active inheritance of all, not merely of those who call themselves *dati*.

This same hands-on experience with diversity is the only reliable way of inculcating the commitment to democracy. We can and should help Israelis develop educational programs, media, etc., to foster the norms of democracy. Tocqueville wrote in his classic work that Americans become committed to democracy by practicing it on the local level. This is crucial in Israel as well. Our role here will necessarily be indirect—assisting Israelis in designing and funding programs that necessarily will be put into practice by Israelis and not by us. But it is crucial that we ourselves convey the knowledge, by the means that I described above, that the

tension between our age-old Jewish tradition and modern democracy is a fruitful tension and by no means a contradiction. We cannot convey that knowledge by preaching it. We can do so only by making Jewish tradition live in us and so through us, thereby proving that the alleged conflict between Judaism and democracy, like those between tradition and modernity, or faith and reason, is a false choice. Every dialogue among Jews of differing commitments, every serious meeting between Jews at the cutting edge of modernity and their tradition, every act of cooperation between Orthodox and non-Orthodox, every conversation despite strong disagreement, weakens that false dichotomy and thus strengthens both Judaism and democracy. We do not need unity for this. We need to know the depth of our need for one another despite our lack of unity.

Yitzhak Rabin's assassination thus only drives home the urgency of doing what has long been needed, and will be needed all the more as each of our Jewish societies and paths prospers and goes its own way, diverging more and more from all the others. Blessing can sadly become a curse, as progress to peace has spawned murder. The accord with the Palestinians has ironically pointed up the need for peace in the House of Israel—and for us that means serious reengagement with Israel, as well as with one another.

Stuart Eizenstat

The tragic murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin underscores the fact that for the balance of the 20th century and well into the next, the central challenge of the Jewish people, in Israel and throughout the Diaspora, will be internal rather than external.

For sure, Jewish history teaches us that we can never be complacent about our foes. The Golden Age of Spain was soon followed by the Inquisition and expulsion. What for the time was an unprecedented integration into post-World War I German economic and political life was wiped out in less than a decade by the Nazi regime. The stirring and swift victory of the Israel Defense Forces in the Six-Day War was followed by the near-disaster of the Yom Kippur War.

The Jewish people must remain vigilant, vocal, and aggressive against anti-Semitism in the Diaspora just as Israel has remained so militarily strong that any potential foe is deterred from attack.

But, in fact, external threats have been significantly reduced, and we should take pride and satisfaction in the end of Israel's isolation (while it keeps a wary eye on Iran and Iraq), just as anti-Semitism, while still around, is far less threatening and is denounced by public officials in virtually all developed democracies.

My response to the thought-provoking questions of the American Jewish Committee have been significantly influenced by my tenure in Europe, both as U.S. ambassador to the European Union and as the State Department's special envoy for Jewish property restitution in Central Europe. I have been deeply moved by two things.

First, I have become close friends with the generation of Holocaust survivors and their children, each of whose life story is gripping and compelling. This remnant that escaped Hitler's deadly grasp runs the gamut of the Jewish spectrum—from highly Orthodox to highly secular. Their shared experience reinforced for me the diverse nature of Judaism. But there was a common strand: They were all endangered, and six million of their brothers and sisters were murdered for one reason—they were Jews. It did not matter if they were observant, partially observant, or completely unobservant.

Stuart Eizenstat

U.S. Ambassador to the European Union. This essay is submitted in his personal, not professional, capacity.

Second, particularly in the Jewish communities of Central Europe, most generally small, mere shadows of their prewar selves, from the Czech Republic and Hungary to Poland and Slovakia, from Romania and Lithuania to Estonia and Latvia, courageous Jews—secular, liberal, and Orthodox—are staying and rebuilding institutions devastated by the twin tragedies of Nazism and communism. Day schools are opening to overflow enrollments. More and more people are identifying themselves as Jewish. Adults are enrolling in *ulpanim* to learn Hebrew. Synagogues are being restored and minyanim maintained. There is a sense of energy. It is inspirational to see the new shoots of grass sprout among the bones and ashes of our people.

And now to your questions.

1. The Jewish people have always been a diverse lot and always will be. But our sense of peoplehood will be strengthened by the following:

• *A focus on what unites us rather than what divides us:* A common destiny based upon a 3000-year shared history of great suffering and enormous achievement, and pride in carrying forward the longest unbroken chain of any people in recorded history give us a sense of peoplehood. We revel in learning that a Jew has gone into space as an astronaut, or made a medical breakthrough, or been elected U.S. senator, or excelled in sports, just as we recoil at a Jew who has acted in ways that bring dishonor to him and, by extension, to us. This is a sense of peoplehood.

• *An appreciation of our shared religious traditions, based on a common Torah and teachings.* Whether we pray three times a day or once a year, we can go into any synagogue anywhere in the world and find the same basic services, the same prayers, similar melodies, and a similar welcome. During the eleven-month period I was saying kaddish each day for my father—all over the United States and in diverse places abroad—I was welcomed warmly as a brother in need of a minyan to fulfill my spiritual obligation. Though we choose to interpret the Torah differently, those differences pale in comparison to our consensus on the basic essentials of our religion.

• *We will strengthen our peoplehood by making a renewed effort—for our children and grandchildren and for us as adults at any age—to learn Hebrew, our ancient and revived common language.* A tremendous sense of identification will be achieved if we set a goal of being able to converse, even at a basic level, in Hebrew.

• *A common identification with and effort to strengthen the modern State of Israel, the first Jewish state in two millennia.* Few things will do more to give us a greater sense of peoplehood. We may relate to Israel in different ways, depending on our backgrounds. But we provide a rallying point for Jews the world over, of every stripe, by involving ourselves in the myriad activities, from regular visits and missions to contributions, from Arab-Israeli reconciliation and helping elderly or poor Israelis to supporting yeshivot, hospitals, and other institutions, and by exposing our children at an early age to camps, educational semesters abroad, and family vacations in Israel. Taking a page from the Mormons, every Jewish family should send their children to Israel on a study mission, either during high school, between high school and college, or for college credit.

• *By engaging in joint and common efforts to help Jews in danger, as those who were threatened in the past in the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, we strengthen our sense of peoplehood.*

• *We can avoid divisive actions which threaten our sense of peoplehood.* This comes in many forms. Orthodox Jews who write Conservative, Reform, and secular Jews out of the religion fail to recognize how many things bind us together and how much we weaken ourselves by such attitudes. At the same time, the decision of the Reform movement unilaterally to adopt patrilineal descent as a fundamental tenet deprived us of the clearest sense of peoplehood—an accepted definition of who is a Jew by birth. This decision should be reconsidered.

• *But the most important ingredient in peoplehood is to look at each other differently.* We must truly love our fellow Jews; revel in our diversity; see in every Jew a part of our past and a part of our future.

2. The Rabin assassination is the most extreme example of the internal strains in the modern Jewish world. In increasingly strident terms, elements of our Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities have squared off in Israel, the United States, and Europe, each increasingly trying to delegitimize or marginalize the other. In political terms, the left and right debate Israel's future in apocalyptic terms, each viewing the other's positions as mortal threats to Israel's existence, rather than as political differences.

The murder of Yitzhak Rabin, like the slaughter of Palestinians by Baruch Goldstein in Hebron, should not be dismissed as merely the violent act of a madman,

an Israeli version of Lee Harvey Oswald or Sirhan Sirhan. Rabin's was a political murder with a political purpose—to halt the peace process because of its impact on the hope of some for a Greater Israel. An atmosphere of total disrespect for the government's policy had been created, and the prime minister was demonized in ways that far exceed acceptable democratic norms.

A few months ago, fifteen rabbis on the West Bank issued a declaration that forbade Orthodox soldiers in the IDF from obeying orders to dismantle army bases in the West Bank, thereby indicting the government for acting in an antihalakhic manner. The prime minister—a hero of the War of Independence, chief of staff in the Six-Day War when Israel captured the very territory on which the militants refuse to compromise, a man who time and again risked his life for Israel's security—was called a traitor.

Compromise with the PLO, the return of territory on the West Bank and Gaza, and the safety of the Jewish residents there are certainly legitimate matters for debate in Israel. On the outcome of such debate hinges the whole future direction of the Jewish state. But the excesses of radicals who would use the Torah, which teaches compassion and tolerance, as a basis for vilifying and even murdering Israel's own leadership is beyond bounds.

This is a watershed event for Israel and for the Jewish people worldwide, with the potential to divide secular and non-Orthodox Jews from our Orthodox brothers and sisters. Several points need to be made:

• *As a succession of esteemed rabbis have indicated, there is no legitimate Torah-based justification for killing another Jew because of political disagreement.* The Torah and its teachings are based upon loving thy neighbor as thyself, accepting the stranger in our midst, brotherhood and justice, not self-appointed vigilante acts. The Talmud states that it was unfounded and senseless hatred among the Jewish people that brought the destruction of the Second Temple.

• *It is a gross error to blame the Orthodox community in Israel collectively for this act.* The overwhelming majority of Israeli Orthodox Jews are strong Zionists, excellent citizens, and serve in the army, distinguishing themselves as fighters and leaders. Non-Orthodox Jews must not lump together all religious Jews.

• *Only a minuscule, albeit dangerous, group of radicals condone violence.*

Several concrete steps can be taken:

- *Israel can consider adopting a political code of conduct governing standards of debate in the Knesset and at political party-sponsored public events. An independent commission, like the U.S. Federal Election Commission, can monitor the code and impose fines for violations. Politicians of all stripes and parties and mainstream Orthodox Jews have an obligation strongly to oppose political rhetoric that treats public figures with whom they disagree as enemies of the state and of Judaism. A climate of acceptance cannot be tolerated for the type of attacks made against Prime Minister Rabin before his death.*
- *Radical and violent extremists must be tracked, identified, isolated, and prosecuted.*
- *Education in both Orthodox and secular communities in Israel is crucial. The same type of courses in democracy and tolerance provided in Israel's secular school system could be required in all yeshivot receiving state funds. But likewise, the secular system should require courses on the meaning and beauty of Orthodox traditions.*
- *Orthodox rabbis in the United States and Israel should emphasize the applicability of the principle of lashon ha'ra—that it is a sin to speak evil of another person. Had this been emphasized, the demonization of political opponents in Israel and opposing ideologies in the Diaspora could have been avoided.*
- *Great emphasis has properly been placed on structured Jewish-Catholic interreligious dialogue and Jewish-black dialogue. It is time, in Israel and the Diaspora, for intracommunal sessions within the Jewish community to discuss our divisions, reduce differences, and find common ground. The American Jewish Committee could take the lead in the United States.*

Daniel Elazar

Yitzhak Rabin's tragic assassination at the hands of a fellow Jew exacerbated many of the cleavages in contemporary Jewish life—on the peace issue, religious-secular relations in Israel, Orthodox-non-Orthodox relations outside of it, and perhaps even aspects of the Israel-Diaspora relationship. This has occurred not so much because of differences over the assassination itself, but as a result of misunderstanding of what happened and why.

There was one cleavage that seemed reduced in the wake of the assassination: that between those who see the future of Israel as a "normal" state like all others in the world and whose Jewishness is incidental, a result of a Jewish majority in the population, and those who see Israel's future as continuing to be a Jewish state where the maintenance and advancement of Jewish culture and religion are central. In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, many previously associated with the "normalization" model returned to Zionism as the "faith of the fathers." But in the long run, that kind of "foxhole religion" will wear off, just as it did in previous times of crisis for the parents or older brothers of these same people.

The near witchhunt that followed the initial mourning period, whereby certain people on the left, along with official bodies looking for scapegoats for their own failures, began pursuing everyone who was identifiably religious, also seems to be on the wane as I write these lines. Shimon Peres, as Rabin's successor, has been trying to bridge the chasm between the Labor camp and the religious element for the sake of national unity and the pursuit of peace. By doing so he has contributed to a reduction of tensions, though the matter is not over yet.

In a real sense, Prime Minister Peres has shown us the way to build bridges across the fissures. The task is not so much intellectually to reach a common basis for Jewish self-understanding and unity as it is of taking practical steps to encourage all Jews who see themselves as Jews in some meaningful way to act toward each other with mutual respect and forbearance, if not love or admiration. Discussions—yea, arguments—over the basis for Jewish unity in our time will continue, but we know that those who care enough to argue are people who feel themselves to be Jews. Thus our task is not to solve the intellectual or ideological problems, but for our leaders and institutions to find practical ways to link together those engaged in the debate.

Daniel Elazar

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This may best be done by a carrot-and-stick method. Unlike the situation a century or two ago, the Jewish people now has what to offer in the way of a carrot and what to withdraw in the way of a stick.

Prime Minister Peres made some very simple moves. He appointed an Orthodox partisan of the peace process, Rabbi Yehuda Amital, to his cabinet. Amital headed the Meimad party, a religious peace movement that failed to gain any seats in the 1988 elections and did not try in 1992, but of which he is the most respected figure. Peres also opened up discussion with the other religious parties over possibly including them in the government. The mere fact of taking these steps diffused tensions and had a unifying effect. If similar steps can be taken wherever the cleavages get out of hand, the sense of common Jewish destiny will reassert itself.

Jews have another problem here. We are wonderful talkers but not the best listeners. Often, when we should be listening, we are instead trying to figure out what to say next. Thus the chance to reconcile, or at least avoid demonization, that comes from listening has a harder time among Jews. Here, too, the issue is not academic. Practical steps are required. When Jews get to know each other they are able to overcome their cleavages. More effort must be made to enable Jews of different persuasions to get to know one another so they can appreciate their shared qualities rather than dwell on their differences. Then the issue of freedom of expression can remain just that, and all Jews will be able to exercise their right to that freedom. Only a tiny minority will abuse it, and they can be more or less excluded from the community of discourse, as Kach has been excluded in Israel; it continues to make noise, but nobody is listening.

The presumed dichotomy between Judaism and democracy is a false one. Even the question is problematic. The real question should be what kind of Judaism and what kind of democracy we want. It is true that some people's definitions of Judaism make it antithetical to democracy and some people's definitions of democracy make it antithetical to Judaism. From my perspective, both those sets of definitions are inaccurate. The rigid, rabbi-dominated, hierarchical Judaism of some of the ultra-Orthodox is not Judaism for me, just as the Jacobin understanding of democracy so widespread in Israel and among Jews elsewhere, which believes that 50 percent plus one produces fair, democratic decision-making in every case, and that minority rights mean the right of everyone to do as he or she pleases, is, in my view, as antithetical to democracy as it is to Judaism. Let us rephrase the question, sit down, and make some serious effort to see how Judaism, properly defined, and democracy, properly defined, do indeed reinforce each other.

Emil Fackenheim

1. The Jewish people of today is a remnant. If rabbis were still coming from Poland, the Diaspora would worry less about "Jewish continuity." And if a million European *halutzim* had come in time, Israel would have less difficulty with Arabs now. In the most basic respect, then, when it comes to our spiritual and even physical survival, our past slogan ought still to be true: "We"—the Diaspora and Israel—"are one." *Then why aren't we?*

The question should be asked also about other, older Jewish dichotomies. The religious and the secularists among us have been in conflict since the onset of modernity, the former believing in God, the latter, if in anything, in Man. Their differences remain; but the conflict should have yielded to mutual solidarity, for the Holocaust has shaken *all* Jewish faith, that of the religious as well as that of the secularist.

Between extremists, to be sure, the conflict persists, indeed, has intensified: for "rightist" ultra-Orthodox faith in God, nothing has changed; and for its "leftist" humanist opposite, the Holocaust means not "Germans murdering Jews" but "people murdering people." Both extremes, however, are in flight from the catastrophe's uniqueness, the first to divinely permitted, or even divinely ordained catastrophes-in-general, the second to criminals-in-general and victims-in-general. Both leave one wondering, the first as to when they will run out of theological excuses, the second as to when they will check out of Jewishness, to become human-beings-in-general.

For Jews, self-exposed to the Holocaust, the theist-humanist conflict, once an honest necessity, has become a debilitating luxury. With a shared commitment to a Jewish future, they need a shared "Never Again" toward the traumatizing past, but can have it only as strengthened by whatever faith, in God or Man, that either remains or can be recovered.

In Judaism, trust in Man and God, intertwined in response to catastrophe, has precedents. "A [human] effort below calls forth a [divine] effort above": thus the Cabalist Isaac Luria responded to the expulsion from Spain—after fifty years. It is now fifty years since the Holocaust.

Zionism originated as a religious-secularist intertwining. Without religious memories, Zionists would be in some pseudo-Zion, not in Zion itself; and without

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secular action, they would not be in Zion yet, still waiting elsewhere. And now, in staying there rather than leaving, their secularists act as if they believe in miracles, and their religious, in bearing arms, as though miracles could not, should not be counted on.

Or so it used to be said. *Why no longer?* Again the question, this time embracing all Jewish divisions, or almost all: if “we” still ought to be “one” —*why aren't we?*

After the catastrophe we restored a Jewish state—the one thing we could do, had to do, and did. But besieged since birth, Israel (although some would deny it) is still under siege; and the besieged (or colonized or otherwise oppressed), if unable to throw off their yoke, will fight each other.

So with us. For one camp, if we are soft on them, they will end the siege voluntarily; for the other, involuntarily if we are tough on them. But *our extremists see the enemy, not in those laying the siege, but in each other.*

For this we have a precedent—and a famous rabbinic judgment: Jerusalem was destroyed, not by Roman generals Vespasian and Titus, but through *sin'at hinam*, groundless hatred of each other, by Jews themselves.

