

Secular-Jewish Identity and the Condition of Secular Judaism in Israel*

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The term *hiloni* (secular) is commonplace in Israel as a means of identifying a type of Jew, a type of Jewish identity, and a type of Judaism. It carries different meanings to different people and different meanings depending on the context. This essay is devoted to seeking to understand the different meanings, or at least the major meanings that the term secular carries in Israel. We will look at this from the perspective of those who use the term in a positive or a neutral fashion. We refer, only by indirection to the meaning of the term in hostile circles. Very often, especially but not exclusively in extreme religious circles the term evokes an image of libertinism (*prikat ol*), at the moral, especially the sexual level and an absence of any commitment to Judaism or the Jewish people or to family values. Many traditionalists (*masortim*) whom we describe in an accompanying essay associate the term *hiloni* with emptiness; a vacuum (*reykanut*). The leaders of secular organizations dedicated to a Jewish renaissance (there are probably close to one hundred such organizations in Israel), find that among their potential audience the term secular bears negative connotations¹ although evidence presented in this essay points in the opposite direction. The term certainly bears negative connotations among many secular intellectuals which may point to their idiosyncratic nature. More on this below.

We are concerned with secular Judaism in Israel. Our topic is the *secular* Jew, not the *secularization* of Judaism. By secularization we mean the rationalization and the

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differentiation of the non-religious realm from the religious realm. Secularization has taken place in the transformation of the Hebrew language (formerly “the Holy tongue”) of Jewish culture, Jewish politics, in the thought processes of Jewish leaders and indeed, to a varying extent within the Jewish religion itself. Secularization has certainly affected the modern-Orthodox and the religious-Zionist camp² and even the *haredi* camp.³ It is a topic that has engaged scholars,⁴ it is as complicated as it is fascinating, but it is not the topic of this essay.

We will use the terms secular or *hiloni* (pl. *hilonim*) and secularism or *hiloniut* interchangeably. After a brief historical excursus we turn to a description of the Jewish practices and beliefs of Israelis who define themselves as secular (*hiloni*) as distinct from Israeli Jews who define themselves as “religious” (*dati*) or “traditional” (*masorti*) and the social characteristics of *hiloni* Jews in Israel. This section relies primarily on survey data but it is informed, as are the remaining sections by our own interviews and impressions and by the full transcripts of eleven interviews of secular students in Rupin College carried out by Hadas Franco.

In the section that follows we distinguish two meanings of the term secular. Defining oneself as secular may simply be the way one who observes little or nothing of the Jewish tradition defines oneself but it may also be a way of distancing oneself from the rabbis or the religious establishment. When such Jews define themselves as secular (or “non-religious” in the terminology of the Guttman study), they are saying, at least in part, that they reject that establishment or at least the religious demands of that establishment. We call such Jews “secular by default”. There are also those who, as a matter of ideology, define themselves as secular. Among those who define themselves as

secular by ideology we can distinguish two groups at end points on a hypothetical continuum. At one extreme are those who consciously observe some rituals and some Jewish traditions and even seek to enhance them even though they themselves are not religious (*dati*), and/or don't believe in God, and/or believe that Judaism is a culture not a religion, and/or believe that religion is a constraint on the ideal society they envision. We call them secular-Judaists and distinguish them from secular-universalists. The latter adhere to a universalist-humanism. Although born Jewish, Judaism and Jewishness are irrelevant to their lives. At the extreme they believe that Judaism is an impediment to the creation of a society in which no political distinctions are drawn between Jews and Arabs. Most of those who fall into this category are post or anti Zionists about whom much has been written⁵. Although they are not a subject for this essay we believe that some of what they say merits the attention of the other camp of ideologists.⁶ Since our topic is secular Jewish identity in Israel we are not concerned with the universalists who are hostile to the Jewish nature of the state and generally indifferent to Judaism itself. Between the two groups of secular intellectuals one finds others of different stripes. Some are antagonistic to religion, indifferent to Judaism but as Israeli nationalists they favor a Jewish state but one in which Judaism and Jewishness don't interfere with their lives. One also finds, as one does in the public at large, those who are enraged by what they perceive as religious coercion, by the behavior of the religious parties and the ultra-Orthodox public whom they view as parasites on the public coffers. This is the public which comprises the core of the Shinui electorate; an electorate which sent 15 representatives to the 2003 Knesset. But they continue to affirm their commitment to

aspects of the Jewish tradition arguing that it is the religious establishment which has misappropriated it.

From here we will turn to a discussion of the prospects for secular Judaism in Israel. We conclude with some final observations on the nature of secular Judaism in Israel.

An Historical Note

There is an important historical dimension to our discussion. Until the late 1940s-1950s the Hebrew term for a non-religious Jew was *hofshi*, literally “free”. The term developed during the nineteenth century with the advent of the Jewish enlightenment when the classical term for a non-religious Jew, *kofer* or *apikores* i.e. a heretic was no longer appropriate. According to Dr. Zvi Zameret *hofshi* was the standard appellation in the *Yishuv* (the Jewish settlement in Palestine before the creation of the State), but it carried a far more positive meaning there than it had amongst the *maskilim* (enlighteners) who first used the term. To the *maskilim* it meant free from religion. But to the Zionist settlers it meant free to choose—to choose not to observe the *halakha* but also free to attend synagogue, or light candles on Friday night, etc. *Hofshi*, as used by the Zionist settlers, did **not** mean the denial of religion and tradition.⁷

The term *hiloni*, or *huloni*, according to Zameret was used as early as the 19th century. It appears among other places in the writing of Micha Joseph Berdichevsky. It implied materialism (*homranut*) and this-worldliness, a term which at that time had very positive connotations. In the eyes of the *maskilim* and the early Zionists, Jews were obliged to embrace the material rather than just the spiritual. This was essential in the creation of the “new” Jew, distinguished from the “old” Jew who was dissociated from

the real world; the Jew, for example, Jew as portrayed in Chagal paintings. (This is an important reason that the early Zionists preferred to use the term *ivry* ((Hebrew)) which automatically meant a “new” Jew, to distinguish themselves from the “old” Jews.) Only later was the term *hiloni* transformed into meaning non-religious. *Hofshi*, as a synonym for non-religious, gradually disappeared around the time of the creation of the state. But by then it had also lost its positive valence. Zameret explains this as part of the general loss of a specific *hiloni* identity amongst the early settlers.