2. But hatred, while “groundless,” must have been, in those ancient days, less than demonizing. Vespasian gave Yavneh, a Jewish school, to a rabbi; Hitler burned synagogues with Jews inside. At war with Titus, Jews could choose between death-with-heroism and life-without-it; Hitler robbed Jews of both. Even Hadrian, most hostile of Roman emperors, left Jews with *one* choice, between apostasy and death, thus creating Jewish martyrs; Hitler, making Jewish death choiceless—for birth not faith—murdered Jewish martyrdom. One asks: in replacing enemies with other Jews, could groundless Jewish hatred make them worse than the real ones? But the Roman leaders were not demons. *Jews demonize other Jews now—by hitlerizing them.* Back in 1967 I formulated a “614th commandment”: “Jews are forbidden to give Hitler posthumous victories.” I did not then imagine that, on both sides, they would give him this victory, perhaps the greatest of all.

How can Jewish *sin'at hinam* be cured? When extreme enough to demonize other Jews, only by *ahavat yisrael*, “love by Jews of other Jews,” itself extreme enough to include those unlovable on account of Jewish troubles. What trouble causes Jews to hitlerize other Jews? In the last analysis, only one, the trauma of Hitler.

To cure that trauma is a many-sided challenge. For Jews at present, most urgent is *ahavat yisrael*.

3. *Deena d'malkhuta deena*, "the law of the state is binding": thus rabbis in ancient times accommodated the Diaspora for Jewish existence in a Gentile state. Within the modern-democratic state, and for Jews both emancipated and themselves democratic, halakhah, Jewish religious law, is privatized in principle, its basis no longer rabbinic authority without but conscience within. After two thousand years of Jewish statelessness and two hundred of democracy, grave tensions are inevitable, in a state both modern and Jewish.

Hitherto, compromise has avoided open warfare in Israel. But crisis times require more. Secularist and religious Israelis both have Jewish trouble, and steps informed by *ahavat yisrael* are required on both sides. In this case, however, the trouble is caused by joy rather than sorrow: Israel, the most creative collective Jewish project of modern times, inspires a well-warranted hope that its current religious-secularist tension, given time and patience, will at length be creatively transcended.

P.S. I have avoided all finger-pointing.

Leonard Fein

1. A “common Jewish destiny”? But destiny is something that happens to you, a course of events beyond your control. And a common destiny is exactly what we may hope the Jewish people does not have, given what it would likely be. No, the change in the Jewish condition is precisely that we no longer have a common destiny, for now we ourselves are (more or less) in charge of what happens to us.

But common destiny is not the only thing that can connect a people. There’s language, in all its manifestations, and there’s ritual, and there’s history. But this people, the Jews, now? Language plainly doesn’t work, nor literature. A history unknown by its inheritors is not much of a connection. And, as to ritual, so long as Israel establishes Orthodoxy as its state religion, thereby alienating most of its citizens, religion and its associated ritual hold us apart, not together.

Indeed, Jewish peoplehood, as distinguished from Judaism-as-faith, on the one (American) hand, and Israeliness, on the other hand, is a fading proposition. It has enough potency to emerge in response to trauma (as in the aftermath of the assassination), but absent true sharing, it is likely to become ever more pale. A people implies a culture, and a culture reflects the lived experience of those who belong to it, to whom it belongs. Our lived experience is inherently and necessarily different from the lived culture of the Israeli Jews.

Yes, one can imagine that, on both sides of the oceans, we will all become children of Western pop culture, a minority, perhaps, holding out for Western high culture. There will be a residue of shared concern. But when an enterprising entrepreneur builds Holyland in Florida, that will be sufficient for many American Jews. (It may even become an attraction for Israeli tourists.)

I write these words in the dismal aftermath of the murder in Tel Aviv. It is difficult to muster much optimism just now, or to repair to facile formulaic remedies. I continue to believe that if we were to create the opportunities for shared experience—say, for example, through a Jewish version of Doctors Without Borders—we could slow the tide, perhaps even escape our “destiny.” But most of the proposals for warming the Israel-Diaspora relationship involve exposing American youngsters to a sniff of Israel, and even these have relatively few takers. The best we can hope for, therefore, is that being Jewish will provide multiple paths of

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access to an array of experiences, ranging from devotional prayer to world-mending, from the study of Yiddish literature to klezmer music, and on and on, and that some commonalities—the Shabbat, a trauma here and there, cross-over people—will loosely connect these into “the Jewish experience.”

2. Jewish religious teachings and the principles of democracy: Jewish religious teachings? Which, precisely? Where Judaism is understood as a public religion and not merely a private faith, those who adhere to its orthodoxies will have trouble with democratic principles. If “everything is in it,” then why bother with democracy? The Council of Torah Sages is really all you need.

Obviously, there are other threads in the tradition, teachings that can be teased into compatibility with democratic principles. And, plainly, some Jewish fundamentalists are sufficiently sentimental to set the logic of their beliefs aside and accommodate to democracy. But it is difficult to imagine a genuine reconciliation between two opposing worldviews, and that, in the end, is what we have.

We are, however, blessed by the absence of an established religious hierarchy, of a coherent authoritative interpretation of the tradition. (And how much has its presence helped the Catholic Church?) Accordingly, we may hope for the persistence of our present muddle, Jews spread over a continuum from radical disbelief to absolute faith. Though logic may point in one direction, life, as lived, is often indifferent to logic. Most of us, no matter our religious views, are committed to democracy; the burden of change is on those at the outer margin of cultic belief. Unfortunately, there is little reason to imagine, however contrite some of them may be at the moment, that they will accept and internalize democratic norms.

I cannot conceive of “discussing our differences” with the cultics “in an atmosphere of mutual respect.” The assassination may have exposed the fissure, but the fissure was there, and while it may here and there and now and then be bridged by events that overwhelm the distance between us, there is very little ground for respectful interchange. (Note: In the absence of respect, we are not condemned to contempt; but must we be stuck with someone who believes that the Katyusha rockets fell on Kiryat Shmoneh because the mezzuzot in Kiryat Shmoneh were *treif*?)

3. That (gloomily) said, is there nothing that can be done to narrow the gap? Perhaps the trauma of the assassination will stiffen the spine of modern Orthodoxy, induce it to resume its bridging place in our midst. Surely the modern

Orthodox, along with such exceptional people on the Orthodox right as Rav Amital, belong with us, and not with them. But let there be no doubt that there is a them.

And perhaps, for other reasons, including especially the "quest for spirituality," the left will find the tradition more inviting than its progenitors did. We shall need to overcome the pernicious belief, quite widespread, that authenticity and rigidity are joined; we shall need to develop a doctrine of multiple authenticities. We are taught, are we not, that "its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace." Its ways; all its paths.

I cannot say how a doctrine of pluralism will sit with the Orthodox. By and large, they have spoken against it, and it may well be that the logic of their system leaves them no option. I understand that logic, though it does not speak to me. I will continue to resent and resist the notion that it is the only, or the most, or the better, or the more authentic, or the truer expression of the tradition. My tradition includes the classic religious texts; it includes, as well, the story of what Jews, through the centuries, have made of those texts, and of the other ingredients of their lives. It includes Sholom Aleichem and Ahad Ha'am and A. D. Gordon and Kaplan and Heschel and Philip Roth, among very many others. It is, in other words, filled with contradictions and nonlogical leaps. What, then, have I to say to someone who is prepared to consider that the Rebbe was/is the Messiah? Shall we "dialogue"? Except as an amateur anthropologist, what is there for me, for us?

My hope, therefore, is in a touch of chaos, beyond even pluralism. My own inconsistencies lead me—essentially secular in habit—to an appreciation (sometimes blossoming into love) for elements within the religious tradition. Other people's inconsistencies enable them to greet me as kin. So the problem of estrangement occurs only at the far margins. That is not such a terrifying problem. In brief: Judaism is not a logical system; it is a way of life. Each person will impose his/her own idiosyncracies on that way, and that's all to the good; that's how each of us comes to own our Judaism. (Each Jewish life is, in that sense, a midrash on the text.) Those few who move beyond the pale—for there are, still, boundaries, however vague—may, for the most part, be ignored. We shall have to develop new mechanisms for excluding the handful who endanger us.

Daniel Gordis

Though we are anxious to focus on healing, it is too early. Before we can repair, we need to appreciate fully the depths of our trauma. The implications of the horrifying assassination of Yitzhak Rabin reach far beyond our mourning for a man and his dream. What we have learned about the condition of the Jewish people and the Jewish state suggests that what we really confront is not only murder and fundamentalist thinking gone awry, but the very possibility of *hurban bayit shelishi*—the destruction of the Third Commonwealth. The implications of our condition are legion, but two seem to me too seldom noted: We have to rethink what we mean by “literate Jew,” and we must confront the danger of the new messianism that pervades our communities.

Since the advent of modern Zionism, we have been caught between two compelling Jewish dreams: Israel as *am ke'khol ha'amim* (a nation like all other nations, or Jewish national normalcy) and the Jews as an *am kadosh* (a holy nation). But both are inadequate, and both—by themselves—are dangerous. At the risk of bluntness, let us put the matter as starkly as these dark times require. The *am ke'khol ha'amim* (nation like all other nations) view has produced a banal, accommodationist Judaism that is at best an anemic representation of the vital Judaism reflected in our tradition. In America, secularized Judaism with autonomy as its *raison d'être* has led not only to frightening and largely irreversible demographic erosion, but to a profound and paralyzing identity crisis as well. In Israel, it is now clear that the secular majority is bereft of any meaningful vision of the Jewishness of the Jewish state. Secular Judaism is exhausted; it can no longer provide the energy our communities need to inspire a serious commitment to a Jewish future.

But the communities that produced Yigal Amir have also shown us that a mechanistic turn to traditional Judaism is no solution, either. The communities on the religious right afford us models of passionate and intensive Jewish life, but they are too often hermetically sealed encounters with tradition that have thus far escaped unscathed from any meaningful exchange with the best that Western philosophy has to offer. Glorious though it is, our tradition does contain categories such as *rodef* (pursuer), the person who so threatens the lives of others that his life may be taken with virtually no attention to what we would call “due process.” Let's be honest: *rodef* is part of our classics' vocabulary, but “democracy” is not. While that may not have been a terrible problem for the exilic (and thus

Daniel Gordis

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largely politically and militarily powerless) communities that produced the rabbinic tradition, it is a potentially devastating lacuna for a community with an independent state. Rabbis Yehuda Amital and Aharon Lichtenstein, two of the *roshei yeshiva* who assailed the antidemocratic streams of the ultranationalist community, are unfortunately the rare exceptions, not the rule.

Thus, an irony. In this dark hour, one key to Jewish unity is to be found in our collective need for a renewed tradition that does not yet exist. Both camps need a new model. Just as Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai recognized that the destruction of the Second Commonwealth called for a new form of academy, we need to acknowledge that the State of Israel—the beginning of the Third Commonwealth—calls for an equally radical paradigm shift. We need a new and expanded *beit midrash*, one in which the tractate Sanhedrin is studied along with Jean Jacques Rousseau, in which Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah* is in dialogue with John Locke. This notion will sound strange to those used to the traditional *beit midrash*. No matter. This is a house of study that could bind the Jewish people, in which the secular would learn from the religious, in which right might glean from left, in which we could search together for new definitions of our peoplehood.

But this *beit midrash* will not be a panacea. We suffer not only from a lack of vision, but from an incendiary vocabulary that we invoke all too often to camouflage our uncertainties. Nothing we do will eradicate such language. Hyperbole is endemic to Jewish life and literature. As long as we are passionate about our commitments and convictions, we will use powerful—and maybe dangerous—language. More of us, of course, will try to be careful, but very little will change fundamentally.

Yet one thing simply must change. Another lesson of this agonizing episode is the danger of a new brand of messianism in Jewish life. This messianism raises the stakes of our disagreements too high. It is one thing to disagree about philosophical matters, issues of Israel's national security or halakhic decisions, but it is quite another to believe that one group is forestalling the coming of the Messiah. The Lubavitch experience after the death of the Rebbe should have alerted us to the dysfunction that sets in when the Messiah is no longer a dream, but instead becomes a reality. In Israel, the results have now been worse. With the (largely American) ultranationalists, the rhetoric of messianism has taken on a reality of its own. Rabin was not simply "giving away" land; he was preventing the Messiah from coming. He thus became not a political opponent, but Evil Incarnate. Now we know that the language of messianism in modern Jewish life is not a matter of

mere rhetorical flourish, but the expression of commitments that inevitably make those with whom we disagree worthy of destruction. That language has to stop, and the moderate middle has to make sure that it does.

And thus, a third implication: If we have learned anything from this tragedy, it has to be that a moderate middle is not enough. We need a *passionate* middle. We need a moderate, religiously serious, and intellectually open Jewish world in which radicals on both sides of the equation are delegitimized. For too long, we have left it to the fringe to deny the authenticity of the middle. That must change. We need to advocate for our new *batai midrash*—with passion, with conviction, with pride. We will need to eschew messianism, not because we are afraid of dreaming, but because we have the courage to dream, and the wisdom to distinguish between dreams and reality. The threat to a meaningful Jewish future is profound and real, but it is too soon to abandon hope. This is the hour for passionate moderates. This is the hour for us to insist that *we* are the future, even if that means saying what we have long felt but have been afraid to utter: Those who insist that nothing is wrong, that the current *beit midrash* is missing nothing or that the messiah is just around the corner, are dangerous. *We*—not they—need to speak for the Jewish people, and we need to assert that. A strong stance? Perhaps. But it is, after all, the Torah (Deut. 21:21) that teaches us to take this path: “*u’vi’arta ha’ra mi’kirbekha, ve’khol yisrael yishme’u ve’yira’u*”: “You must burn out the evil from your midst; let all Israel hear and take heed.”

David Gordis

The pressing issue of the moment needs to be drawn carefully: What is at stake is not unity, but civility. The slogans that have often been used about Jewish unity risk implying the ideal of Jewish uniformity. Such uniformity is both impossible and undesirable. Jews encounter in microcosm the challenge that faces the world on the macrocosmic level, namely, dealing with difference. Contemporary Jewry must deal with the articulation of two powerful forces, namely nationalism and religion, and when these two forces come together in extreme expressions, the result is incendiary. The challenge is to sustain a community of rich diversity without allowing fragmentation and polarization to destroy the communal fabric itself.

What binds Jews together is what has historically bound Jews together. We share a common history, a language in which the central literature of our people was written, a religious and ethnic symbolism that is related to by Jews in a variety of ways but that nevertheless provides a common vocabulary, a calendar, a remarkably rich and heterogeneous literature and culture. Jews interact with these commonplaces in a variety of ways. We differ theologically and politically, we live in a variety of settings, but there is enough in our commonality to sustain a sense of community.

But it is necessary to lower the community's tolerance level for intolerance. Those who choose to disassociate themselves from the rest of the community, who reject communal norms, who reject the very notion of pluralism, who seek to delegitimize those who differ with them either politically or religiously, need themselves to be isolated and delegitimized. I do not suggest that anyone's views have no right to be heard, except for actual incitement and sedition. But too often, extremist groups have been viewed as in some way embodying Jewish legitimacy in a way that more moderate groups do not, and as a result they have been tolerated and even supported. Moderation in the Jewish community, both religiously and politically, needs to be reasserted as a positive value, and not a kind of weak default position lacking backbone and commitment. What must be strengthened is "positive centrism," drawing on the rich Jewish tradition of intelligent and rational discourse, the strength of historic institutions of the community as a restraint over individual excess and extremism, and a renewed appeal to fundamental moral principles in the discourse of the community.

David Gordis

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A natural starting point for the strengthening of civility and moderation is the spirit of rabbinic Judaism properly understood. The Talmud itself is the "in process" text par excellence. It preserves all sides of argumentation, it insists that minority views be preserved along with prevailing views, and it exposes its readers to a range of possibilities even where a simple monochromatic response might be welcome. Attempts to shortcut the Talmudic process, even by so distinguished an interpreter as Maimonides, were doomed to failure, because the core style of reasoned reflection, of respectful consideration of alternatives, is fundamental to the mindset of classical Judaism beginning in the rabbinic period. We have begun to lose that mindset, and those who seek to restore civility and moderation would do well to revisit rabbinic Judaism, access its spirit anew, and embody its approach in communal leadership and the teaching of Judaism and classical Jewish texts.

Israel will find a way to limit the activities of extremist groups. Modest steps in the direction of Jewish religious pluralism in Israel are taking place. This is significant, since the establishment of a single religious denomination in Israel, one that seeks to delegitimize all other Jewish religious expression, has contributed to the religious polarization within Israel and has compounded troublesome Jewish interrelationships in the United States as well. Far more important than theological or halakhic differences between Orthodoxy and other Jewish denominations is the fact that only Orthodoxy declares all other expressions invalid, and in Israel has successfully prevented the legal recognition of these other expressions. This needs to change. Already, moderate religious voices have articulated moving pleas for a bridging of differences and the adoption of a conciliatory and respectful style of discourse in political and religious areas, and, along with enlightened and cautious recourse to the judicial and legislative systems, Israel will find a way to sustain civil discourse in the context of a diverse and pluralistic democracy. American Jews should reexamine their commitments to political and religious groups that do not contribute to the kind of civility that is required, and should direct both energy and resources to those of all political and religious views who seek to preserve civility in diversity.

No religious tradition, including Judaism, provides an unequivocal rationale for democracy or for any other form of political organization, for that matter. What should characterize the link between the living Jewish community and the Jewish tradition is the sense that the tradition both reflects and generates the values of the community that encounters it. The community should approach the tradition from a starting point of commitment to democratic values and ethical integrity.

Components of the tradition that reinforce that commitment can be used to teach it and strengthen it; components of the tradition that may be in opposition to democratic values need to be rejected. One of Judaism's remarkable qualities is that it has empowered the individual and the community through its institutions to make ethical judgments and to use reason to make moral discriminations and decisions. The community must make its embrace of democratic values unequivocal and nonnegotiable. Those who oppose democratic values, whether from a reading of Jewish tradition or on some other basis, need to understand that though they have a right to their views, the community has opted for democracy, and this view needs to be a central feature of Jewish education on all levels and of Jewish public discourse and policy formulation.

Excesses are committed by a few on the fringe; responsibility to weave a fabric of respect for the positions with which one differs, even in the areas of politics and religion where positions are held passionately, is the responsibility of all—institutions, groups, leaders, and individuals. The time for us all to meet that responsibility is now.

Alfred Gottschalk

I am deeply pained, as we all are, by the horrendous murder of Yitzhak Rabin, and profoundly troubled by the current ugly mood in Israel due to the division that exists within the country concerning the peace process. The mood is *the* motivating factor in Rabin's murder by one who was in his self-righteousness bedecked with presumed piety and religious zealotry.

The assassin's presumed piety and religious zealotry call to mind the origins of the word "assassin." Taken from the Arabic *hashashin* (lit. "those who smoke hashish"), the term first was applied to a group of 11th- and 12th-century Cairo zealots who planned to establish a single Islamic empire after killing off all competing rulers. Later, the group savagely killed Crusaders. Europeans attributed this group's blood lust to the effects of hashish and called them "assassins." But hashish was not arousing this blood lust. It was inspired by the more powerful and poisonous narcotics of demonic piety and religious zealotry.

These poisons are dangerous enough alone, but when mixed with politics they are most volatile. The horrible nature of Rabin's murder at a peace rally brings to mind the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. attendant to a rally for civil rights, the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy in connection with his political campaign, and the cowardly Oklahoma City bombing that exploded a day-care center in the name of political opposition. In all these instances, murders were carried out by fanatics with political motivations.

Rabin's assassination is further marked by the volatile nature of much of Israel's society and the continued tolerance of violence especially on the right, but also, at times, on the left. A Jew murdered a Jew! We need now to reassert the ancient Jewish mission, to refute those who exalt themselves while demonizing opponents, and to take back the religious values and texts that are twisted to profane dimensions.

Given the extant divisions among Jews, we must reassert the unifying mission of Jewish peoplehood: the truly inspired mission to bring about an era that will result in a manifestation of harmony, love, and peace in place of strife, jealousy, and war. This is the mission that has been proposed by our prophets. Their

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visions not only shine a beacon on the ideal on which we fix our sights, they also illumine the shadows of darkness on which we must fix our deeds of restoration.

In those who exalt themselves and demonize their opponents, we must encourage both greater humility and nobler ambition. These are not contradictory, but represent the dynamic tension of Jewish life. There is a piece of Jewish folk wisdom that highlights this tension: A Jew is to carry two notes. On the first is written the phrase "I am but dust and ashes." On the second, "The world was created for my sake."

The first note ("dust and ashes") is a constant reminder that our stay on earth is fleeting, and that at the end of our days all of us will return to the earth. Reading this note, we are humbled with respect to the natural world, to other creatures, to other people, and to God. It reminds us that in the natural world other living things were created before people. Our haughty arrogance about these so-called lesser creatures ignores this sequence. Thus the first note is a reminder of the need for humility. But if we carried only this first note, we might be paralyzed by an overwhelming sense of inadequacy. We Jews were not intended to be merely passive in the world, despite our humble status. So we also carry the second note ("created for my sake"), which is a constant reminder that we are special for having been created in the image of God. As God is the *Creator*-custodian of the world, we are the *created*-custodians of it.

As created-custodians we have the choice to be instruments of nobility or holiness at all times and in every place. It is not enough to embody holiness in ritual life alone. We also must struggle to embody holiness in political debates and disputes that cry out for the democratic process.

Judaism demands that we see the harmony between democratic principles and Jewish values. Modern concepts of justice are repulsed by some harsh measures contained in the Bible's narrative such as the ancient expulsion of native people from Canaan to make room for the Jewish people, or war generally, or capital punishment. These biblical measures offend our modern sensibilities. They should. Jews have evolved different standards of perfection since then. For example, capital punishment is mandated by the Bible, but was experienced ambivalently or opposed by the prophets. Later, it was, for all practical purposes, repealed by the rabbis. In this connection, it is remarkable that the government of Israel imposed the death penalty only once in forty-five years, hanging Adolf Eichmann for his crimes against humanity.

As Jews, we must unambiguously oppose pious certainty and religious zealotry, whether from the left or the right, from Jews or non-Jews. While the great literature of our ancient rabbis is filled with contradictory views, we cannot let these be twisted to support hate and produce venom. These contradictions reflect the complexity of the underlying problems, not the superficial simplicity of choosing one side over the other. In other words, we must learn from our tradition the value of dialogue over complex matters. It is exemplified by Isaiah's hopeful plea (1:18), "Come now, let us reason together."

At this time of our pain, perhaps, it is not God's thunder and lightening but our own for which we must pray. Perhaps God exhorts us to acts of restoration precisely because we, as humans, are the legitimate source of repair in this world. As restoration and repair are a partnership between us and God, then God is the silent partner, we the active ones. God *inspires* but we *enact*. It is God's promise of repair that inspires me. It is the knowledge that we have the capacity to make it happen that gives me hope.

Irving Greenberg

With the assassination of Rabin, we have learned a new norm within the ethic of Jewish power. The system depends on a working principle: *Disagreement, yes; delegitimation, no*. This very principle was violated in the struggle over the peace process. The left broke this rule repeatedly, although not as gravely as the right. The murder of the prime minister and the political process that preceded it have taught us that it is a grave sin to violate this limit. The practice of delegitimation is religiously as well as politically wrong according to the fundamental principles of Judaism and of democracy.

Democracy, like Judaism, is founded on covenant. Bound together by love, people pledge to work together in order to build community. The nation brings together individuals equal in their dignity. Equality requires that all people have the right to vote on policy even if they are wrong. They have the right to be heard even if they are outvoted on a particular matter. Why should every person have an equal right and say especially if some are more informed, more equipped with good judgment, more effective? The answer is that the dignity of equality is not conditioned on intelligence or judgment or activity. Superior qualities or compelling approaches can influence; that is how majorities are formed. But the basic equality—the right to affect and to be heard—is never waived.

Of course, there are bound to be disagreements. But society prevents destructive conflicts by the practice of pluralism; it allows multiple, conflicting interests, each with its own needs and rights. Since the nation is pledged to stay together, people will make compromises along the way. Competing groups can live with these limitations as long as they feel that their fundamental dignity is being honored by the other, and as long as the fundamental legitimacy of the system holds intact.

Therefore, disagreements are allowed in a democracy and in a pluralistic religious community. It is all right to argue that the other side is wrong. But to delegitimize it is to claim that the other side is not just wrong; rather it is illegitimate; it has no right to exist; it is not worthy of being heard. This is the essential difference between disagreement and delegitimation. When the right to exist of the other position is impugned, then the person who holds that position is degraded as well. After all, one must be intellectually/spiritually/ethically unworthy if one holds a position that is so wrong that it has no right to exist. If a position does not deserve to be heard respectfully, then the person who upholds it must be less than equal—maybe less than human?

Irving Greenberg

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So there is a guiding ethical principle—it is permitted to disagree, but not to delegitimize. To disagree is human; to delegitimize is to dehumanize.

This is not to say that all positions are legitimate. There is a *no* as well as a *yes* in the pluralist system. Every pluralism—political, religious, or cultural—is based on one or more fundamental principles that define the boundaries of legitimacy. If someone rejects or violates such principles, he or she is beyond the pale. However, such a judgment (i.e., delegitimation) is truly rare and a last resort.

In a healthy democracy or religious system one can assume that the vast majority of positions taken, however erroneous, will not be beyond the pale. They are worthy of being disagreed with but not delegitimized.

In the rare cases when a position violates the fundamental principle of the society, there may still be room to allow for free speech, out of the conviction that people will be mature enough to filter out even grave error and wise enough to come to the right conclusions—when there is a free exchange of ideas. The pluralist system also assumes that no leadership, however wise, and no tradition, however authoritative, can do as good a job as all the people together to establish and choose the good, the true, that which is good for society overall.

This understanding of pluralism is compatible with democratic principles and with a broad-minded reading of the Jewish religion. This even allows room for serious disagreement between religious-based views and democratic political judgments. The two views may clarify, influence, and even reshape each other. Each side may, in conscience, yield to the other after having disagreed. The Jewish religious community through its authorities would have to recognize that it shares the common vision of a people carrying on a mission (however variously defined) that needs a functioning nation-state to be realized.

But, even if the system works, why should society allow error the same right to be heard as truth? Why should people instructed by God (as they understand it) grant serious weight to other views that are merely human (as they understand it)? Absolutism would answer—they should not. Relativism would answer—they should, because there is no ultimate truth; no one word of God; no ultimate claim. There is only the decision of the individual (be it attributed to God, group, or system).

Pluralism answers that there are real truths and ultimate claims. But humans of goodwill differ on which of the conflicting views are real and ultimate. Therefore, we are left with genuine disagreements. Out of the unity of a common goal, then,

people pledge not to delegitimize. This self-restraint will contain conflict and not let it tear society and community apart, lest everything be destroyed.

Pluralism is made possible by the acceptance of limits. To be pluralist in spirit, individuals (and groups) must accept two fundamental limits. The first is built on the fact that human nature is infinitely varied yet finitely limited. Three possibilities follow. The first: Even if I possess the truth, I cannot encompass all of it. This leaves room for others—even if they are in error overall—to know truth also. The second: My truth/position/policy cannot cover all situations, so there is need for other groups to contribute their share. The third: My truth cannot reach all people—so there is need for others to operate in the society and community. Since the others have a valid role, I will not strive to demolish them. In other words, disagreement between us will not be allowed to escalate into delegitimation.

The second limit grows out of the recognition that there is a higher goal or unifying principle. Respect for that principle—God, covenant, democracy, Judaism—sets a limit on my promulgation of my truth and on the advancement of my interest. The pluralist recognizes that however profound the clash of views or disagreement over a particular policy, the overarching unifying principle sets a limit on the tactics to be pursued in the conflict. The deeper unity keeps us together inside its boundaries, in the face of a conflict that may be so fundamental as to otherwise convince us that we are alien to each other, located on opposite sides of the fence.

Pluralism teaches us that to know one's limitations is to be more competent; less is more. A Jewish ethic of power must know its own limits and build in pluralism as well as mutual respect to prevent excess.

To repeat: Disagreement-but-not-delegitimation is the basic working principle of pluralism. Failure to practice this principle threatens civil war in Israel over the peace process, and kulturkampf if peace is achieved. Failure to grasp its meaning is polarizing the Jewish people in the Diaspora as well; there, too, the threat of splitting into two bitterly feuding peoples looms large. We must take note: The Rabin assassination is the early warning of an impending meltdown.

Restoring the teaching of pluralism is the central task at hand. It must be a pluralism solidly within the framework of a powerful unity principle—I think that is the covenant of fate of the Jewish people. This enables people to stay together even though they may fundamentally disagree with each other.

Arthur Hertzberg

I am not comfortable with the basic premise of the three questions that you have posed. You clearly think that some formula can be found that will guarantee “the indispensable process of fostering reconciliation.” I doubt it. I see no possible compromise between those who think that Jewish political decisions should be made rationally and pragmatically and those who think that their views represent the clearly articulated will of God. We have become, at very least, two peoples.

The only possible basis for unity is an agreement to join together for some tasks in which both elements might share, such as resisting anti-Semitism. I am not very hopeful that even this will work well, because there is now almost nothing on the Jewish agenda, from the question of the West Bank, to the rescue of Russian Jews (many of whom are not Jews according to halakhah), to state aid for parochial schools, on which the agendas of these two Jewish communities are in agreement.

We might be able to strengthen the nonfundamentalist, nonmessianic majority of the Jewish people by deepening a common education in classic Jewish texts and traditions, but even the Bible and Talmud are different—radically different—when studied on the basis of fundamentally different religious premises.

I suspect that these remarks are not in the “upbeat” key of the responses that you seem to hope to get, but I can only tell you what I see. I wish I could contribute to the optimism you seem to wish to foster, but I foresee a contemporary version of the convulsion of at least a century in which the followers of Shabbtai Zvi split off and were excommunicated.

Arthur Hertzberg
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Ammiel Hirsch

Yitzhak Rabin was a great man.

As Sophocles wrote, one must wait until the evening to see how splendid was the day. Now, at the end of his life, it is possible to see clearly how glorious was his day. Rabin was a man of physical daring when the nascent Jewish state needed architects to build a modern army. He became a man of moral strength and political courage when a maturing Jewish state needed leaders to guide it into a new millennium. Time after time, personality and circumstance thrust him into the right place at the right time. He thus not only mirrored Israel's own development, but in many ways helped shape its course.

In the aftermath of his death, we should be concerned less with the identity of the assassin than with the philosophy that produced the assassination. Yigal Amir himself is only a small part of the story. There were plenty of Amirs waiting in the wings, inspired by a sick fanatical philosophy that, like all forms of religious fundamentalism, is convinced that it alone hears the word of God. It is a philosophy that is unable to tolerate sophistication; a philosophy that says that, if you do not believe as we do, you are a heretic. It was only a small step for extremist rabbis to categorize Rabin as a traitor ("pursuer" in halakhic terms) and a threat to the Jewish people, requiring his elimination by any and all means.

This philosophy hollowed out the fatal bullet and pulled the trigger. The fact that it presumed to rely on Jewish sources is secondary. Philosophies of religious hate, intolerance, and violence are known the world over. They are always reduced to "this is God's will." Needless to say, they care little for such democratic niceties as majority rule and the rule of law. They presume to speak for, and answer to, a higher authority.

Unity after national tragedy is important. We should not, however, distort the concept of Jewish unity. Unity does not mean a dulling of the senses in an artificial spirit of forgiveness. Unity does not require suppression. To the contrary, it is now time for the healthy mainstream of the Jewish world to come clean and purify itself with sincere, agonizing soul-searching. We have been taught from Moses to Martin Luther King that when good people are silent in the face of evil, evil triumphs.

Ammiel Hirsch

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Those of us who support the peace process should prostrate ourselves on the altar of truth and confess to our sins of silence. We ignored the teachings of the ages. We ignored our own intuition and hard-won experience. We remained largely silent not only to those who oppose the peace process, but also to the language and spirit with which such opposition was voiced. We share the responsibility for civil breakdown in the Jewish world.

But we supporters of the peace process do not assume primary responsibility. We should avoid the easy temptation to consider all parties equally at fault. It is simply not true. To claim otherwise, even for the commendable purposes of healing and Jewish unity, would be a disservice. It would bring neither healing nor unity. For we would then fail to incorporate the lessons of these tragic events, and in the long run cause more harm than good.

The Israeli political and religious right and their supporters abroad bear a greater burden of responsibility. Their hollow protestations notwithstanding, they tolerated and even encouraged vicious verbal assaults not only against the policies of Yitzhak Rabin, but against his person as well. "There is life and death in the power of language," according to Jewish tradition. Violent words lead to violent deeds.

The mainstream right cynically exploited the violent passions of the extreme right for political gain. The religious fanatics were often present at right-wing rallies, usually tolerated and almost never expelled. Day after day, edicts handed down by some rabbinic authorities permitted, even demanded, the assassination of the prime minister. Leading rabbis urged Orthodox soldiers to disobey government orders in the event of an evacuation of settlements. Posters equating Rabin with SS storm troopers; accusations of disloyalty and betrayal; portraits of Rabin in intoxicated stupor—were seldom condemned effectively by the mainstream right. In late summer the head of the General Security Service warned leaders of the opposition parties to refrain from contacts with extremist elements in the Orthodox community. The warning was ignored by opposition leaders who felt that it was an attempt by the government to torpedo right-wing demonstrations. They much preferred to dwell on what they considered to be the government's mistreatment of the settlers. In retrospect, the silence of the mainstream secular and Orthodox opposition was deafening.

One positive outcome of the first weeks following the assassination is an apparent

willingness on the part of some of the Orthodox authorities to condemn, in much stronger language than ever before, religious extremism in their midst. Of course, it is too late for Yitzhak Rabin, but it is welcome nonetheless, since it will help prevent the next political assassination. Israeli security authorities concluded long ago that acts of political violence will not be committed by Orthodox Jews without prior approval from Orthodox rabbis.

The coming twelve months may be the last best hope for peace. Poll after poll reveals that the majority of American Jews support the peace process. The silent majority must regain control of the airwaves and the streets. The corridors of power can no longer be primarily the domain of the right. We must not allow the opponents of the peace process to gain the upper hand. We are engaged in a monumental struggle for the soul of the Jewish people. This cannot be the exclusive responsibility of a handful of brave soldiers for peace. We must join the battle. If we do this with steadfast resolve and unwavering commitment, then there will be a season of true reckoning. The Promised Land will again be a land of promise, purified and rededicated to the ancient proposition that peace and brotherhood are Judaism's highest ideals. The Jewish soul will be cleansed of intolerance and hate.

If we do this with steadfast resolve and unwavering commitment, the legacy of Yitzhak Rabin will continue to grow: "And Yitzhak planted in the Land, and reaped abundant fruit. And God blessed him. And Yitzhak became great, and continued to grow in stature until he became very great" (Genesis 26:12).