The relatively recent usage of the term *hiloni* as a synonym for non-religious or non-observant is further attested to by the late Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, the prominent linguist who conducted a weekly language column on the pages of the daily newspaper Ha'aretz⁸. The author introduced a column in June, 1965 with a quote concerning a young *hiloni* girl. Goshen-Gottstein wonders if the term *hiloni* would have been so readily understood ten years earlier. Until recently, he says, the term used was either *hofshi* or *lo-dati* (not-religious). He goes on to explore the classical meaning of the term *hiloni* noting that in the Targum Unkelos, the semi-canonical translation of the Pentateuch, *hiloni* is a rendition of the Hebrew word *zar* (stranger). Goshen-Gottstein finds the term *hiloni* objectionable but has no suggestions for a substitute.

Dissatisfaction with the term remains. The Shenhar commission created in 1991 to offer recommendations to the Ministry of Education on the teaching of Jewish subjects in the state (non-religious) schools expressed its discomfort with the term *hiloni* but absent an alternative term it used the word *hiloni* to identify students in non-religious schools.⁹ The chair of the commission, Aliza Shenhar, told us that in her public appearances she has returned to the term *hofshi*.¹⁰ The problem is not so much a matter of

appropriate usage. Goshen-Gottstein already noted that the term *hiloni* is properly translated as profane and one can speak of a profane literature, of profane professions, of profane values but not of a profane person. The problem is that because the term has come to mean non-religious, it carries a negative not a positive resonance. It tells you what somebody is not, rather than what somebody is. As the reader will note, many of the authors cited below use the term *hofshi* (pl: *hofshiim*) to refer to secular Jews and we are at a loss of how to translate the term. Hence, we retain the original Hebrew in order to provide an appreciation of the large number of Israeli intellectuals who shun the term *hiloni*.

The second historical point to be noted is that a thriving form of secular Judaism existed in the recent past. The secular Yiddish culture of Eastern Europe is well known but it is easy to forget that a strong positive secular Jewish culture existed in the *Yishuv* and in the early years of statehood. Among the pioneer settlers who came to Palestine in the first decades of the last century there was, generally speaking, a positive attitude toward Jewish ethnicity, i.e. membership in the Jewish people and concern for Jews throughout the world, a nostalgia for many traditional Jewish practices but a principled objection to “religion” and hence to the observance of Jewish ritual in its traditional form. The *Yishuv*, therefore, adapted traditional ritual transforming and transvaluing it in secular terms at the national level¹¹ as well as at the local and private level. Intensive efforts in this direction took place within the kibbutz movement.¹² However, the historical record is heavily skewed in favor of the ideology, practices and beliefs of the working class and the ideologists of the labor movement. We suspect that among the urban middle and

lower middle classes many aspects of traditional Judaism were simply incorporated into their lives without ideological passion without misgivings and with less of a need to transform and transvalue them.

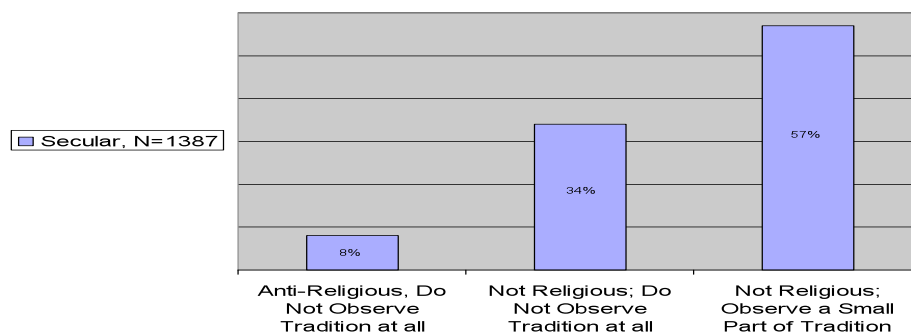
The creation of the state of Israel, along with the influx of new immigrants breathed new life into secular Judaism. Jewish symbols were now adapted to build and to strengthen national identity and loyalty and to Zionize the new immigrants many of whom were tied to traditional religious practice. Israel's civil religion, however manipulative and distorting it might have been, was built upon traditional Jewish symbols and still is. The problem is that the civil religion itself no longer evokes the allegiance and the emotion that it did in the past and the older secular rituals have been largely forgotten. Furthermore, in most cases, as is true of other innovative ritual, rituals lose relevance very rapidly, especially in a changing society. What is important to note, a point to which we return in subsequent sections, is that the Zionist enterprise, Zionist ideology and Zionist commitment, were inextricably tied to Jewish ethnicity and a sensitivity to Jewish history and Jewish symbols. It is fair to say that Zionism sought to nationalize Judaism. It succeeded to a great extent but this, we will suggest, has also been the undoing of secular Judaism in Israel.

Practices and Beliefs of *Hilonim*

According to the 1999 survey of the Jewish population of Israel by the Guttman Institute,¹³ 43 percent of Israeli Jews (N=1,272, out of a total of 2,717 respondents) defined themselves as non-religious, and an additional five percent defined themselves as anti-religious (N=115). The Guttman Report uses the term "non-religious" rather than "secular". This is unfortunate since traditional (*masorti*) Jew is also non-religious, i.e.

does not define him/herself as *dati* (a religious Jew). Perhaps to remedy this confusion the Report lists the term “secular” in parenthesis following the label “non-religious”. The Guttman Report is also misleading by distinguishing those who define themselves as “anti-religious” from the “non-religious (secular)” despite the fact that almost all the anti-religious report that they are totally non-observant of the tradition. We have chosen to label both those whom the Guttman Report calls non-religious and those whom they call anti-religious and observe no part of the tradition, as secular.¹⁴ Together these two groups constitute 48 percent of the Guttman sample. Assuming this is a representative sample it means that secular Jews comprise almost half of the Jewish population of Israel. Respondents were also asked about their observance of the tradition. Looking only at the secular, and recalculating the Guttman Report data we find that 57 percent of the secular report that they observe a small part of the tradition, 34 percent of the secular report that they do not observe any part of the tradition (as we shall see this is questionable), and eight percent of the secular report that they were anti-religious and didn’t observe any part of the tradition.¹⁵ These three groups are the subject of our essay.

Diagram I: Observance of Religious Practice and Belief Among Secular Jews



Ethnicity played a major role in our study of *masortim* and its impact is equally evident among the secular. Based on Guttman Report data we find that 17 percent of the

total sample were Israeli born whose fathers were also born in Israel. They are not identified by ethnic origin. The remainder is either *mizrahim* (those born in Moslem countries or those whose fathers were born there and who constitute 46 percent of the total sample) or *ashkenazim* (those born in Christian countries or those whose fathers were born in Christian countries) who constitute 36 percent of the total sample). Looking only at the secular portion of the population we find that *Mizrahim* constitute 28 percent of the secular who observe something, 15 percent of the secular who observe nothing and 12 percent of the anti-religious who observe nothing. By contrast *Ashkenazim* constitute 56 percent of the secular who observe something, 65 percent of the secular who observe nothing, and 59 percent of the anti-religious.¹⁶ In other words, *Mizrahim* are dramatically underrepresented among secular Jews in Israel. In addition, the less traditional the secular group is, the fewer *Mizrahim* are to be found in the group. In the table that follows we report on observance and belief by secular groups.

Table I: Percentage of Secular Jews Affirming Traditional Judaism and Jewish Ties

Aspects of Traditional Judaism and Ties to Jewish People	Partially Observing Seculars N=793	Non-observing Seculars N=479	Anti-Religious Seculars N=115	Total of all Seculars N=1387
Special Meal on Sabbath	29	16	8	23
Lighting Sabbath candles with a blessing	25	7	4	17
Avoiding non-kosher meat	38	15	8	28
Participating or leading a Seder in accordance with <i>halakha</i>	50	26	12	38
Fasting on Yom Kippur	55	19	4	38
Using Special Dishes on Passover	30	11	8	22
Has a <i>mezuzah</i> in every room in the house	65	44	39	56
Believes there is a God	45	20	9	33
Wants a State that is Jewish, not necessarily <i>halakhic</i>	88	80	79	84
Wants more Jewish study in state (non-religious) schools	47	24	10	36
Want more Jewish content on Israeli television	48	29	22	39
Feels part of world wide Jewish people	57	43	34	50
If reborn would want very much to be reborn as a Jew	45	29	22	38

We must bear in mind that these figures include the data for recent Russian Jewish immigrants – those who arrived since 1989. Seventy three percent of the Russians describe themselves as either secular or anti-religious and they constitute 19 percent of the total sample of secular Jews (21 percent of the anti-religious). Everything we know about them suggests that their religious practice and belief is lower than that of the remainder of the Jewish population in Israel. This is confirmed in a study by Daphna Canetti who samped over 2,200 college and university students from most institutions of higher education in Israel. We may assume that even if the proportion of Russian students among them is the same as the proportion of Russians in the general population,

they are more highly socialized to patterns of Israeli Jewish behavior. Eighty percent of Canetti's sample reported they were secular.¹⁷ But she found an even higher incidence of traditional observance and belief among her sample of secular Jews than did the Guttman report. For example, 43 percent reported that they believed in God and 36 percent believed that the soul continues to exist after death.¹⁸ Over a quarter believed that the Jews were a chosen people, that the Torah was given at Sinai, and that Jewish history is guided by a supernatural force. Forty three percent refrained from eating bread on Passover, and 35 percent lit Sabbath candles with a blessing.

The conclusion from the Guttman study, the Canetti study, and other studies to be mentioned below, is that a sizeable minority of Israeli secular Jews observe at least some Jewish traditions, share the basic beliefs of the religiously observant, and feel strong ties to the Jewish people. It also leads us to wonder why so many Israelis define themselves as secular when they might instead have defined themselves as traditional (*masorti*) and why so many secular Jews report that they do not observe any aspects of the tradition when this is clearly contrary to their own reported behavior. Perhaps this stems from negative feelings about the rabbinic establishment, and/or the religious tradition but we suspect that much of it has to do with the fact that when many secular Jews report their observance or their belief they are not thinking in terms of Judaism but in terms of Israeliness. In other words when the secular Jew lights Sabbath candles, even with a blessing, or fasts on Yom Kippur he or she thinks of this as performing an Israeli as much as a Jewish act although the two are very much related. Indeed, as we see from the last two items in Table I, the less traditionally observant the group, the more tenuous their ties to the Jewish people. This finding is consistent with the larger finding of the Guttman

study and with every other study that looks at how closely different groups of Israeli Jews identify with the Jewish people. Therefore, it ought not to surprise us if, indeed, the Jewishness of the secular Israeli is incorporated into his Israeli identity.

Elsewhere¹⁹ we have written about other recent studies of Israeli Jewish identity. All of them yield similar if not identical conclusions and two points serve us here as a convenient review.²⁰ First, although there are significant differences between groups of Israeli Jews in terms of both their Israeli identity and their Jewish identity the two identities, Israeli and Jewish are positively related except in the case of the ultra-Orthodox (*haredim*). But, as Yair Auron found, the attitudes of the secular toward the Jewish people and the self image of the secular as part of the Jewish people is much less meaningful to them than other identity components such as their attitudes toward the State of Israel or to the Land of Israel.