Paula Hyman

I must begin with a dissent from the premise of the questions posed to the contributors to this booklet. Unity of the Jewish people is not an end in itself. There are times when conflicting visions of Judaism and the Jewish future cannot be reconciled, if we are to remain true to our values. Should Zionists in 1897, for example, have bowed to the overwhelming sentiment in the Jewish world that opposed their reading of the Jewish past and program for the Jewish future? Should anti-Zionists of that time, in the West or the East, have moderated their opposition in the name of Jewish unity, when they considered either their own civic equality or interpretation of Judaism at stake? Should Jews committed to achieving peace for Israel and her Arab neighbors in 1995/6 mute their voices so that a bland "unity" may be achieved? Should American Jews privilege the fundamental belief of Orthodox leaders that women be denied some forms of participation in communal public events over the deeply felt commitment of the majority to the absolute value of gender equality?

There are many areas of Jewish life where our differences are so significant that we cannot recognize other Jews as our partners in community. Many of us cannot enter into a dialogue, for example, with those who consider Baruch Goldstein a hero. We cannot discuss politics with those who are confident that God determines political strategy. A tribal people such as the Jews are like a family. You can't choose your relatives, but you can favor some over others. And a few you can choose not to invite to the party.

This is not to say that we should read out of our community all our political and religious antagonists, or speak only with those with whom we are in agreement. It does suggest that all participants in shared communal debate must accept the rules of rational and civil discourse. As a community divided along multiple fault lines, we must set limits upon ourselves in the way we speak to and about those with whom we disagree. As our tradition teaches us and as we have learned from history, words have consequences. Just as we demand from university presidents, for example, that anti-Semitic speech be disavowed, although it cannot be suppressed, so our leaders, both rabbinic and secular, must make it clear that the Jewish community disavows speech that demonizes opponents. Leaders have the power, as well as the obligation, to delegitimize certain types of speech; they can make their views known by addressing this subject in every forum available to them and by denying communal honors to those who violate the code of civility.

Paula Hyman

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Without that delegitimation, through repetition hate speech can become normal.

We must also affirm our commitment as a community to democracy in the Jewish state as elsewhere, not only because we consider democracy the most just form of government, but because our very survival as Jews in the modern world depends on it. I would go so far as to assert that democratic values are a *sine qua non* for the Jewish "continuity" to which our communal institutions have pledged themselves. If some Jewish schools are teaching antidemocratic values, that information should be made known within the community and such schools should not receive communal funding. Moreover, the majority of educators in all sectors of the Jewish community who reject the use of Torah to fortify antidemocratic politics need to acknowledge to their students that there are statements in the Torah that are disturbing to us. Such an approach does not delegitimize the study of Torah or "Jewish religious teachings"; it offers the opportunity to teach about the many voices that contend with each other as we engage in the ongoing task of interpreting and reinterpreting the texts of our tradition.

In the wake of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin it is difficult to speak about democratic principles and religious teachings delegitimizing each other. Those committed to democratic principles did not commit assassination; some committed to a particular reading of Jewish teaching created a climate that legitimated murder. Our educators and religious leaders need to grapple with that reality, even as we refrain from stereotyping entire groups of Jews on the basis of the behavior of some of their members. And we can legitimately demand more soul-searching on the political and religious right. We are not all equally to blame.

Given our political, cultural, and religious fragmentation, our sense of common destiny cannot be comprehensive. We can work, however, to identify areas where we might come together—such as our common commitment to social welfare in the United States as well as in Israel, our concern for Jews in danger around the world, and our interest in study. CLAL, the Wexner Graduate Fellowships, and the Bronfman Fellowships for high school juniors, to name three very different institutions, bring together Jews of disparate backgrounds to discuss texts that we share and to debate matters that touch all of us, in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Even as we agree to disagree on many political and religious issues, we must expand our opportunities to recognize and deepen our commonalities by doing "Jewish things" together. If the past is any guide, we will continue to need each other.

Francine Klagsbrun

Some years ago I wrote a book about people in marriages that had lasted many years. I sought to discover what factors had made them work when so many others had failed. Key among my conclusions was that couples in good marriages had an ability to live with imperfections, unchangeability, conflicts that, in spite of efforts to resolve them, remained unresolved. In short, they didn't expect paradise or perfection, but knew how to gain satisfaction even from unions that included areas of dissatisfaction. Dozens of trees have supplied the paper used for articles calling for Jewish unity since the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Shocked and heartbroken, Jews from all points of the political spectrum have spoken of closing the chasm that separates left from right, pro-peace process from anti, religious from secular, and so on. The words of the late Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook have been cited often, urging Jews to counter the "causeless hatred" in our midst, said by the Talmud to have led to the destruction of the Second Temple, with "causeless," or unconditional, love of one Jew for the next.

It will never happen. The factionalism is too deep, the stakes too high for a sudden surge of love among the many opposing groups in Jewish life today. And without a severe threat from the outside—which one prays we will never have to suffer again—the longed-for unity of the Jewish people is an illusion, a spurious dream that can lead to false expectations and deep disappointments.

No. The issue before us is not to reach for an unattainable unity. It is how to live with our disunity. Like the married couples in my study, we need to recognize that we will always have unresolved conflicts and deep discords in our midst. How do we maintain our peoplehood, our communal "marriage," in spite of them?

We begin with our leaders. If ever there was a time when leaders of many opposing factions might be ready to talk together, this is it. The murder has alerted everyone to a crisis in the community. At this moment of self-examination, leaders of highly divergent groups should be able to sit down and exchange ideas, not necessarily about the issues themselves, but about how to speak with each other even while disagreeing on those issues.

Rabbis of all denominations, organization heads—from secular to religious—and, in Israel, responsible leaders need to meet in small groups and start talking to

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each other. Extremist leaders—of Kach and such—should not be welcomed; they have to know that they are marginalized, repudiated by the mainstream.

Nor is “Nightline” the proper forum for these discussions. They belong out of the limelight, away from the media, at places uncondusive to grandstanding. The Oslo peace talks can serve as a model for this. Our internal peace talks should be held quietly, under the auspices of umbrella organizations in the United States and Israel and in retreat-like locations. Participants need to be able to speak with each other honestly and off the record.

The agenda for these meetings should be to arrive at guidelines for discourse that allow for a full range of differences without the kind of destructiveness that has plagued us. To that end discussion might center on distinguishing between free expression and hate talk. Time and again we have seen the most virulently anti-Jewish rhetoric permitted in college newspapers under the rubric of democratic “free expression.” We have objected to every incident, yet we have permitted the same excuse to be used to rationalize the most vicious attacks between opposing groups within our community.

In reality, free expression is democratic only when it allows for the free exchange of ideas. Name-calling and labeling shut off such an exchange and in that sense are antidemocratic. And because it leaves no opportunity for dialogue, hate talk easily turns into violent action, surely not sanctioned in a democracy.

The leadership discussions need to arrive at criteria for determining when the line has been crossed between free speech and incendiary speech. Actually, formulating these criteria is a form of consensus-building within the community. Members of various factions may never agree on the proper course toward peace in Israel, but they may agree on how to curtail invectives in arguing about that course.

The criteria agreed on by community leaders need then be brought back to their constituents. Rabbis, heads of yeshivot, presidents of organizations, politicians, have to open discussions within their own arenas similar to those held by the leadership groups, and then pressure their followers to conform to the agreed-upon standards. Those who don't, who use violent rhetoric and hate language, should be made to feel their community's condemnation, even threatened with being isolated from it.

Beyond issues of discourse, much of the rage generated by the assassination

among Jews at large has been directed not only at the right-wing Orthodox from whose circles the assassin came, but at the Jewish religion itself. If the Talmud can be used to justify the most heinous of all crimes, the thinking goes, how can it have any meaning in a modern democratic society?

The task, then, is twofold. First, to tease apart the legitimate place of Jewish teachings and texts as a vital source of religion and morality from their misuse as political documents. Moderate rabbinic authorities both in Israel and the United States must come forward and clarify the limitations of Jewish law in regard to the democratic principles that govern Israel. For example, as some have already shown, the Talmudic concept of *moser*, a person who hands over other Jews or Jewish property to non-Jews, under which extremist rabbis condemned Prime Minister Rabin, actually cannot be applied in Jewish law to the duly elected head of a government—even if it didn't carry with it the outright threat of violence. Religious Jews need to learn about the boundaries of Jewish law in a free society. Secular Jews need to know them also, to help curb the anger so many already feel at Orthodox restrictions on their personal lives.

The second task for religious and lay leaders is to generate positive feelings toward Jewish teachings by making known their profound moral and ethical content. In Israel, where much of the population knows little of Jewish tradition, the idea of introducing some religious courses into secular schools should be further explored. In the United States, a concerted effort should be made to publicize religious principles that bolster democracy. One thought is for rabbis across the denominations to designate one or two Sabbaths a year in which all synagogues discuss the same teaching—the sanctity of human life, for example. Heads of central organizations might meet to plan the project, and then enlist their member synagogues to participate in it. Aside from spreading Jewish teachings, such a joint program of Jewish study can give all parts of the religious community, at least, a sense of common interests.

In my study of long-term marriages, couples recognized that being together was more important to them than any of the conflicts that tore them apart. In order to stay together they were willing to compromise and live with irresolution. For all our divisiveness, Jews today still feel tied to one another and still value their Jewishness. Instead of bemoaning our differences, let's learn to work around them to strengthen those feelings.

Norman Lamm

1. From the very beginning of Jewish history, with the emergence of Abraham, three elements were intertwined: an Idea, a People, and a Land. The Idea was ethical monotheism, later incorporated in Torah; the People was the "seed of Abraham"; and the Land was Eretz Israel. We were able to survive without the third, but only so long as we recognized that we were in "exile" in every place outside the Land.

Our situation today is unprecedented. Israelis have a Land, but very little of a common Idea, and increasingly tenuous connections with a People. Diaspora Jewry, especially American Jewry, is highly ambivalent about the Land as well. This means that our fragmentation is far advanced. I am therefore not at all sanguine about the future cohesiveness of *am yisrael*. Nevertheless, we must exert every effort to get a maximum number of Jews to share a sense of peoplehood and common destiny.

The unraveling of the fabric of Jewish identity began with the Emancipation and has accelerated since. When there was at least a minimal standard for Jewishness (the halakhic norm that a Jew is one born to a Jewish mother) that was accepted by almost all groups, religious or secular, one could hope to unite the People around an identity rooted in reality, in this case a biological one—not dissimilar to the statement that a Frenchman is one born in or who lives in France, a geographical reality. However, with the current abandonment of this "reality rooted" identity in favor of a completely, or almost completely, voluntaristic one, as advanced by the adoption of patrilinealism by the Reform movement and by certain decisions of the Israeli judiciary, the common basis for Jewish peoplehood becomes more and more remote.

Can some compromise be found? A basically voluntaristic standard for Jewish peoplehood that stands some chance of successfully holding most of us together can best be achieved by searching for a common strand that can best pass the "reality test," i.e., that is least dependent upon opinion or ideology or whim. Such a strand is—our collective memory. If most of us Jews no longer share basic assumptions about the great questions of life and faith, we at least share a past. History and literature therefore become critical in defining the basis for Jewish peoplehood. But these must be pursued passionately, with focused attention, and

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not merely asserted. And whatever other shreds of commonality remain with us should be protected and enhanced as well.

Thus, there must be a reintroduction of Jews to the classics of their own great literature, from the Bible down. All Jewish groups and "denominations" can teach Jewish history, no matter how much their interpretations may differ. More Jews must learn Hebrew or at least be exposed to it. We should restore the use of the classical Jewish calendar alongside the conventional secular calendar. We should continue to work for wider acceptance of the "Israel experience" (the ultimate success of which will depend on the follow-up when the young people return to their homes, and also to what and whom they will be exposed while they are in Israel). Every Jew should be given and use a Hebrew name in addition to, if not in place of, his or her English or any other non-Hebrew name. We should create a minimum Jewish library for every Jewish home.

But ultimately, all such efforts rest upon the foundation of a genuine attempt to create mass Jewish education in Israel and the Diaspora. Nothing less than a "Marshall Plan" is needed, something on the scale, relatively, of the Manhattan Project. The "Jewish continuity" movement so far has been more in the nature of goodwill gestures, and that will not save us. A minimum Jewish education will include what we all share as Jews, such as history and literature; what should be common to all Jews, such as language and other cultural artifacts; and teaching those things which some Jews hold dear but which all Jews need to know about and respect even if they disagree.

2. Mutual recriminations among various groups accomplish nothing, and, indeed, are counterproductive. Rather, each group must undergo the process of *heshbon ha'nefesh*, such as is now being undertaken by modern Orthodox Jews in Israel and the U.S.A. (Wouldn't it be refreshing if every movement and organization in Jewish life would announce, before every Yom Kippur, the results of its internal stock-taking along with a list of its errors and the plans to correct them—instead of the immodest boasting of its "accomplishments?" We do believe in the Messiah)

3. A distinction must be made between two levels: the practical or political issue which affects the State of Israel, and the ideological question, which affects religion-minded Jews the world over. With regard to the latter, those who are committed to democracy (and that includes the overwhelming majority of all religious as well as non-religious Jews) must appreciate that democracy is a political system

and not a metaphysical or theological construct, and that religious people do—and are entitled to—believe in higher purposes that transcend political interests or values. It is when Judaism is taken as a political system, and when democracy is treated as if it were a religion, that the conflicts become unavoidable and the systems irreconcilable. I assume, therefore, that we are being asked about the former rather than the latter.

First, it must be made clear that American democracy is not the only valid form of democracy—something most Americans are unaware of—and that other versions of democracy leave more ample room for religious expression by the society. Second, there is a large degree of commonality between democratic values and Jewish teaching. This should be researched objectively and honestly, with scholarly rectitude, and it should not sound or be apologetic. There is no need to prove that Judaism is more democratic than the American constitution; it is not necessary that every pronouncement of the ACLU or other such groups be considered critical to the existence of democracy such that Judaism must be reconciled with it. The sources for such Jewish teachings are not only Scripture and Talmud, but, even more to the point and more practically, the organization of Jewish communities in the Middle Ages in Central and Western Europe (the late Professor Irving Agus of Yeshiva University did important spadework in this area). The results of such efforts, both scholarly and popular, should be widely disseminated. Third, where they diverge, religious Jews should understand that not all Jewish doctrine is meant to be applied in all historical circumstances, and that Judaism can accommodate itself to less than ideal circumstances—as it has done successfully throughout much of its history. At the same time, other Jews should appreciate that a great deal of the polemic surrounding religion in Israel is fundamentally *cultural* rather than political, and they too must make accommodations and not expect that all Jews must assimilate to vulgar standards of American culture as the dominant political culture either in Israel or in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora.

Deborah Lipstadt

Though life in Israel and Jewish communities worldwide is beginning to return to a semblance of normalcy, for many Jews, not only Israelis, the wounds are open and festering, as Jews blame one another—and themselves—for the killing. The shock of the murder was intensified because it was committed by a Jew. One of the refrains heard in its aftermath was “This is not how Jews behave.” But there were those—both Jews and non-Jews—who were inclined to say, “This is *exactly* how Jews behave.” Jews, they argued, have a propensity for being at each other’s throats, and the assassination was an extreme manifestation of that. I was called by a number of reporters from major papers and media outlets who wanted me to validate that view. When I told them that it was more complicated than that, they lost interest in my views. Of course, they were not entirely wrong.

Ethnic jokes—those jokes a group tells about itself—are often a good barometer of certain internal realities. There is an entire genre of “Jews-can-never-agree jokes.” One concerns the Jewish Robinson Crusoe who is stranded on a desert island. Upon being rescued, he gives his rescuers a tour of his shelter, tools, and food supplies. Finally, he takes them to two magnificent structures he has built. Pointing at one, he announces, “Oh, that’s the synagogue I go to, and,” pointing at the other, “that’s the one I wouldn’t set foot in!” or (because it’s a Jewish joke it obviously has more than one version) “That’s the one I used to go to, but I had a fight and quit.” Another joke that makes the same point concerns a town’s new rabbi, who, given conflicting information about *minhagei ha’makom*, local customs, turns to the congregation’s oldest member to learn the town’s traditions. He asks the old man about a variety of practices, only to be repeatedly told, “I don’t remember.” The congregation members, frustrated and angry, begin to yell at one another about the original customs. As the shouting grows louder and more acrimonious, the old man looks up and sighs, “*That* I remember.”

Jews have had passionate theological, political, and sociological differences, sometimes with disastrous consequences. A striking example of the cost of Jewish internecine warfare occurred during the Holocaust. American Jews fought one another often over unimportant matters, given the magnitude of the horror facing them. While it is not at all certain that even if Jews had been utterly united they would have effected any policy changes, the State Department and other government agencies used Jewish disunity as an excuse for their own inaction.

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These Jews had ancient precedents on their side. According to the Talmud, the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans because of *sin'at hinam*, baseless hatred among Jews. Consequently, it is not surprising that *shalom bayit*, peace in the home, and, in its broader context, peace within the community, has become a basic Jewish value. People often care most about that which they find difficult to attain.

There is another side to this issue. The differences among Jews have created a tent broad enough to encompass people of vastly opposing views in what is euphemistically called "the Jewish community." Hasidim were ardently opposed by other Jews who believed that Hasidism elevated its rebbes to a semidivine and, consequently, inherently un-Jewish status. In the 19th century, traditional Jews were appalled by Reform's theological innovations (they called them transgressions). Reform was apoplectic about Zionism, fearing that non-Jews would revoke Jews' recently acquired rights if they mused about "returning" to their real homeland. Among the Zionists there were vast differences on the nature of the projected Jewish state. Some believed the state must recognize God's role in its creation, while others argued that God, if indeed there was one, should be kept out of politics. And today there are, of course, deep differences about the peace process. There is an additional aspect to these dramatically different points of view. Nineteenth-century German classical Reform Judaism has been castigated by critics as an attempt to ape Protestantism. It shed kashrut, bar mitzvah, the Hebrew language, and other practices because it evaluated Judaism with a Christian yardstick. According to these critics, Reform was naught but a way station to the baptismal font. Others take a different view, arguing that Reform was the last barrier between Jews and conversion. But for Reform, the argument goes, many Jews would have ended up as Christians. The conversion rate, which was already high, would have grown higher if young Jews had not had Reform as an option.

A similar argument can be made about Zionism. Most national movements have one goal: independence. The Jewish national movement, on the other hand, had multiple goals. Each group of Zionists believed its particular goal the most crucial, and the others divergences. Political Zionists, who followed Herzl's ideology that an independent national state was the supreme objective, fought bitterly with cultural Zionists, Ahad Ha'am's followers, who believed that while political independence was a worthy goal, a state would constitute a hollow victory if its culture and ideology were not inherently Jewish. Religious Zionists believed the state must reflect God's Torah. Labor Zionists wanted a socialist agricultural entity, while Revisionists, Jabotinsky's followers, took an opposite stance. These multiple

goals, rather than creating obstacles, were the secret of the movement's success. When the Balfour Declaration, proclaiming Britain's support of a Jewish homeland, was issued in 1917, political goals seemed close to realization. It soon became clear that that was not to be. During the years when the realization of the political aims seemed out of reach, success could be counted in a myriad of ways, including Hebrew-speaking young Jews for whom a Jewish cultural environment was the norm, the flowering of kibbutzim, drained swamps, and new cities. The multiple goals not only saved the movement and its adherents from discouragement, but also allowed for different ways of assessing the movement's progress.

Judaism has room—within reason—for vastly differing views. With the exception of Jews for Jesus and a few other fringe elements, no one can be read out of the community solely for his or her point of view. This is not intended to justify internecine fighting. Immediate repair of the deep divisions must be made. Those who point the finger of blame at an "other" side must be condemned. But at critical moments in Jewish history individuals have been able to remain in the community precisely because there were a variety of ways in which they could declare themselves Jews.

The Bible says that God liberated the children of Israel from Egypt on eagles' wings. Those wings transported many kinds of Jews. When one kind tries to push another off, the ride becomes precarious. Jews must find a way of civilly disagreeing with one another. Unless they do, the eagles, rather than soar, will surely crash, having been tragically brought down by their passengers, not by external forces. Then we will have given life to Isaiah's *other* prophecy. Not the one about the lion and the lamb, but the one too often ignored by Jews: "Your destroyers will come from your own ranks."

Alfred Moses

The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin is but one manifestation, albeit tragic, of the divisions that exist in the Jewish world. This is ironic, for non-Jews often think of Jews as being monolithic to the point where anti-Semites demonize us as united in a worldwide conspiracy. How often have we heard the term "You Jews," not necessarily meant in ill will, from persons who think that Jews think and act alike. The stark reality is far different.

Regrettably, the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin cannot be dismissed as an isolated act of a madman, as one could characterize the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The pulling of the trigger by Yigal Amir was heralded as a religious act by those Jews who see the peace process as violating God's covenant with the Jewish people, thereby justifying murder—the Sixth Commandment notwithstanding. These Jewish fanatics have much in common with Islamic fundamentalists. Both live outside of history, seeking to change a reality they cannot accept by using any means available, including violence. It is important to note that this form of fanaticism that condones murder in religious terms does not permeate the Orthodox community. True, the *Haredi* community also lives outside of history, being more attuned to divine proximity than contemporaneous events. But for them it is enough to exclude the reality they cannot accept, without seeking to destroy it. This passive rejection does not place them beyond the collective Jewish "we," as evidenced by the rallying of American Jewry in defense of the Hasidim when riots erupted a few years ago in Crown Heights. They are nevertheless a "breed apart" from modern Jews, for whom the destiny of the West is not borrowed clothing.

This schism between the *Haredi* community and what, for lack of a better term, we refer to as modern Jews (including the modern Orthodox) is neither new nor startling. It has existed since the dawn of the *Haskalah* and earlier—in the Golden Age of Sephardic Jewry, not to mention the division between Hellenized Jews and Maccabees, with the latter viewed by their more contemporary brethren as cultural and religious atavists. True, we have survived despite this internecine warfare, but at a huge price. The losers drifted away from the Jewish community, and in time disappeared as recognizable Jews, the fate that befell the ten lost tribes 2700 years ago, for whom the prophet Jeremiah mourned so poignantly.

One would be naive to think that the Jewish world will ever be free from internal conflicts. There are too many diverse interests, not all of them religious, to expect

Alfred Moses

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anything different. The issue is how to manage the conflicts so as not to destroy a sense of shared purpose and destiny. Surely the religious world is not the only paradigm for us to follow. We do not need a *herem* reminiscent of the Mitnagdim's condemnation of the Hasidim or the vitriol of the aged Rabbi Schach's reference to the late Lubavitch rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson as "That madman who lives on Eastern parkway and drives the whole world crazy." Nor can we look to those Israeli political leaders who, in the name of Zionism, consign Jews living outside of Israel to the dustbin of Jewish history, bereft of a Jewish future. It is no more valid for Israelis to say that Jews living outside Israel have sold their Jewish birthright for a bowl of porridge (read materialism) than it is for American Jewry to criticize Israelis who are not religiously observant.

By its very nature, the peace process will continue to arouse Jewish emotions. At issue are values that go to the heart of Jewish interests—land, the Bible, the state. A high level of tension is likely to continue even after the peace process itself is a recorded event in history. Those of us who are not Israelis are best off staying out of the fray. It is for Israelis to decide the fate of their country, not American Jews, neither those who say, "We won't give up an inch of the Golan," but will go on living exactly as before regardless of the fate of the Golan, nor those American Jews who are uncomfortable when Israelis do not look and act like figures in a Norman Rockwell painting. The future of the peace process is for Israelis to decide, end of story.

For their part, Israelis need to realize that the totality of the Jewish world does not end at Israel's borders, that the larger Jewish world continues to have a vital role in ensuring the security of Israel and in preserving Jewish identity as a religious, cultural, and historical continuum.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust and with victorious Israeli armies on the Golan and at the Suez Canal, it was easy to say, "We are one." After all, the Nazi murderers treated us all alike, not distinguishing between Zionists, Bundists, Orthodox, and nonreligious Jews. All met the same fate. Now, with memory of the Holocaust fading (we are already in the third post-Holocaust generation) and Israel divided as never before, we need to ask ourselves what kind of Jewish world we want, an inclusive one, or one that is fractured into bits. If the choice is the inclusive model, then we need to do something about it, not leave it to those on the extremes to determine our fate. At a minimum this means supporting like-minded Jewish institutions in Israel and in the United States, and recognizing that the democratically elected government of Israel is the only legitimate spokesman for the State of Israel on matters of national policy.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin

The age-old habit of passionate disputation—Talmudic and otherwise—is, to my mind, among the Jewish people's proudest legacies, as is our willingness to talk truth to power.

But it has become obvious that we must change the way we have been talking to and about each other. That a prime minister who spent his whole life defending and protecting the Jewish state could be vilified as a traitor and a Nazi, and be murdered by a fellow Jew in the name of God, is tragic proof that inflammatory speech can become a license to kill. Clearly, it should not have taken an assassination to teach us this lesson. We, of all people, know the perils of demagoguery and the dangers of rhetorical excess. In fact, our community has been trigger-quick to respond to hate speech when it comes from outsiders—the skinheads, ayatollahs, militias, Louis Farrakhans, Khalid Muhammeds, and Pat Buchanans of this world. No one had to tell us to challenge Farrakhan when he called Jews “bloodsuckers” or Judaism a “gutter religion.” No one has to prod us to respond when Lyndon LaRouche maligns Jews, or the Christian Identity Movement preaches that Jews are inferiors, or the White Aryan Resistance calls Jewish power the root of all corruption.

“They can't say those things,” insist our leaders, who fearlessly speak out, run ads, write op-ed essays. “Slander can lead to slaughter; we've seen it happen before.”

But when it comes to protesting the attacks *by* our own *on* our own, too often there has been silence. Few in the Jewish community have been willing to take seriously or publicly condemn the increasingly toxic climate created by fellow Jews who may, in the long run, prove more destructive to our collective well-being than all those external adversaries put together.

On November 4, *klal yisrael* reaped the whirlwind, but it's not as if we didn't have fair warning. In 1987, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Albert R. Hunt asked a broad spectrum of Israeli leaders “What is the central issue facing Israel?” Everyone—Yitzhak Rabin, Ariel Sharon, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Shamir, Ezer Weizman—answered security, but a rabbi who headed one of the small right-wing religious parties that was part of the governing Likud coalition named the biggest problem Teddy Kollek, and proceeded to launch what Hunt called “an incredibly vitriolic tirade against secular Israeli political leaders.”

Letty Cottin Pogrebin

author of eight books,
most recently *Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America*

Echoes of fundamentalist hyperbole can be heard in a secret 1991 tape recording that came to light in 1993 in which Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the Israeli Torah scholar and spiritual mentor of the religious party Shas, can be heard giving a Talmud class. On the tape, he hurls vulgar curses at Israel's attorney general, excoriates all of Reform Judaism, calls Meretz minister Yossi Sarid "evil," says MK Avraham Burg "makes propaganda for hell," and proclaims that "on the day Aloni dies, we will declare a celebration and hold a banquet." (MK Shulamit Aloni is a leader of the liberal Meretz faction and a long-time peace advocate.)

In my column in *Moment* magazine, I asked how a man of God could suggest that another Jew's death would be cause for celebration since Jews are commanded to revere life, especially Jewish life. Weren't the rabbi's words tantamount to incitement? Furthermore, what if one of the rabbi's more passionate disciples got the message that the demise of this godless adversary should be accelerated? Several readers accused me of Orthodox-bashing, but to Rabbi Yosef's invectives there was no reaction.

The pattern is sadly familiar—strong words from the extremists, passivity from the mainstream. Once again, this is not to say the organized Jewish community is incapable of constructive public outrage; quite the contrary. Our leadership always responds to attacks by non-Jews—from Jesse Jackson's "Hymietown" remark, to Leonard Jeffries's libel about the Jews and the slave trade, to Bradley Smith's Holocaust denial ads, among other provocations. But when the attackers are other Jews, official reaction has been tentative, tepid, slow in coming, or nonexistent.

Where were the outcries and op-ed pieces, for instance, when Jewish extremists left bombs outside the offices of Americans for Peace Now and other peace groups in New York? Why were there no ads demanding a public apology when Israeli ambassador Itamar Rabinovich and Consul General Colette Avital were shouted down and pelted with eggs in a synagogue? Where were the "appalled" spokespersons for mainstream Jewry when ultra-right-wing Jews consistently defamed Israeli democracy, the peace process, and all Arabs in the same venomous breath? Or when Israeli rabbis instructed soldiers to defy the orders of their superiors; or when New Jersey rabbi Steven Pruzansky compared the Rabin government to the *Judenrat*; or Brooklyn rabbi Abraham Hecht declared that killing the Israeli prime minister was acceptable under Jewish law?

Fear of the Orthodox establishment may explain, though not excuse, some of the reticence to criticize this behavior. But it doesn't account for the mainstream community's relatively low-key response to other Jew-to-Jew offenses, for instance,

when MK Aloni was roughed up by a man who was the vice president of the World Committee for Israel and honorary chair of the Salute to Israel Parade; or when big *machers* in New York or Miami talk as if *they* know more about Israeli security than the Israeli generals; or when the settlers' supposedly peaceful demonstrations degenerated into orgies of hate speech and physical assault, including an attack on Jerusalem police chief Arye Amit.

In Israel, both in the streets and the Knesset, the rhetoric of the political right tends to be more vitriolic, but the center and left have not been innocent of verbal excess. In the 1980s, they called Sharon "butcher" and "murderer," and termed Shamir "the murderer of the peace." More recently, they have accused the opposition of being "racists" and "allies of Hamas." Even Rabin fell to name-calling when he dubbed the settlers "crybabies." Likewise, in the United States, extremists are not our only problem. Jewish Republicans and conservatives routinely excoriate Jewish Democrats and liberals—and vice versa. Members of the four branches of our faith badmouth one another in person and in the Jewish press. "We've said some awful things about one another," writes Orthodox Joel Rebibo in the *Jerusalem Post*. "You call us primitive. We call you shallow heathens." People who disagree on the Mideast peace process don't just argue their points, they defame and dehumanize their opponents. After the assassination, Professor Ehud Sprinzak of Hebrew University and an expert on the Israeli right, said, "What happened last Saturday night was the culmination of a systematic process of going after Rabin personally as a traitor."

Indeed, last fall—on top of the familiar charges of "Nazi," "traitor," "killer," "murderer," and "non-Jewish Jew"—some of us sensed an intensification of the hate campaign targeted at the prime minister. A mock death certificate with Rabin's name on it was circulated around West Bank settlements. Author Moshe Shamir went on the radio to accuse Rabin of "collaborating with Nazis." A group of settlement rabbis published an opinion that "the life of anyone abandoning part of the land of Israel is forfeitable." Benjamin Kahane of Kahane Chai told an interviewer, "Many think the solution is to murder Rabin and Peres." Uzi Landau, a Likud leader, called Rabin "an ignoramus . . . who has no idea about Judaism or Zionism." Moshe Saitovitch, a thirty-seven-year-old Israeli working in New York, posted an Internet message branding Rabin a traitor whose crimes invited punishment "by death or life imprisonment." And finally, Yigal Amir called Yitzhak Rabin "a pursuer"—one who betrays his people to the enemy and must be killed.

While Israelis debate how their legal system should distinguish between free speech and criminal incitement, and while the New York Board of Rabbis announced plans to “shun, scorn, and quarantine” anyone who advocates murdering Jewish leaders, it is also incumbent upon the rest of us to do our parts to alter the escalating climate of hate.

“Good people often wilt when confronted by violent rhetoric,” writes Chaim Potok in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, “. . . it’s hard to know what to say and how to say it. Why can’t some knowledgeable individual develop a manual of effective responses to repellent public language? Once written, let’s see to its dissemination throughout the world.”

That’s one good suggestion; I think I have another. Let’s create a simple anti-slander pledge, an oath, if you will, to be circulated and signed by as many American Jews as can be reached through our synagogues and communal institutions. What I’m proposing is not a politically correct mantra or New Age invention but a restatement of one of the core ethical imperatives of our tradition—the prescription against *lashon ha’ra*, literally “the evil tongue.”

The Torah describes the vice of slander as a capital crime. In Proverbs 18:21 we read, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” The Talmud unequivocally condemns a person with an evil tongue as one who denies God. And of the slanderer, God says: “He and I cannot live together in the world” (Arakhin 15b).

According to Philip Birnbaum, author of *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts*, “The term slander has been defined [under Jewish law] as the utterance or dissemination of false statements or reports concerning a person, or malicious misrepresentation of his actions, in order to defame or injure him The offense is much greater if the report is circulated with malicious intent to injure a man’s reputation or to expose him to contempt or derision.” Now that we’ve seen how thin is the line between character assassination and assassination, we must change the level of discourse in our community, lower the volume, clean up the vocabulary. Words like traitor and murderer have no place in civilized debate. Hyperbole and generalizations must be challenged: not all Orthodox Jews are extremists or enemies of the peace process, and not all peace activists are Arab lovers or enemies of God. We must retain the passion of our convictions but guard our tongues. Not an easy task, but an urgent one.

To that end, groups like the American Jewish Committee and other Jewish communal and Israel-oriented organizations could circulate to their memberships a mutually agreed-upon text, perhaps something as plainspoken as this:

While reserving the right to express my opinions freely and forcefully, I vow to eschew the vice of slander as it is understood in Jewish tradition and established norms of ethical behavior. I further promise to publicly condemn all speech whether from Jews or Gentiles that vilifies, libels, and demonizes human beings on the basis of their religious or political beliefs.

The goal of such a pledge is obvious. It should elicit from each signatory a moment of consciousness, a mindful personal commitment to civility and reasoned debate. If, for starters, 100,000 community leaders and activist Jews were to put their names to a written promise not just to banish *lashon ha'ra* from their own mouths but personally to take responsibility for helping to eliminate it from the public sphere, think what a transformative effect it would have upon all our interactions.

Who should take the pledge? Anyone who cares about healing the rift in our community; anyone who believes Jewish identity carries with it relational and behavioral standards; anyone who recognizes that Jewish continuity requires not just marrying Jewish and observing rituals but mutual respect among Jews; anyone who purports to speak on behalf of Jewish interests and to act *as a Jew* in the world; anyone who hopes to bring *shalom bayit* to the House of Israel.

President Clinton bade good-bye to Prime Minister Rabin with the words "*Shalom chaver*"—Farewell, friend. That phrase, which now appears on lapel buttons worn by Jews everywhere, could serve symbolically to remind us of the communication standards we must demand of one another no matter how profoundly we disagree. "*Shalom chaver*." Hello friend. And now, let's talk.