The correlation between the strength of the Israeli and Jewish identities suggests the second major finding. Respondents who define themselves as religious (*dati*) have stronger Jewish and Israeli identities than respondents who define themselves as traditional (*masorti*) and they in turn have stronger Jewish and Israeli identities than those who define themselves as secular. (See the discussion in the concluding section). And all the studies report on a minority of young secular Jews who express negative attitudes toward religion and the Jewish tradition and alienation from Diaspora Jews.

When we try to get behind the labels and ask what they really mean to the respondents themselves, the survey data is less helpful. Yair Auron, whose studies of students in teachers' seminaries is most instructive, feels that for his secular respondents, the Holocaust is the central element in their Jewish identity. Attitudes toward the Jewish

people, he says, are mediated by way of the Holocaust and the tie to the Jewish people is a tie to a dead people. His analysis recalls that of Amos Elon who, in the 1970's stressed the importance of suffering and victimhood in the Jewish identity of Israelis.²¹ Laura Zarembski describes this crisis in terms of a lost sense of defining characteristics – what it means to be an Israeli. She contrasts the insecurity of the secular community to the self-confidence of the religious community.²² This reinforces our suspicion that weakened ties to a sense of Jewish peoplehood may not rest in the dissociation from religion or from tradition but a loss of belief, by significant numbers of secular Israelis, in the values of secular Zionism – an ideology that until now had nourished their sense of identity with Judaism and the Jewish people.

Types of Secular Jews

What does it mean to be a secular Jew in Israel? As we suggested at the outset, some distinctions should be made in trying to fathom the meaning of secularism (*hiloniut*) in Israel. First, the distinction between those who are ideologically secular, i.e., those to whom their secularism is a matter of conviction and a way of life, and those whose secularism is a kind of default position. By default secularism we refer to persons who label themselves secular because they are neither *dati* nor *masorti*, they keep few if any of traditional observances, the vast majority if not all their friends consider themselves secular, and they probably don't like the rabbinical establishment. As we will suggest throughout the analysis, we suspect that these are individuals whose identity is primarily Israeli and who observe some Jewish traditions because they have become Israeli-Jewish traditions. All this makes them secular by default. The term “secular” or *hiloni* bears no positive meaning, it is not an ideology or a belief system; secularism is

not part of the identity of the Jew who is secular by default in contrast to the ideologically secular Jew and certainly in contrast to the religious (*dati*) Jew for whom the fact of his being *dati* is basic to his identity. The line distinguishing ideologically secular Jews from secular Jews by default is not always sharp and there are surely those who fall very close to either side of the line. But in our judgment it is a fair and important distinction because it reminds us that when we turn to hearing how secular intellectuals describe their secularism we are hearing the voices of a group who constitute only a small part of the secular public.

Those who are ideologically secular are in turn divided into those whom we call secular Judaists and those whom we call secular universalists. The former feel strongly Jewish, their secular identity is tied to their Jewishness, and they are anxious to retain and even strengthen the Jewish components of the state and society of Israel. On the other side of the divide is a smaller group of ideologically secular to whom Judaism is at best trivial and at worst a barrier to their aspirations for a state based on liberal universalistic principals in which distinctions between Jews and non-Jews have no bearing. The lines distinguishing these two groups are also not hermetic. There are some who find themselves on one side of the line in terms of their political preferences and on the other side of the line in terms of their negative attitudes toward the religious tradition. Some have shifted back and forth between the two orientations. But we believe that most of those who are ideologically secular can be categorized as being closer to either the Jewish or universalist positions. As we noted above, the latter fall outside the purview of our essay.

Jews who are Secular by Default

The majority of Israeli seculars fall into the category of secular by default. A statement of the organization Ma'agal Tov is instructive in this regard. Ma'agal Tov identifies itself as a secular institution addressing students, parents, youth group leaders and young teachers in the spirit of the Labor Movement. Its concern is that secular Israeli society is turning its back on its Jewish heritage.²³ The leaders of Ma'agal Tov are quoted as follows:

In the present reality, the overwhelming majority of the secular public is not aware of what it does not have. For most young secular people in Israel, the word "Judaism" generally produces a feeling of repulsion.²⁴

This may be overstated and that which is true of young people is not necessarily true of an older generation. But the point is not without validity. The secular by default, most of whom observe a bare minimum of Jewish tradition, are not embarrassed by the fact of their Jewishness. Although most of them don't feel strongly that they are a part of the Jewish people and don't feel strong ties to the Diaspora they do have some sense of their Jewishness, they do have some feeling, weak as it may be, that they are part of the Jewish people, and as Table I shows the vast majority do want a state that is Jewish though not one governed by Jewish law. In a more speculative vein, as we already noted, we suspect that the Jewish orientations that these Jews do possess, however weak they may be, stem primarily from the fact that in the minds of most Israelis, being Israeli and being Jewish are inseparable, a point we note again below when we find prominent intellectuals who simply confuse the terms Jew and Israeli. In a more specific sense this confusion is attributable to the culture of Israel and the folk customs of the society, to historical memories of which, as we noted above, the memory of the Holocaust is the

most powerful and to the educational system where Jewish content is severely diluted but the notion that one ought to honor the tradition and Jewish peoplehood is present.