Emanuel Rackman

Until recently, Israeli sociologists were of the opinion that there was a general consensus among Israeli Jews that, while the state should not impose religious coercion, the state should nonetheless have some Jewish character. Neither is true any longer. The secularists—with the notable exception of Eliezer Schweid—see no reason why the state must have a religious character. And increasingly, religionists see no reason why they should give up their commitment to a state according to halakhah—with the exception of most modern or centrist Orthodox Jews, who want no religious coercion, but seek to unite the nation through the religion's tradition, and influence Israeli law through the values of traditional Hebrew law.

This considerable change in the consensus is fully reflected in Israel's present crisis and its most tragic hour. What must one do to restore the earlier consensus?

It would be the sheerest folly to expect the political system—especially the Knesset—to make any contribution toward this goal. It is the most culpable for the bitter divisiveness.

Nor can one expect either the religionists on the right or the secularists on the left to be concerned. The former increase in number and visualize that one day they will "take over." Rabbi Meir Kahane held this view very fervently. And the latter have such little Jewish background—their education was so devoid of it—that they would not know even how to identify Jewish character.

That is why I hold that only one governmental institution can do anything about it. The president should be the person—and not only the symbol—whose responsibility Jewish unity should be. His position is apolitical—above partisan politicking—and thus far all of those who have served in the position have been paragons of popular support and respect.

Furthermore, not only should the Knesset be required to finance the programs that the president and his staff originate, but the Ministry of Education should be charged with full cooperation.

Second, something must be done to civilize the behavior of those who are representatives of the government. Heretofore this was done by encouraging them

Emanuel Rackman
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through awards and prizes—for the most gentle speech, or the kindest outlook, and so on. But this is a minuscule way to approach the problem. What would be effective for members of the Knesset and many other government officials is the elimination of the immunity they enjoy. This would have to be done through legislation, and those presently in power may hesitate to give up their own private privileges. This is only natural. But we have had an assassination of a prime minister which was due mainly, not to the behavior of students in the yeshivot, or rabbis who teach in those institutions, but to heated words in the Knesset.

There is considerable halakhic authority which makes it clear that there need be no conflict between halakhic and democratic values. The constituency of the Jewish state—its voting citizens—enjoy the powers that monarchs and medieval autonomous communities had in the past. And Rabbis Bar-Ilan, Herzog, Shaul Israeli, and others have made it possible, for example, to justify the role of women as judges and the power of the state to give non-Jews rights and privileges that ancient halakhah once denied them. This scholarly material is available, and should be provided in popular form. Thus the alleged “conflict” between Judaism and democracy is only a major problem for those Orthodox who still do not recognize the state.

And the Bar-Ilan University way is the only pattern that will get more of the separatists to seek and obtain both the good life of a democratic society and the freedom that they are denied in their separatist sects.

Joseph Rackman

To contribute to a strengthening of intra-Jewish ties and to demonstrate the disastrous consequences of extremist politics, I propose a simple act: The Rabbinical Council of America, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Rabbinical Assembly, Central Conference of American Rabbis, and Union of American Hebrew Congregations call upon their constituencies this coming Rosh Hashanah to observe the Fast of Gedaliah.

The exact details of the historical event that the fast day commemorates will be detailed shortly. For the moment, suffice it to say that the fast stands for a condemnation of political extremism and assassination.

By using an Orthodox model, the non-Orthodox demonstrate a respect for tradition. The Orthodox, realizing this, will recognize that they have much to contribute to the entire Jewish landscape and that isolationism on their part will only lessen the guidance and historical continuity that this movement can bring to our peoplehood. (By contrast, a fast on Rabin's *yahrzeit* is a quandary for those, Orthodox or otherwise, who did not support his policies, but deplored the murder.) And as we fast let us remember that as important as it is to be careful about what we put into our mouths, what comes out of our mouths is of even greater importance.

Here is the historical background:

There was a new political reality in the Middle East in the beginning of the 6th century B.C.E. Egypt continued as the southern power, but the traditional military power in the north, Assyria, had been overthrown in 612 B.C.E. by the Babylonians. The Egyptians felt threatened by this new power and joined with their former enemies, the remnants of the Assyrians, to attack the Babylonians. Israel was caught in the middle as the Egyptian army advanced up her coast, and King Josiah feared for the independence of his kingdom if the Assyrians, who had historically threatened (and periodically attacked) Israel, regained power. So he went to war against Assyria, but at Megiddo, in northern Israel, this righteous king, who had served God and fought against idolatry, was mortally wounded.

While the Egyptian-Assyrian alliance defeated Israel, it was unable to defeat

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Babylon. Israel, a buffer zone between the two world powers of the time, cast its lot with Egypt against Babylon. With help from God, the prophet Jeremiah read the political tea leaves accurately, and prophesied that the new king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, had been chosen as God's instrument for punishing the Jews. For a brief period, the then-king of Judea, Jehoiakim, swore allegiance to Babylon, but after three years changed his mind, precipitating an attack against Judea by the Babylonians, and yet another Judean king lost his life in battle. The king's son and successor, Jehoiachin, continued the fight, but when Nebuchadnezzar arrived in person to direct military operations, he surrendered and was deported to Babylon, accompanied by his court, the nobility, and seven thousand citizens together with their families, and a thousand craftsmen (597 B.C.E.). This was the beginning of the end for the First Temple in Jerusalem.

Act II in this tragedy came eleven years later. It was left to King Zedekiah, the last king of Judea, to make all the wrong moves. Initially, he allied himself with Babylon, but later he succumbed to the pro-Egyptian faction at court. Jeremiah opposed the alliance with Egypt, but the king joined forces with an anti-Babylonian coalition consisting of Edom, Ammon, Moab, and, of course, Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar threw all his military power against the coalition and laid siege to Jerusalem in 588-87 B.C.E. From the south, Egypt sent its expeditionary force, causing Nebuchadnezzar to deal with the threat by removing his army from the siege of Jerusalem.

Despite this reprieve, Jeremiah continued to advocate acceptance of Babylonian subjugation, and he was arrested. Secretly visited by the king in prison, Jeremiah urged him to surrender to the Babylonians, but the king refused. Then Nebuchadnezzar, having disposed of the Egyptians, resumed the siege of Jerusalem, and in 586 B.C.E. Jerusalem was destroyed, the Temple burned to the ground.

Act III was all too brief. Nebuchadnezzar had left some of the pro-Babylonian Judean nobility behind to rule over Jerusalem, but again the pro-Egyptian faction, refusing to accept defeat, assassinated Gedaliah, the Babylonians' hand-picked regent. Fearing Nebuchadnezzar's vengeance, the pro-Egyptian party fled to Egypt, forcing Jeremiah to go with them.

In spite of a prophet of God and in spite of clear indications that Babylon was the ascendant power, the leadership of Israel failed to alter course, bringing tragic consequences. The assassination of Gedaliah (commemorated as a fast day on the day following the second day of Rosh Hashanah) is perfect proof of what a stubborn people we can be.

The key lesson is all too clear: Violence by Jews against Jews (and anything that increases the possibility of such violence, such as heightened rhetoric) is more to be feared than any violence of Arabs against Jews (or Jews against Arabs). It is civil war that is to be feared and civility which must be sought.

As the lay leaders of our nation's congregations and their rabbis call upon the American Jewish community to observe the Fast of Gedaliah on Monday, September 16, we will enhance Jewish unity, while reminding us all of the riches of our shared traditions. As part of this undertaking, an appropriate booklet that explains this and other relevant aspects of our history might be distributed in synagogues on Rosh Hashanah. At the very least, congregants (even those who do not fast) should be urged to read the booklet at home on September 16—a nonfood seder for Gedaliah, as it were. (This has the laudable purpose of bringing a Jewish observance into the home.) Additionally, people should be urged to contribute what they otherwise spend on lunch to a charity (suggested by the local rabbi) that promotes tolerance and understanding.

Sadly, this symbolic unification may be easier to implement in America than in Israel, where the divide is so much deeper (which is understandable, as the stakes in Israel are so much higher).

Especially important in the aftermath of the Rabin assassination, we need to use both traditional and nontraditional texts to teach a renewed respect for life and for the differing opinions that are a reflection of a vital and vibrant democratic society. We must not cede to any individual or to any group the right to interpret texts, even the most sacred. As individuals and as Jews, each of us is called upon to draw lessons for life and conduct from the texts that are a legacy to us all.

For there to be *shalom bayit*, we must consciously promote and draw strength from our diversity. We must engage in dialogue with those with whom we differ most vehemently, remembering always that peaceful opposition to government policies is an elemental right of a free people and a sign of strength in a democracy. And we must stand ready—be it in Israel or here in America—to raise our voices, individually and collectively, against those whose words or actions cross the line of acceptable conduct in a free and democratic society.

Jehuda Reinharz

The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made us aware of two things: that the divisions within Israeli society have been and continue to be dangerously deep, and that Jews are capable of violent political acts we thought characterized only other peoples and other societies. Since the Rabin assassination, there have been repeated calls for Jews here and in Israel to come together and foster reconciliation in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Is this realistic?

How do we deal with divisions? Can a new sense of community be found to replace the cohesiveness that results from prolonged external threat? While the answer to this question will take different forms here and in Israel, both communities can learn from one another's experience as they each wrestle with the issue of disunity.

Because of the nature of Israeli society and the American Jewish population, we need open acknowledgment of diversity. Efforts must be made to draw different segments of the community into joint activities or discussions. We need to be as diverse and as creative as possible, abandoning a "one-size-fits-all" approach to Jewish involvement in favor of a fragmented approach. It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that promoting or allowing for diversity strengthens feelings of community, but it is, in my judgment, the only realistic course if we are to ensure a vigorous and creative Jewish future here and in Israel.

We need to stop talking only with those with whom we share values and opinions. We need to create forums in which to engage one another—left versus right, secular versus religious, Jewishly involved or uninvolved—in a dialogue, not just on the contentious issues, but on the myriad topics and issues of daily life that engage us all. It is far easier to stereotype and demonize the stranger than it is the neighbor whom we know on multiple levels.

We need interdenominational networking within Judaism. We need schools and engaging activities here and in Israel that bring children together across sectarian lines where the emphasis is on the traditional Jewish love of learning and education, not sectarian identification. Synagogues that reflect different traditions within Judaism should share rabbis. We need broadly diverse commissions or retreats that consider such issues as "What constitutes an educated Jew?" or "What does it mean to lead a Jewish life?" We need to look for community-building

opportunities and connections that cut across political, denominational, social, gender, interest, and other lines.

A more inclusive definition of Judaism is needed, one that increases Judaism's relevance and attractiveness to a sophisticated and broadly diverse Jewish community here and in Israel. Once this diversity is legitimized, we must also seek common ground among those organizations and build bridges through what I referred to above as interdenominational networking within Judaism. Bridge-building can lead to meaningful cohesion as a community.

In my role as president of Brandeis University, a nondenominationally Jewish-sponsored yet nonsectarian institution, I try to build an environment in which disparate and seemingly incompatible groups can live and learn together. It is not always easy, but it can be done, and often it is to the great advantage of everyone involved, strengthening communication and increasing the effectiveness of diverse groups and organizations.

In general, research has shown that for many American Jews identity is no longer tied solely to the practice of religion as an all-encompassing system of laws, but is based rather on a feeling of community arising from a shared ethnic identity. At Brandeis University, for example, a commitment to social justice is one of the pillars upon which the university was founded. Practicing social justice through volunteerism and activism, which are part of the Jewish tradition, attracts Jews who otherwise are alienated from the practice of the religion.

Jewish-sponsored leisure activities attract many otherwise unaffiliated Jews, because—in addition to the activities themselves—they are a source of valuable professional or social networking opportunities. In seeking to make Judaism meaningful and as attractive as possible to every segment of the population, we need programs that appeal to the young, the old, the religious, and the nonreligious. In short, we need something for everyone, and we need to be prepared to take the broadest possible view of what constitutes legitimate expressions of Jewish identity.

The Jewish community should consider new slogans that can become the equivalent of a moral rallying call for American and world Jewry. "We Are One" is a slogan that has entered the collective conscience of the world. We need a new slogan that will reflect the new realities of the Jewish community here and in Israel and will serve to energize a new generation of Jews. I suggest that one such slogan might be "We Are Many, We Are One."

Anne Roiphe

One should never believe one's own stories. Tell them, of course, but remember they are tales, embellished, polished, political, self-serving, gorgeous or not. The deeply felt belief that Jews do not kill Jews is one of our sweetest fables. With the rest of the world hunting us down, it seemed urgent that, inside the group, we hold ourselves dear.

But of course the Zealots burned the grain and allowed Jewish children to starve, of course there were fundamentalists slitting the throats of Jews too fond of the gym, and there have been, in every time of disaster, collaborators, betrayers, turncoats, and weasels. Also, there were always purists, literalists, ranters and ravers, visionaries, and hard-liners who accepted as Jewish only those Jews who were mirror images of themselves. To accept pluralism, a Jewish dynamic of opinion, is asking a lot of the human mind. Probably too much.

The Zionist goal to create a state like any other, a normal state, has been achieved. We therefore cannot be surprised at the turmoil that follows. At a time when the country was deeply divided on a moral issue and a terrible war was being fought, the losing side produced an assassin, and the eloquent, dark-eyed leader of the country was shot in his box at the theater. Lincoln, like Rabin, was the normal leader of a normal state trying to resolve an issue on which both sides felt passionately, and today, 130 years later, we are still reckoning with the division, we are still defusing mines, mopping up, coping with the afterlife of slavery. Death beyond counting was the result of the killing of an archduke in a small, normal Balkan country.

The death of Rabin is proof of Israel's unremarkable place in the community of nations. Wherever politics gets confused with God's voice, wherever the nation is of two minds, wherever ideology becomes ethics, the assassin rises, blood is shed. No surprise there.

Nevertheless, we have a Jewish peoplehood. We existed so long without real estate that we've grown accustomed to ourselves as a nation with a destiny unknown, with a special role, sometimes tragic, sometimes glorious, in the fate of the world. We expected better of ourselves. We were wrong. Like everyone else's, our politics and our religion can take a noxious turn. We now have to acknowledge that our habits of argument, our tendency to scream like the Red Queen in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, "off with their heads," is less than admirable. Nev-

Anne Roiphe

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ertheless, we cannot control the rhetoric. If we suppress it, the political vision of the right will only grow more powerful underground. If we permit it, it will spread naturally like an epidemic. It may eventually subside, but it will return. We cannot cool the passions because they are rooted in our story, they are the plot lines of the book and we are the people of the book, even if most of us have turned into postmodernists, critics, deconstructionists.

We cannot tell the messianic ones that it is not necessary to plant our flag on all the ground that they claim. They won't listen, they won't believe us. We cannot tell those who are convinced that the Arab is an implacable enemy that there is room for adjustment. Flexibility, the changing of one's mind, the granting humanity to one's enemy, these are not traits that the religious right or the political right holds precious. We will not argue them out of their view. On the other hand, they will not convince us that we must fight a holy war. The divisions are sharp and ugly. The issues of security, of preventing war, these things can be debated without mayhem following. But Rabin was not killed over a difference about security. He was killed because he threatened a religious vision.

After the Holocaust some Jews thought that the religious community would fade away, become quaint, nostalgic, and small. It was a miscalculation of enormous proportions. We appreciated the black coats, those of us who were not black coats, because they preserved our tradition for us; they were real where we were inauthentic. This somewhat condescending and peculiar view won't do anymore. They are a power and so are we. They are authentic and so are we.

The issues of nationalism involved in the Israeli peace process are profoundly separating. Hatred and fear accompany the dialogue, there and here, among the religious and the nonreligious. Those on the left were for many years publicly called traitors, betrayers of the people. The language of our differences was terrible and the intense feelings invoked were dangerous and sad. I don't believe that we can curtail the free speech, the passionate convictions of the right or left, without damaging ourselves beyond repair. I don't believe that we will change anyone's mind by dialogue. The issue of messianic politics is not like the fine points of Trotsky vs. Lenin, a subject for interesting if heated debates over coffee in the cafe. What we have to face is that this division of the Jewish people is dark and dreadful. The trauma of the Holocaust has led us to doubt the Enlightenment and all its trappings. We are not interested in reason anymore. Our bitterness, our cry, leads some among us to feel that once again God is whispering in the ear of the Jewish people.

Time, a long time, will bring some perspective on this issue. The divisions among us will take new shapes, new horrors will occupy our attention. If the peace process continues and Israel flourishes in a newly forged economic alliance with her neighbors, most Israelis will tolerate the Arab control of what some consider their land. But there will always be opposition. The Jabotinsky view has lasted half a century already, and one could say it is built into the 5,000 years of Jewish history. I suspect it will continue forever. There will always be terrible things said by one group of Jews against another. We can attempt to lower the volume on political rhetoric, but like the fevers of malaria, the nasty words and absolutist thoughts will return soon enough. It is not the language that creates the passion, but the other way around.

When I saw pictures of the young teenagers lighting candles in Tel Aviv, my grief was deep, my soul was there. They were here, with us. But I harbor no sentimental expectations of Jewish unity. The definition of a people is a group of humans who are more prone to murder outsiders than insiders most of the time. We will have to live with that.