We believe that a significant portion of the secular by default think of their Jewishness, probably unconsciously, as an accident of birth. Judaism, in their view, seems to be a biological-ethnic fact. To be Jewish in Israel has traditionally meant that one was not an Arab. The sense of Jewishness is tied to the notion that Israel should be a Jewish state. Jewish and Arab were mirror images of one another. A Jewish state was a state where Jews outnumbered Arabs. Beginning in the nineties, as the percentage of non-Jewish non-Arab immigrants and foreign workers rose dramatically, the prevalent notion in Israeli secular society was to think of the immigrants as part of the non-Arab majority which in some sense made them Jewish²⁵. This was especially true of those immigrants who served in the army. In other words, one's contribution and display of loyalty to the state incorporated one into the Jewish people. Hence, it is not surprising that secular Jewish society never encouraged the Russian non-Jews to convert. Today, as the proportion of those who are non-Jewish and non-Arab grows dramatically, older conceptions are under challenge and it is too early to tell where they will lead.

The secular by default are also influenced by currents prevalent in western culture. Consumerism may be the strongest of such currents. Guy Ben-Porat suggests that the secular Jew who spends Shabbat with his family at a shopping mall may bear no animus to religion, no radical opinion on issues of religion-state relations and may even cherish the Shabbat.²⁶ But Shabbat at a shopping mall is his/her choice of leisure time activity. The atrophying of Jewish and Judaic commitment, a process that has been taking place for at least two decades, seems to proceed from the natural rhythms of life. It is too

early to determine what long term effect the second intifada has had on secular Israelis but it is our impression that the immediate result has been the strengthening of the sense of Israeliness and its identification with Jewishness. The perception of being engaged in a national conflict between Arabs and Israeli Jews has, we believe, strengthened Jewishness in its national, Zionist, some might say neo-Zionist sense. The perception of the Arab as the “other” was strengthened but this did little to strengthen Jewishness in its religious, or halakhic sense.

The Ideologically Secular-Judaists

The ideological Jewish-seculars, like the secular organizations concerned with Jewish identity, are troubled by the state of Judaism among the secular public. Dedi Zucker edited a book published in 1999 titled, We the Jewish Seculars: What is Secular Jewish Identity? The book, written and edited against the background of what has been called “the culture war between religious and secular” is of special interest to us here. The book is a kind of self-conscious effort by prominent representatives of the Israeli cultural elite to identify for themselves and their readers the significance and meaning of an identity that was, in the recent past, simply taken for granted; in no need of any kind of textual support.²⁷ The lack of clarity in the meaning of a secular identity or indeed in the meaning of the term secular Jew” that led to the writing of the book was also behind the decision of those who conducted the Guttman Report to substitute the term “not religious” for the term “secular”.²⁸ At the time Zucker edited the book he was a member of the Knesset representing Meretz, the most left wing and along with the party Shinui, the most outspokenly secular of the Zionist parties. Zucker, however, was uneasy with

the absence of a Jewish component in his party's secularism. He writes as follows of the secular public:

[This public] has been pulling in a universalistic direction in order to express its secularism. Expressions of empathy and identification with traditional Jewish concepts and with the Jewish history of the various diasporas has lessened....The non-religious Israeli knows only a banal Judaism or a fanatical Judaism enclosed in its own world. Against this he sees an Israel almost totally cleansed of any Jewish concepts....Too many Israeli seculars are left stammering when asked to define their Judaism. Secular identity has based itself far too much on hostility to religion and the religious. A secular humanist identity must gather its courage and enter the Jewish (Judaic) territory without abandoning an iota of the universalistic tradition...Only such a Jew can enter into a real dialogue with the other Jewish tribes. Only such Jews can prevent a cleavage from the traditional-*mizrahi* tribe. The alternative is to stand on the fringes of Israeliness...²⁹

The volume is comprised of contributions from twenty Israeli intellectuals – some of them, like A.B. Yehoshua, quite well known, others less so. We will look more carefully at this volume but note at the outset that it did not include essays by two of the most prominent spokespersons for secular Judaism. We refer to Ruth Gavison, to whom we return below, and Eliezer Schweid.³⁰ What we are interested in is how the contributors define secular Judaism. A wide variety of opinions found expression and all that really united the contributors was the fact that to be a secular Jew meant that one was not a religiously observant Jew. A few of the contributions were primarily expressions of hostility toward the religious establishment, especially its stance on political issues. A few, at the opposite extreme, were concerned with the secular-religious divide and on the need to find a basis for unity and consensus. Many, like Zucker in his introduction, bemoaned the ignorance and indifference of secular Jews toward Jewish history and the Jewish heritage and noted that secular Jews are often confused about Judaism. Indeed a few contributors dissociated themselves from secular Judaism for that very reason. A number of them preferred to identify themselves as *hofshiim* (see our historical excurses)

rather than seculars (*hilonim*). One contributor noted that whereas the real secular Jews sought the normalization of the Jewish people he feared that normalization would lead to assimilation. He sought instead the construction of a society built on the vision of the prophets.³¹ Another contributor, expressing what we earlier called a biological-ethnic perception of Jewishness, thought that, “there are Jews but no Judaism”, but he was one of the few who expressed the notion.³² A few years earlier it was more common to hear from secular Jewish intellectuals, that whatever Jews (presumably Israeli Jews) do, is Judaism.³³ In contrast, another contributor suggested the equation of religion and Judaism.³⁴

Two points about the volume were especially striking to us. First, whereas the title and subtitle of the volume make no mention of Israel and speak only of secular Judaism, the authors all write as though the topic was secular Judaism *in Israel*. Yehoshua is only the most extreme in this respect. He writes:

if asked to present my identity card as a secular Jew I would answer that I don't employ the concept “secular Jew” at all but the concept “Israeli”. I suggest ...a return to the simple concept “Israeli” as the primary concept of identity, without any unnecessary additions. I am an Israeli. And if the religious Israeli wants to identify as a religious person, let him say, “I am a religious Israeli”. I don't ask him to do that.³⁵

We attribute great significance to this statement. On its face it is nonsensical. If Yehoshua, instead of saying that he identifies himself as an Israeli had said that he identifies himself as a “Jew”, not a “secular-Jew” and that if religious Jews choose to identify themselves as religious, it is their choice to hyphenate their Jewish identity the statement would make sense. But this is not what Yehoshua said. He simply confused the term Jewish with the term Israeli. This confusion, we have already suggested, goes to the heart of Israeli secularism. The fact that it also ignores the fact that over 20 percent of the

population is non-Jewish as well as forgetting that there are non-observant Jews outside of Israel is also significant. We are arguing here for a subconscious interpretation that extends to many of those who are secular by default as well. At least until recently, as we noted above, to be a Jew in Israel meant, for many secular Jews, not to be an Arab. Israeli Jew and Arab were mirror images. For many secular Jews, the fact of their being Jewish had little content other than pointing to the fact that they were not Arab. But since Arabs, at the conscious level were never present, the confusion between Jew and Israeli was natural.

In many of the other essays the seeds of the equation, Israeli equals Jew, are to be found. The most prominent academic among the contributors, Professor Yael Tamir, notes that only in Israel can one be a secular Jew because only in Israel does the Jewish tradition and the Jewish heritage exist in education, the media, literature, museums, etc.³⁶ The assumption here is that there are no private structures for secular Judaism, an assumption with which others agree. Professor Ruth Gavison, an outspoken and secular, makes a similar point. She often notes, in her public lectures, that whereas the religious public does not need the state and society to express their Judaism, the secular public, in the absence of the public acknowledgment of the Jewish tradition, would be hard pressed to find ways to express their Jewishness. Israel, she writes:

...is the only place where the public culture is Hebrew-Jewish. From this point of view, Israel allows people like me – Jews who are not at all religious – to lead a Jewish life in which our Jewish identity has a central place. It is possible that it is the only place where Jews can survive without the observance of commandments for more than two generations.³⁷

Gavison and Tamir's points, we believe, are well taken. We agree with them. But they also suggest how dependent the Jewish identity of these seculars is on their Israeliness.

The second striking aspect of the Zucker volume is how few of the contributors defined, even in broad outline what they meant by secular Judaism in other than negative terms. (I.e. it was not religion, it was not authoritative, it was not ritual). Those who did so, for example, Yael Tamir, Yaron London³⁸, and Ruth Calderon³⁹ viewed secularism as embedded in the Jewish tradition but offering a new interpretation and model in which the tradition is transmitted. But this, as all the contributors pointed out, was yet to be done. Indeed, Tamir is unsure if the secular public can meet the challenge of constructing “a new prayer book, a new reading of the sources, and a new interpretation of Jewish holidays.”⁴⁰ The overwhelming conclusion with which the reader is left, a conclusion with which the majority of contributors would surely concur, is that secular Judaism in Israel, when defined in a positive way rather than simply as a negation of religion, is pretty thin both in practice and in intellectual content. It appears to us that none of the contributors with the exception of Yair Tzaban⁴¹ believe that the ideology of Israeli secularism, at the present time, amounts to much. It has little to offer and has few advocates. Under the circumstances one can resort to one of two strategies. Either concede the point as most of the authors do, and point to the direction in which things might get better (i.e. renewed interest in and a new interpretation of the Jewish tradition), or argue as only a few authors do, that whatever Israeli Jews do is by definition secular Judaism. Our own opinion is that the pessimism which most of the contributors exhibit is premature and we turn to that in the concluding section of the essay.

The Meanings of Secular Judaism

It would seem that secular Judaism has at least three meanings in the minds of most Israelis. The most common meaning, one that survey researchers simply assume to be the meaning, is a Jewish person who is not observant of religious commandments. As we already suggested, many if not most Israeli Jews who call themselves secular do observe quite a few commandments and the question in that case is why they call themselves secular rather than *masorti*. (See the accompanying article). But the differences are very basic. The secular who do observe some religious commandments don't think of themselves as observing *religious* commandments. They are acting out Jewish or Israeli folk customs or performing acts out of deference to parents, or other family members or friends. Furthermore, even if they do recognize that a few of the rituals that they perform are religious acts, e.g. kissing a mezuzah, or fasting on Yom Kippur, the basis may well be a superstitious placating of spirits. We have also heard secular Jews rationalizing their behavior in New Age terminology (e.g. fasting is good for the soul).

A second definition of secular, one that many intellectuals seem to favor, is the absence of a belief in God.⁴² As we have seen, many Israeli Jews who define themselves as secular do report that they believe in God. (Forty three percent of secular college students according to Daphna Canetti's survey). While it seems to us that this is the least useful or accurate way of describing a secular Jew, the fact remains that it is the definition used by a few secular and is a central tenet of secularism in Yaakov Malkin's , What Do Secular Jews Believe?⁴³

A third definition of secular Jew refers to one who has a non-religious conception of Judaism – the notion that Judaism is a culture or a civilization of which religious practice and belief is only a part. This would contrast to a religious conception of Judaism which argues that Judaism is constituted by Jewish law. This notion of secular Judaism was basic to the Jewish enlightenment of Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century⁴⁴ a critical component in the thinking of such luminaries as Ahad Ha'am and Mordecai Kaplan. This basic notion, however, is shared by virtually every student of Judaism including many religiously observant Jews. The problem, therefore, with defining a secular Jew in this manner is that all it does is distinguish between those who are familiar with Judaism and Jewish history and those who are not. Our own preference is the definition offered by the Moroccan born musician Shlomo Bar. "Judaism, he feels, isn't a religion but 'a way to live'"⁴⁵, but not many of those whom we studied echo this sentiment.