Jonathan Rosenblatt

The unity of the Jewish people is at once a priority and a puzzle. Before strategy can be put in place, it is important to recognize that, on one level, we are indeed two peoples. Secular Jews (and a portion of the religiously active ones as well) live in a human-centered, or homocentric, cosmos. In that configuration of reality, individual actualization and Jewish peoplehood are the core values. Anti-Semitism and Jewish culture (as opposed to religious imperatives) play important roles. Jewish community is loosely configured within a cosmopolitan lifestyle. For traditionally religious Jews, the universe is G-d-centered, with the Divine Will, identified as the Torah, transmitted through the rabbinic tradition. This camp emphasizes the authority of halakhah and a transcendent view of history as unfolding Divine Providence. It also cultivates a measure of detachment from the general society, favoring a community that nurtures religious continuity and personal religious intensity.

In the State of Israel, these two ideological communities of Jews found convergence of commitment. For homocentric Jews, Israel represented a new plateau of safety and self-determination. It was also an unprecedented opportunity to develop a culture comparable to the complex cultures of other state-based peoples. For theocentric Jews, Israel represented an intimate link with eternal sanctity, the land promised to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. It also offered the possibility of a society sympathetic to the needs of the devout, illustrated, for example, by the flourishing of classical rabbinic studies unparalleled (at least in numbers) since the Babylonian academies. And always there was the sense that divinely driven destiny was again moving forward.

The current crisis grows out of a cleavage between two visions of the Jewish state. Convergence has been in decline since its climax in the Six-Day War, and the peace process has moved us toward rupture. For one community, it means the long-awaited end of Israel's war-based culture and a new acceptance among the family of nations. To the other, it signals betrayal of the "flowering of the Redemption" metaphor, which, for almost fifty years, placed the phenomenon of the modern state in theological, eschatological perspective.

This strain also brought to the surface long-standing antipathies between these two communities. Fantasies of a fully secular Israel and of a total theocracy have beckoned the extremes in each camp to grasp for gains long suppressed by the

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realities of consensus governing. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin is the bottom of a rocky chasm (we *pray* it is the bottom!), a place where the two communities of the Jewish people seem in danger of losing all sense of sympathetic connection.

What path might lead us out of the chasm? Trumpeting slogans, even if they are positive, will not suffice. A more analytical approach suggests itself. Its first principle must be apprehended on the highest levels of leadership: neither camp will survive alone. The traditions that have nourished and even revived the commitment of many nondevout Jews and inspired their labors on behalf of the Jewish people would not have been preserved without an intensely focused religious core community. Additionally, their generally higher birthrate and substantially lower rate of intermarriage make the religious community a demographic bulwark of Jewish continuity.

But the theocentric community is also dependent upon its sibling. The vast network of institutions that nurture religious life would not survive without the support of a largely secular infrastructure. And we should remember that it is Israeli soldiers who guarantee the safety of the scholars of B'nei B'rak.

With this recognition in place, it remains for the leaders of each camp to devise educational strategies that inject this message into the very groundwater that their communities drink. In this effort, we have seen the greatest failure, a failure based upon a simple miscalculation. Each group wishes vindication *in its own terms*. In other words, the human-centered camp desires recognition based upon the principles of democracy, pluralism, individualism, and personal freedom. The G-d/Torah camp would like recognition of the authority of halakhah, the divinity of Torah. It projects a time when the nonhalakhic camp will define itself as "fallen" or "lapsed" Jews, just as their counterparts await an "enlightenment" in which the traditionalists will shed their obscurantism and confirm their true belief in the modern humanist creed. These unrealistic expectations assume that each side is secretly convinced of the other's rightness, and that unity is only a matter of drawing out those confessions.

It would be far more realistic for each camp to define a value for the other *in its own terms*. There is ample precedent in the theocentric tradition for the reverential treatment of Jews who sacrifice on behalf of Jews, even when they are outside the community of observance. The human-centered group, as well, is richly gifted with such options. Such Jews are, despite the unfortunate labeling, seldom truly "secular," without spiritual yearnings or interests. The disinclination to live a life dominated by religious obligations may leave intact serious and pressing religious

needs. A reservoir of religious intensity is a resource of incalculable value, provided it is made available to those who sip as well as those who swim. Even beyond the issue of religion, an authentic Jewish culture is difficult to imagine without the richness that the religious tradition has woven into it. A devout community is a cultural treasure.

For this model of cross-recognition to work there must also be a suspension of unwarranted peevishness. The well-meaning condescension of zealously loving yeshiva students who seek to embrace a principled secularist as a saint unknown even to himself must be forgiven. So too the dilettante interest in Jewish practice by a secular Jew on a "cultural safari." Each is valuing the other in terms that he/she can understand without a total upheaval of values. *That* in itself has a value in the effort to maintain our unified (if not uniform) Jewish people.

Parallel strategies working from within the two communities of Jews preserve the hope that we can remain, if not a synthesized people, at least an intertwined people, no negligible unity. Our common destiny lies in the honest recognition of ideological differences and in the commitment to mobilize the strength of *each* community for *am yisrael*.

The wording of your second question assumes that the approach to the inflammatory speech that has played so evident a part in bringing us to the precipice of disaster is a system of controls. The only issues are how and how much. But suppression in the field of speech is fraught with a danger greater than the incendiary rhetoric itself. I would suggest that the blame for our tragic state comes less from the presence of "bad" speech than from the absence of "good" speech. This absence is, in part, due to the sensationalist tendencies of the media, which favor the lurid over the balanced. But the community and its leadership must also accept a modicum of blame for failing to be militantly moderate. Too many hateful remarks passed unremarked. The passions of those who advocated seldom reached the temperature of those who condemned. And many of us preferred not to engage opponents whose tactics were unseemly and often downright threatening. Rabin was not the first victim of an assassination, albeit the first of a bullet.

If the Jewish community is serious about countering hate speech and demagoguery, it must set itself the task of setting the world awash with responsible alternatives. There must be leaders unafraid to speak and to frame a passionate, intelligent, positive vision. And there must be a community determined to provide these voices with forums and access. The force of argument and good sense will cleanse the marketplace.

Jonathan Sarna

In the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, rabbis called upon Jews throughout the world to undertake *heshbon nefesh*, a period of soul-searching in response to the tragedy that turned all Jews into mourners. The term *heshbon nefesh* turns out to be “relatively new in the lexicon of Jewish thought.” According to Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, in his penetrating essay on the topic in Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr’s *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought* (1987), the term dates back no further than the Middle Ages. Of course, the idea of spiritual reckoning is far older, “as old as Jewish culture itself,” and is firmly rooted in the Bible. But the biblical concept focused on the sins of the group—the wickedness of the generation of the flood, the sinfulness of Jews in the land of Israel, the immorality of the people of Nineveh. Only later, in rabbinic and medieval times, did soul-searching take on “a more individual, personal character,” as ideas of individual autonomy became ascendant.

Given the divisions within the Jewish people today, a return to the biblical idea of soul-searching may be in order. What is called for is not just *heshbon nefesh* on the part of those individuals who engaged in rhetorical excesses. Instead, Jews *as a group* need to ponder how we have wandered so far away from our traditional sense of *klal yisrael*, our commitment to the totality and interdependence of the Jewish people, and how we can now recommit ourselves to strengthening this bedrock Jewish value anew.

In recent years, *klal yisrael* has topped the list of endangered Jewish values. Divisions throughout the Jewish world have multiplied, rancor has replaced civility, and organizations that once bound Jews together are now themselves falling apart—witness the demise of the Synagogue Council of America just one year ago. There is no reason to believe that the issues facing Jews today are more intractable than before; it is instead Jews themselves who seem less tractable. Caught in the cultural crossfires of a polarized world, Jews too have polarized, lining up to the right and to the left with an ever-widening gap between them. “The old unity of Jewry . . . lies shattered today almost beyond repair,” David Vital, the distinguished historian of Zionism, has written. Our task *as a people* at this fateful hour is to work to rebuild that unity, to restore *klal yisrael* to its former place of glory atop the scale of commonly shared Jewish values.

Jonathan Sarna

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How do we accomplish this task? We need above all to carry through the full process of communal soul-searching, including all five elements that, according to Rabbi Steinsaltz, are essential to the process: review, recognition of offense, regret, repentance, and remedy. As part of the process, one would hope that leaders, organizations, and individuals would publicly recommit themselves to the ideals of *klal yisrael*, and undertake a conscious communitywide effort to explore (through the study of Jewish texts and historical case studies) the implications of this commitment for their ongoing work. We need, for example, to analyze the impact that a *klal yisrael* commitment would make on communal politics, on modes of discourse, on Jewish education, and on public relations. Most of all, we need to learn how to uphold the ideals of *klal yisrael* even when we fundamentally disagree.

Beyond this, I would urge that we add a *klal yisrael* dimension to all of our policy explorations. This might take the form of a "*klal yisrael* impact statement" that would spell out in detail how proposed new policy initiatives would affect the Jewish people as a whole. Perhaps we should offer a prize (akin to the Nobel Peace Prize or the Templeton Prize) to leaders who exemplify the ideals of *klal yisrael*, so that they might be publicly celebrated as communal role models. Perhaps we need a body of distinguished leaders from across the Jewish spectrum who would act as a committee of *klal yisrael* watchdogs, denouncing those whose rhetoric and actions endanger us all. The aim, of course, is not to impose a stifling uniformity on Jewish life, much less to shut off freedom of expression and healthy, vigorous debate. It is simply to ensure that we remain *one* Jewish people, respectful of one another even when we disagree.

Some argue that Jewish religious teachings take precedence over *klal yisrael*, and that (at least in a Jewish state) even democracy must ultimately be subservient to Jewish law. These claims, even if one disputes them, merit careful scrutiny as part of the communitywide study proposed above. But in this case, much more than just study is required. One hopes that communal soul-searching will produce what Steinsaltz describes as "an overall reckoning, one that includes in it a presupposition of the possibility of error, of a great and fundamental mistake."

Ismar Schorsch

According to the Talmud, the words inscribed on God's tefillin draw a parallel between the unity of God and the unity of God's chosen people: "You are One. Your name is One, and who is like Your people Israel, one singular nation throughout the world?" The reason for this bold image, the Talmud suggests, is divine gratitude. As Israel disseminates knowledge of God's unity, so God ensures the unity of Israel.

Unfortunately, reality falls short of the ideal, and Jewish history shows a recurring pattern of internal division and internecine violence. Jacob's family born of two wives and their maidservants is long-riven by bitter antagonism. The Israelite kingdom established by David and Solomon with Jerusalem as its capital lasts less than a century before it breaks apart irremediably into two often hostile realms. And the festival of Hanukkah commemorates the end of a civil war in which the Syrians were induced to enter on the side of Hellenistic Jews who had gained control of Jerusalem and the Temple. Indeed, rabbinic Judaism did not prevail without stubborn resistance from the Sadducees before the fall of the Second Temple and from the Karaites after the rise of Islam.

I recite this history of internal conflict, which could easily be lengthened, to dispel the naive notion that unity is the norm of our experience. What appears time and again is deep discord over specific issues. When contained, you have diversity within a common framework. When out of control, rupture ensues. Clearly, the challenge of the moment is immense.

To my mind, the root cause of the assassination of Mr. Rabin was not Orthodoxy or verbal violence, but messianism. The Six-Day War demonstrated that the active quest for national redemption does not spring only from persecution, as Jewish historians are wont to tell us, but also from the euphoria of unexpected achievement. The messianism of both Gush Emunim and the Lubavitch, though very different, erupted from a triumphalism spawned by success, the victory of the Israeli armed forces, on the one hand, and the worldwide advances of *tzivos ha'shem* on the other. Nor is it an accident that the Rebbe was a hard-liner on land for peace. His minions picketed the White House on September 13, 1993, when Mr. Rabin and Mr. Arafat signed the Declaration of Principles.

Of no practical consequence in America, the messianism of the Lubavitch simply amused incredulous onlookers. Not so in the sovereign State of Israel. The mes-

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sianic temper that increasingly infected the yeshivot of religious Zionism bred a right-wing nationalism that perverted both Judaism and Zionism. Joshua suddenly became the most sacred book of the Bible, and settling the land, the supreme mitzvah of Judaism. Palestinians were recast into Amalekites, halakhah superseded human rights, and Judaism suddenly became incompatible with democracy.

It is from this overheated atmosphere that Yigal Amir burst forth, and his assassination of Israel's prime minister will one day be universally deemed no less a betrayal of Judaism than the conversion of Shabbtai Zvi to Islam in 1666. Like nuclear energy, Jewish messianism is a force for good only under carefully regulated conditions. Amir's insane act is a religious meltdown.

Mr. Rabin infuriated the messianists because he was so utterly nonapocalyptic. Unlike them, he did not turn the Holocaust from a singular and horrific historical event into a deep-seated worldview that colored everything he saw. He refused to countenance every Gentile as a potential anti-Semite or every clash of national interests as but another instance of Jew-hatred. His sober disposition remained immune to the sirens of redemptive triumphalism or paranoid despair.

What made Mr. Rabin a sabra, the finest embodiment of Zionism's new Jew, was this pervasive lack of fear. He knew that no combination of Arab armies could defeat the military machine he had helped to solidify, and that this vast edge enabled Israel to take risks for peace. As minister of defense under Likud, he had also learned firsthand the limits of Israel's power. And so, when he moved decisively after 1992 to disentangle Israel from its entrapment, he threatened to reverse the messianists' march to redemption. In retrospect, Baruch Goldstein's suicide mission offered an early warning of what havoc messianists could wreak.

Given the above analysis, I would recommend the following course of action. First, the peace process must continue with undiminished vigor, in part because Israel has no viable alternative, in part because of the added support it has gained through Mr. Rabin's martyred death, and in part because in the long run that is the only way to eliminate the reason for our escalating disunity. Hollow appeals for a rhetoric of unity cannot paper over the divide that separates us. Regrettably, that political division serves to exacerbate the already strained relationship between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews in Israel and America. To achieve a lasting peace would hopefully at least temper the national extremism that has corrupted religious Zionism, setting Jew against Jew.

Second, it is critical that North American Jews begin to hold yeshivot in Israel accountable before they continue to fund them. The economic base of much of

that world is to be found on this continent. Yet not all yeshivot are alike. Many are bitterly anti-Zionist and many suffer from a surfeit of Zionism. All benefit from a muddled nostalgia that prompts donors to give to institutions they would not like to see their children attend. We should be wary of people who peddle a pabulum of absolutes to adolescents and adults who have stopped thinking.

Third, the conviction that Judaism and democracy are compatible must be loudly reaffirmed, both in Israel and America. The canard that they are not was first raised in recent memory by Meir Kahane, whose rage and vulgarity even disqualified him from the Knesset. One can trace the drift to the right of religious Zionism by the degree to which it has embraced this and other planks of his poisonous legacy. Right-wing extremism should not be countered by legal restrictions on free speech, but by a resounding consensus articulated in resolution that Israel's democracy is firmly rooted in the millennial experience of Jewish self-government and in the history of Zionism.

Fourth, and no less urgent, the moment calls for a reassertion of liberal Zionism, which founded the most dynamic, durable, and democratic nation to be created after the Second World War, and which retains the power to sustain it in its time of testing. The 20th century has seen enough instances of right-wing nationalism that sacrificed life and liberty on the altar of territory and ideology. It was not for naught that Abraham's descendents were fated to endure the trauma of slavery before they were permitted to settle the promised land.

And finally, if Israel is ever to moderate the religious excesses to which life in the land of our ancestors is prone, it must find the political will to introduce an equitable form of religious pluralism. The irony of the monopoly now enjoyed by the Orthodox, which the Knesset will soon expand to include conversion, is that the state of Judaism in the Diaspora is far healthier than in the Jewish state. The absence of religious choices has estranged the majority of Israelis from any meaningful relationship to the history and culture of the Jewish people, a condition that is not only a national tragedy but also a source of growing alienation between Israel and the Diaspora. Peace between Jews and Palestinians must lead to the correction of this structural flaw.

Israel has not come this far to founder on internal discord. The unimagined outpouring of national grief at Mr. Rabin's assassination is proof positive that the collective will of Israel remains strong and resilient. We shall not do unto ourselves what our enemies could not achieve. But decisive action is surely called for, and I am confident that we will muster the wisdom and courage to take it.

Chaim Seidler-Feller

What follows is a measure of what I have learned in the aftermath of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

First, those of us who admire Rabin can gain some solace from the fact that the gathering of world leaders at his funeral and the outpouring of sympathy from all corners of the globe constituted incontrovertible evidence that Rabin's assertion that "the whole world is *not* against us" is indeed true. His experience and his reading of history gave him the understanding that the existence of the State of Israel created the potential for the full integration of Israel and of the Jewish people into the world of nations. In his inaugural Knesset speech, Rabin proclaimed: "We must overcome the sense of isolation that has held us in its thrall for almost half a century, for otherwise Israel will indeed remain alone."

The peace process was the mechanism that Rabin utilized to breach the barrier of isolation. In his death, ironically, we all became witnesses to the success of his efforts. Esau and Jacob, in spite of the Talmudic dictum to the contrary, are no longer fated to remain eternal enemies, and Israel can no longer be described as "a people that dwells alone." Yitzhak Rabin achieved his goal.

Second, the assassination has made it clear that the *beit midrash*, the study hall where Talmudic learning occurs, has lost its innocence. For hundreds of years yeshiva rabbis have peppered their discourse with a range of speculative opinions, knowing that the consequences of their analyses were merely theoretical. So, for instance, when they discussed the law of the pursuer, no one imagined that the deliberations would result in action, and that the ruling would be implemented. Yigal Amir effectively changed all that, forcing the realization that in a *beit midrash* whose students are part of the military, abstract teachings can become powerfully explosive tools. The rabbinic scholars, who seem not to have been conscious of this paradigm shift, can deny the new reality no longer.