Prospects for Secular Judaism

What are the prospects for secular Judaism in Israel? Will secular Jews in Israel succeed in developing a meaningful Jewish culture? We discussed this problem elsewhere⁴⁶ and concluded then, as we do now that the verdict is not yet in. The evidence is mixed. The ideologically Secular-Judaists, as we have seen, fear the growing ignorance of and indifference toward the Jewish tradition. It is easy to blame the religious establishment itself for this state of affairs and to their credit, most of the secular intellectuals in the Zucker volume refrain from doing so. It would have been easy for them to argue, as only a few did, that the erosion of tradition in the lives of so many Israelis is a consequence of the Orthodox elite appropriating Judaism and interpreting the

traditional text and traditional values in a xenophobic, sexist manner overlooking or rejecting values within the Jewish tradition which could have provided a vision and a model of moral behavior for all Israelis. But even if the religious house of Israel is morally rotten most of the secular-Jewish ideologists whom we read don't find this sufficient in explaining the feeble character of secular Judaism in Israel. And we agree with them. Because blaming the religious establishment would not account for the easy manner in which seculars surrendered the battle over defining the nature of Judaism. That we suspect, stems from the lack of passion and commitment that secular Judaism engenders. This passion and commitment once existed not because of the nature of secular Judaism but rather because it was anchored in a Zionist vision and ideology. As that vision diminishes in importance, so does the Jewish tradition. The Guttman Report is instructive in this regard as well. On all the measures of Zionist-Israeli loyalty and identity, the seculars score lower than the *masortim* and indeed lower than non-*haredi* religious. For example, responding to the question would you want very much to be born again as an Israeli 85 percent of the non-*haredi* religious responded yes, 73 percent of the *masortim* said yes, but among the secular: 42 percent of those who kept something of the tradition, 31 percent of those who kept none of the tradition and 30 percent of the anti-religious who kept none of the tradition answered yes. Similar proportions are found in responses to the question "Do you feel yourself Israeli?"⁴⁷ Respondents were asked about components that were very influential in shaping their Jewish identity. Some of these components were of a religious nature (i.e. lighting Shabbat candles), some of them were of a general Jewish nature (i.e., the Holocaust, or the Warsaw ghetto uprising) and some of them were of an Israeli nature (i.e. the establishment of the State or the wars that Israel

underwent). In all cases these components, even the Israeli components, were weaker among the secular than among the masortim or religious.⁴⁸ This finding only makes sense if we assume that as far as many (not all) secular Jews are concerned, both the Jewish and Israeli identity are so weak that the respondent is reluctant to credit any factor as being “very influential” in the shaping of his/her Jewish identity.⁴⁹

On the other hand, the situation is not as bleak as some would have it. And here we must distinguish between secular Judaism as an interpretation of the tradition and secular Judaism as a Jewish way of life.

Secular-Judaism as Interpretation

The interpretive or homiletic enterprise which authors such as Yaron London, Yael Tamir and Ruth Calderon called for has been taking place for a number of decades in Israel; with great urgency and intensity since the beginning of the nineties. This takes place, in various secular institutions of learning (Oranim and Alma are outstanding examples) but also among the modern Orthodox. There are scores of study groups all over Israel where both secular and modern Orthodox Jews study together and undertake the interpretation of text together.⁵⁰ It may well be that little of what they produce is of lasting importance, but the most significant aspect of the enterprise is that Israelis are making the interpretive effort. What do we mean by interpretation? We mean looking anew at traditional Jewish texts to see how they can relate to one’s own life, to the joys, to the tragedies, to the journeys and the passages from one status to another. Secondly, how they can be understood as illustrating and explaining such values as human reason, acting justly to non-Jews as well as Jews, tolerance of a variety of opinions, eschewing violence, responsibility to society, and the requirements and parameters of ethical

behavior. In other words, values which are likely to make a liberal humanist proud to be a Jew rather than cringe at the mention of Judaism; values which demonstrate the compatibility of Judaism and humanism and only in that context project the value of Jewish particularism.⁵¹ Interestingly, one of the lessons of all or at least most of the groups where secular and Orthodox Jews study together is that the secular need the help of religious Jews in accessing the text.

The non-Orthodox, even the best educated among them are generally ignorant of the Jewish sources. They have much to contribute once they understand the simple meaning of the texts, but they need the Orthodox to serve as their basic guides. Once the simple meaning of the text is uncovered, differences between Orthodox and secular, so we are told, tend to disappear. And the differences that remain provide sources of stimulation for both sides. But how much better off secular Judaism would be, if seculars were knowledgeable and secure enough to engage in the study of Jewish texts on their own.

If, as the evidence suggests, such groups are emerging all over Israel, how do we explain the negative assessments of secular intellectuals regarding the state of Jewish understanding and Jewish study? The answer is that one can judge the same cup as half full or half empty. It is also a matter of judgments by insiders versus those by outsiders. For example, for those who look at the status of Jewish study from the inside, one finds that:

In the last few decades, the secular population of Israel has been undergoing a revival of interest in all matters related to Hebrew culture and Jewish identity. The organizations and societies which have arisen as a reflection of this revival have ... exchanged the academic-disciplinary approach for a holistic approach which perceives the engagement in and study of Judaism as a

doctrine, a source of inspiration and a way of life for secular Israelis Jews as well.⁵²

The symbolic expression of this renewal is the term “a return to the Jewish bookshelf” a play on words taken from a poem by Israel’s great national poet H.N. Bialik. One can find evidence in other areas as well. In a most illuminating article, basic we think to understanding contemporary Israeli art, David Sperber writes about the emergence of Jewish themes, a process that he dates to the eighties of the last century.⁵³ Sperber notes other manifestations of this Jewish renaissance. He writes that:

In this spiritual climate the “Jewish” artists of today, who in the past were pushed to the margins of the Israeli art world, are warmly embraced. The great change with regard to Judaism that began more than two decades ago, is not unique to the world of art but is influenced, of course, by the dominant current among the Israeli cultural elite and by the transformation of the “Jewish bookshelf” to a dominant topic of discourse. Even a movement as singularly secular as Hashomer Hatzair participates in this... The goals of that movement have been revised to include “educating a person to be involved in Jewish culture ...”⁵⁴