In addition, the belief that "Jews don't do things like this" appears to have been an expression of hollow conceit. And the anguish that many Jewish leaders expressed over the shattering of this notion strikes me as a denial of reality. In point of fact, Jews do do things like this! Because, in the context of the pursuit of nationalist, political aims where power is a critical ingredient, all varieties of violent acts are to be expected. Nationalist Jews will tend to behave like all other nationalists.

Chaim Seidler-Feller
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Yehuda Halevi (12th-century Spain), himself a proto-nationalist, was very aware of this stinging truth. With great craft and integrity, he has the Khazar king gently rebuke the rabbi by declaring, "If you had power, you too would kill!" (*Kuzari* 1:114). Indeed, Jews do have power and they do kill—even each other.

Furthermore, the murder by an individual who invoked God's order as justification for his abominable act reminds us that the sacred teachings of every religion contain passages that, when read literally, constitute incitement to violence. Therefore, it is the special responsibility of religious educators in the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities to acknowledge the intolerance and prejudice that is embedded in some of their texts, to expose those teachings, and to denounce them as immoral in their simple form, while, at the same time, presenting layers of interpretation offered by the tradition as a filter for that particularly ignominious textual passage.

It is interesting, if not tragic, that few religious voices in the Middle East are among those advocating peace. Rather, the respective peace camps are led by secularists, while the guardians of the faith in both the Muslim and Jewish communities tend to be numbered among the fanatic opposition.

This fact makes the unprecedented public soul-searching of an unusual group of rabbis all the more remarkable. However, up till now they have avoided confronting the messianic ideology that provided the underpinning for the heinous murder of the prime minister. This failure to extend their self-criticism can be explained by the fact that messianism, in this post-Six-Day-War era, has emerged as the sole justification for religious Zionism. Messianism helped to resolve the inner conflict over support for an ostensibly secular project, Zionism. The Six-Day War was interpreted as a miraculous intervention of the Divine, providing evidence that the Zionist program was part of a sacred messianic process. To challenge the messianic interpretation would thus be tantamount to calling the entire enterprise into question. But the events of the past few months culminating in the assassination compel us to reconsider the wisdom of advocating an ideology driven by messianic aspirations. More often than not, the pursuit of a utopian messianic vision has pushed believers beyond sober consideration of cause and effect into a realm where only ends matter and the violation of basic moral norms is held to be legitimate. Rabin became the enemy because by agreeing to trade "holy" land—whose conquest was viewed as a critical step in the unfolding messianic drama—for peace, he was precluding the advent, and obstructing the process. Consequently, he had to be eliminated.

The time has arrived for religious educators to accept Zionism for what it is: a

reentry into history and a rejection of ahistorical, transcendent frameworks. The State of Israel is normal and holds out the promise of normalizing the Jewish religion by granting Jews the opportunity to gain fulfillment through the sanctity of this-worldly, everyday activities. Illusory—and ultimately corrupting—dreams of messianic perfection are no longer necessary.

Finally, while the reconstruction of religious thinking is essential, it is also clear that secular Zionism itself requires refashioning. The rift between secular and religious Israelis has developed into a chasm. No longer does there appear to be a basis for common discourse, and religious Jews have no reason to trust the motivations of secular fellow Israelis. In fact, they relate to the peace process as if it were an expression of assimilationist disregard for Jewish values, since those who support the accords with the PLO and Jordan demonstrate little concern for the historical significance of the land or the deeply felt emotional ties to it. Therefore, a reorientation of secular Israeli education that would lead to the integration of Zionism within the contours of Judaism is in order. It's time for Zionism to come home; the revolution was successful, but it is in danger of losing its bearings. While forging a peace with Palestinians, it would be appropriate also to make peace with the Jewish tradition.

I am not here suggesting that acts of religious fervor and those of secular zeal are exactly equivalent. After all, violent deeds in recent Jewish history have been the sole province of religious fundamentalists (rock-throwing Hasidim, the settler underground, Emil Grunzweig's murderer, Yigal Amir, etc.) and, as Charles Liebman taught us years ago, extremism is a religious norm. Nevertheless, a crude and vitriolic animus has emerged from the secular left that alienates even liberal religious Jews like myself. Reflected in the left's contemptuous attitude toward religion and its willingness simply to dismiss centuries-old traditions as vestiges of a primitive past, it actually constitutes a form of violence against Judaism itself. Thus, before a productive conversation between religious and secular Israelis can begin, the secularists must acknowledge their own extremism and confront their own prejudices.

Following such soul-searching, a further effort might pursue a curricular course that would make the study of classical texts a centerpiece of all learning. In this noncoercive way, secular and religious Israelis might become aware of what they share and recover their ability to talk to and respect each other.

In sum, Yitzhak Rabin's murder imposes on us no less a task than the Zionization of Judaism and the Judaization of Zionism. That project would certainly be a worthy memorial. May his memory be for a blessing.

David Teutsch

Several key factors have held Jews together over the centuries. Two that are critical today are our sense of shared destiny stretching from the time of Abraham to messianic days, and our sense of mutual obligation and commitment. No matter where they have been in the world, Jews have always been able to trust that other Jews would empathize with their situation and, when necessary, move in truly sacrificial ways to protect their well-being. Today, Jews have an unprecedented level of affluence and secular education, and we have absorbed much of the ideology of nationalism and expressive individualism from the cultures around us. In order to keep the Jewish people together, we need to renew a sense of Jewish peoplehood through reasserting our common culture, destiny, and values.

One of the reasons for alienation within the Jewish community is the receding amount of shared experience and knowledge. We need to do what we can to promote more ritual observance, Jewish study, and engagement with Jewish art, literature, and the other aspects of Jewish culture. In the course of developing a more vigorous shared life, we will find that what we have in common grows. This in turn will provide more of a basis for dialogue. Alienation among those who share a great deal can be much more easily overcome than alienation between people who otherwise have little in common. Thus, one of our goals must be reinvigoration of the Jewish cultural experience.

The vast majority of Jews believe in civil discourse and mutual connection. That vast majority recognizes the importance of a commitment to pluralism in the Jewish community. Those truly committed to pluralism not only tolerate difference, they willingly accept difference. They recognize that the basis for unity in a voluntary community must be acceptance of diversity. For those of us committed to women's equal rights, for example, it means acceptance of those with whom we have a profound moral disagreement because they assert the primacy of halakhah and *mehitzah* (partition between men and women during prayers) in a way that creates a different status for women in Orthodoxy. Ultra-Orthodox Jews generally revile the liberals' perspective. However there is a group among the Orthodox who believe that we liberal Jews are wrong to have afforded women full ritual equality but who recognize that neither of us can yet claim a final moral victory and that we must put mutual

David Teutsch

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respect above our differences on this issue. Strengthening mutual respect entails teaching democratic values at every turn. Those on the radical and fundamentalist right of the Jewish community and those on the intolerant left place their certainty in their own rightness above the unity of the Jewish people and mutual respect among Jews. We in the middle ought passionately to condemn that choice at every turn.

One of the keys to democratic discourse is to offer a full and clear critique of ideas and beliefs with which we disagree in order to persuade others of our points of view and to educate those with whom we disagree about how and why we think as we do. That is not only laudable, it is necessary if the Jewish people is to continue to be a creative and energetic entity. Character assassination, on the other hand, is an extraordinarily destructive force. We in the Jewish community have always had a strong official position against such things. There are the rules against *lashon ha'ra* (slander and gossip), and the rabbis said it was because of *sin'at binam*, groundless hatred, that the Second Temple was destroyed. Name-calling has continued in the Jewish community after the tragic assassination of Yitzhak Rabin almost to the extent that it did before. Instead of dealing with arguments on their merits, far too many people insist on making arguments based on people's histories, associations, and personal pedigrees. That is the stuff of demagoguery, but it will continue until a large enough group in the Jewish community committed to mutual respect and democracy puts its foot down and refuses to tolerate that kind of performance. We who are moderate should be that group. One place where that should occur is in the Jewish press, which should simply refuse to publish such personal attacks no matter which camp offers them.

In Israel, a major step toward building up democracy will be the rejection of the government-sanctioned religious authority of the Orthodox rabbinate and the creation of a truly secular state. Another important development there is the continuous expansion of not-for-profit organizations committed to pluralism and democracy. One activity of North American Jewry that will have a positive effect on Israel is the funding of such institutions. The more influential such not-for-profit organizations are in Israel, the more Israeli culture will reflect outlooks with which American Jews can identify. In such an atmosphere of democracy and pluralism, arguments based on religious claims can be taken as just one of many legitimate forms of argument. Religious arguments, like all other arguments, must be viewed on their merits. No single viewpoint can be allowed to carry a veto.

In North America, the need to teach Jewish values surrounding speech and public discourse is a burning one. We as a people have developed strong values and norms regarding discourse and the covenantal commitment to community. Unfortunately, those values and norms have been taught far too little in the last generation or two. We need them more than ever today. So it is time for us to return to their study and practice. That is true of other values in Jewish culture as well. It is incumbent upon all of us who play leadership roles anywhere in the American Jewish community to study the sources of our tradition and apply those values with which we resonate to our leadership roles as well as to our personal and collective communal conduct.

If we who are committed to dialogue and democracy passionately demand that the resources of our community go only to those who share that commitment, and if we provide a communal platform for all those who engage in reasoned discourse with us, we will take major strides toward creating an atmosphere in which name-calling, depersonalization, and delegitimation of individuals are no longer tolerated. We will know that we have triumphed when all those who engage in conversation about the future of Jewish life take seriously the full meaning of the fact that each of us is created in the image of God.

David Wolpe

How should the Jewish community react to the violent and vile discourse that has arisen in our midst? Where are the antibodies that this overwhelmingly gentle and graceful tradition must produce to counter those who advocate absolutism and fear?

First, we must recognize that ferocity is not solely an alien import. Having watched the late Meir Kahane with a sort of fascinated horror, I noticed that he lacked many things, but he did not lack supporting Jewish texts. Our tradition is not univocal. There are angry, extremist, and even violent voices in our texts and tales. As the late Professor Louis Ginzberg used to say, "the devil can quote Scripture to his purpose, and were he more learned, he could quote the Talmud, too."

Argumentation alone will not quell hatred. Trumping one text with another is not sufficient. The rabbis who argued that Rabin was a *rodef* (a pursuer, who, in Jewish law, may be killed) are familiar with the corpus of Jewish texts. What they lack is a vision of the sanctity of humanity, all humanity. Barring their repentance, dialogue with such people is neither productive nor possible.

We do not ask moderate Muslims to dialogue with ayatollahs who order fatwas. We ask them to repudiate such alleged "leaders." We must do the same. It is the task of Jews who love Torah, who love Jews, and who fear for the future of humanity, to repudiate, anathematize, and shun those who do not share the value of human life and reasoned discourse. It is a paradox of toleration that it can only accommodate intolerance to a certain point. Judaism risks disfigurement in the hands of these learned boors, those who could use the Torah not only as a spade with which to dig, but as a weapon with which to kill. The Judaism we cherish cannot survive unless we subordinate solidarity to decency. It cannot survive if we continue to honor erudition in the absence of compassion.

Once we have agreed on repudiation, we must strive for accommodation. There are real, albeit different, life and death struggles taking place in both Israel and America. Israel struggles still for physical security, but it also shares our own struggle for spiritual survival. In such times the stakes are high and discourse will be impassioned. When crises loom, imperatives of courtesy lose much of their urgency. Passionate discourse within boundaries is bracing and healthy.

First, it is incumbent upon those who study and care for traditional texts to con-

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tinue fashioning a normative view in which varied voices can be heard. It is up to Jewish leaders to sever the unthinking link between absolutism and authenticity. Moderation is not weakness, nor tolerance illegitimacy. But the case for moderation must not only be heard as a political platitude. It must arise from a deep study of our tradition.

Second, we must recognize that Israel is a modern democratic state. Treating it as a theocracy—or a state that will become messianic if this or that platform is followed—is an ever-present danger. The Talmud itself warns us repeatedly about “forcing the Messiah.” When the Temple was destroyed, the rabbis relate, the high priest threw the keys of the Temple toward the sky. There they must remain. Since no one among us has been vouchsafed the keys, we are caretakers, not midwives, of the Messiah. The state is established according to the imperfect arrangements of human beings. If we find religious meaning in Israel, that is our own affair. We must affirm the democratic character of Israel. Institutionalizing eschatology is a certain path to disaster.

As a religious Jew, I do not believe that Judaism can survive in the absence of Torah. As one born in the 20th century, I know that the Torah cannot survive unless it takes root in the hearts and minds of its adherents. That is the task of enlightenment, not coercion.

Finally, we who do not live in Israel must be mindful of the hubris of offering our brothers and sisters advice. We who live in a safe, pluralistic democracy have not been notably successful in weeding out extremism. Many radical elements in Israel were born and raised in America. If we are to help, and not merely hector, we must do some serious soul-searching about our own children. Why do so many abandon Judaism? Why do some who stay choose paths of violence? Our advice must be tempered by a humble acknowledgment of our own failures and limitations.

The Book of Joshua relates the tale of the conquest of Israel. In the fifth chapter is a poignant scene. Joshua looks up and sees a man standing before him with a drawn sword. Instantly he asks, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” The answer is stunning: “No. I am a captain of the host of the Lord” (Joshua 5:13-14). The angel is teaching Joshua that not everyone, or everything, is reducible to our side or their side. “No” is to tell Joshua that his categories are wrong. God is above partisanship. God’s care embraces all humanity. That was Judaism’s original message: one people to proclaim the universal nature of God. If we betray that message it will be a tragedy for Judaism, and for the world.

Eric Yoffie

1. Judaism—and nothing else—is the basis of Jewish peoplehood and the source of Jewish unity. It is Judaism that ties American Jews to the Jewish state and the Jewish state to the Diaspora. Judaism is the connecting link, the covenantal bond that for 3500 years has brought us together as a people.

At the heart of Judaism is Torah. As Saadya Gaon said 1100 years ago, “What defines our people is its Torah.” Strengthening our common Jewish destiny requires both an embrace of Torah and a proper understanding of Torah.

Torah is subject to a multiplicity of interpretations; Jews are justly proud of the richness and diversity of their interpretive traditions. Nonetheless, Torah is not infinitely malleable; it has clear and definable limits. Both Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir violated those limits and stepped beyond the boundaries of our tradition. Torah, which unifies the Jewish people and provides us with moral direction, was turned by them into an instrument of division, hatred, and atrocity.

Yitzhak Rabin was not a religious man, but he understood this. Speaking of Jewish fanatics after the killings in Hebron, he said to the Knesset: “Sane Judaism spits them out.”

Our task now: To reject apocalyptic fundamentalism put forward in the name of Torah, and to understand that the absolute value for Jews is not unity, but Judaism itself. The key to a common Jewish destiny and to overcoming the divisions within the Jewish people is an embrace of the “sane Judaism” of which Yitzhak Rabin spoke—a Judaism rooted in a wholehearted embrace of Torah and its moral teachings.

With proper leadership, the overwhelming majority of Jews will be prepared to follow this path. As for the few who will prefer the path of fanaticism and extremist messianism, let us say, simply and honestly, that they have separated themselves from Judaism and that we too spit them out.

2. The State of Israel should vigorously enforce existing laws against incitement, but beyond that there is little that democratic communities—such as Israel and the United States—can do to prevent extremist rhetoric.

What we can do, however, is to respond promptly and vigorously to such rhetoric

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when it appears. As we know, we simply have not done so, despite defensive claims to the contrary that are now being heard. And the fact is that racist language has been prevalent in certain Jewish circles for a very long time. The American Jewish community responds emphatically to even a hint of anti-Semitism in public discourse here, but has been strangely silent when the language of hate is uttered by Jews about Arabs or peace advocates.

The leaders of mainstream Orthodoxy have a special responsibility. Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir emerged from the mainstream religious right and from the great Orthodox universities of the United States and Israel. These were the universities that were created to provide an interface between Orthodoxy and the modern world, and which—until recently—were dominated by the moderate and ethically powerful voices of giants such as Joseph B. Soloveitchik. But the influence of Soloveitchik has receded, and inexplicably, little has been done in recent years to combat growing and increasingly strident fanaticism. How is it, for example, that the campus rabbi at Bar-Ilan University for many years was Israel Hess? Hess, who still teaches there as visiting lecturer, is best known for writing an article in the Bar-Ilan newspaper entitled “The Mitzvah of Genocide in the Torah.”

I wish to be clear: It would be profoundly wrong to suggest that the Orthodox community bears general responsibility for the killing of Rabin. The great majority of Orthodox Jews, like the great majority of non-Orthodox Jews, was outraged. But modern Orthodox leaders, and particularly their intellectual and halakhic authorities, must be much more vigilant in uprooting this spiritual cancer from their midst. And the reason I stress this is simply to state an obvious truth: Only the halakhic authorities of the Orthodox world have influence in those circles where the extremism has emerged. Communal leaders and leaders of other religious streams should also have been more outspoken, but there is no chance that the Yigal Amirs of the world would heed their cries. We therefore must rely on the students of Rav Soloveitchik to find their voice and reassert their influence. In this regard, I personally am encouraged by what I hear about the introspection, self-examination, and renewed educational efforts among the young in the Orthodox world.

3. Jewish religious teachings do not conflict with the principles of democracy. Those who make this claim do not understand Judaism, and I see little point in trying to convince them. Our responsibility is to assert another obvious truth: Democratic societies are those most likely to provide security for the Jews and opportunities for a rich Jewish life. They who claim otherwise must be isolated and discredited.

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