He goes on to say that when 20,000 members of Hashomer Hatzair meet at the end of July, 2003, for the *Shomria*, a gathering held once every ten years, they will be treated to an event unimaginable in the past; a dramatic presentation of portions of the Talmud.⁵⁵

As we said, if one follows development in Israeli culture closely one finds evidence for a renewed interest in Judaism.⁵⁶ But to an outsider with no stake in demonstrating a renewed interest in Jewish matters or in exploring the margins of main stream Israeli culture (margins which may, of course become main stream themselves at some future time), the condition of secular Jewish culture is not as rosy. Sperber himself assesses the Jewish content of the art upon which he reports as shallow and simplistic with an overemphasis on antisemitism and the Holocaust. Secondly, he suggests that much of the renewed interest in Jewish matters in art is related to sense of post-Zionist ennui if not

hostility toward the Israeli past and the manner in which it was portrayed in mainstream Israeli culture. This, in turn leads to the search for new foci of identity. Jewish renewal among Israeli seculars, the study groups and the interpretive effort described above, is funded in good part by private foundations, mostly in the U.S. and the U.K. and a few Jewish Federations in the U.S. Israeli government funding has been severely cut in recent years. The Jewish renewal itself receives little attention in the media and most significantly relatively little encouragement or reinforcement in Israeli schools despite the demands of the Shenhar Report. It does not seem to touch the day to day lives of the vast majority of secular Israeli Jews although according to the Guttman Report, most Israelis would like more Jewish emphasis in both the media and the schools.

Conclusion: Secular Judaism and the Rhythms of Life

The confusion in the minds of many Israeli seculars between Jew and Israeli is understandable and where it exists it is obviously at the subconscious not the conscious level. The notion that only Israel affords an opportunity for the secular Jew to live a life in which Judaism and Jewish identity are central to one's identity is not without foundation. But if living in Israel is a necessary condition it is by no means a sufficient one. One can not ignore the impact of western consumer culture and assume that the present level of Jewish practice and commitment guarantees the survival of a substantive rather than a nominal Jewish culture in Israel. The possibility exists because, as both Yael Tamir and Ruth Gavison pointed out, only in Israel is the public arena Jewish and this Jewishness is reflected in the minds and lives of at least some seculars. When Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut, embarked into space on the ill fated Columbia shuttle, he brought aboard a Hebrew Bible, a *Kiddush* cup for the blessing over sacramental wine,

a *mezuzah* which he borrowed from the Israeli air force and a picture drawn by a child during the Holocaust. Ramon, according to family members with whom we spoke, did not observe any of the laws of kashrut, but he requested and was provided with kosher meals by NASA. Ramon saw himself as a representative of Israel (not of the Jewish people), and these were the symbols he chose to represent his nation. It tells us a great deal about the power of Jewish secularism in Israel. But it also suggests its weakness.

At the risk of generalizing and oversimplifying, for counter tendencies, as we have noted in the course of this paper, are present, it suggests the enormous dependence of secular Judaism on the public arena, of the inability of the secular to generate private structures of life that are Jewish, or to compete with the consumer culture that does create such structures. Does secular Judaism succeed in doing so elsewhere? It does not. This is the great problem that confronts the vast majority of European Jewry, Jews of both western but especially Eastern Europe. Has it ever done so? The example of the nineteenth century Jewish enlightenment (*haskalah*), especially in Eastern Europe, and the early Zionist settlers in Palestine offers a ray of hope. But in many respects the rich presence of Jewish tradition in the lives of the early *maskilim* and the Zionist settlers was a debt to their own childhood – a taken for granted way of life that was inconsistent with their own ideological emphases and was not successfully transmitted to future generations.

For most Jews, ritual is the central aspect of Judaism. It is what they think of when they think of what it means to be a Jew. It is that which makes Judaism distinctive. It is interesting that in his book titled What Do Secular Jews Believe?, the author, Yaakov Malkin is also concerned with what the ritual and ceremonial implications of being

secular. Perhaps all that God demands of the Jew is to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly in His path, but that is not what sets the Jew apart from non-Jews. Can Judaism in Israel be lived exclusively at the public level and/or by incorporating Jewish folk customs (a Passover seder, Shabbat meals, even a blessing over candles) into one's private life? According to Table I roughly a quarter of secular Israeli Jews do incorporate religious commandments into their private lives although they don't think of them as commandments. Are they likely to be retained if the performance of the "commandment" or ritual lacks the mantle of authority, if one does not feel *obligated* to perform them? We do not know. What is clear, however, is that secular Judaism does not generate the commitment, the passion, and the confidence that religion generates in the hearts of its adherents. Perhaps if more Israeli Jews thought of Judaism as "a way of life" as the *masortim* do, it would generate the kind of commitment that is required if Judaism is to survive in the face of the challenge of western culture. Jewish practice would then become authoritative, not because God commanded it, but because that is what it means to be Jewish. As it now stands, the passivity of secular Jews with regard to issues of Judaic meaning and Jewish commitment coupled with their antagonism to the rabbis and religious parties who are perceived as coercive and intolerant, and the assimilatory pressures of a global post-modern culture are difficult hurdles to overcome.⁵⁷

There is another alternative. Perhaps secular Jews in Israel can generate new rituals or transform older ones so that they become more meaningful than traditional ones. There has been a lot of activity in this regard and a number of organizations have developed in the last few years to help secular Jews think through and perform rituals and *rites de passage* in a "secular" manner. Needless to say there is a web cite as well. The interesting

questions are to what extent the new secular rituals incorporate traditional ritual and how widespread have they become. We have no answer to the first question. We believe that, as might be expected, secular ritual in Israel incorporates a good deal of traditional ritual. (For example, we interviewed a number of rabbis who perform marriages for secular couples, lay people who facilitate or conduct secular marriages and the author of a doctoral dissertation on the topic. All of them report that in every instance the secular couple wants a bridal canopy and the ceremonial of breaking a glass. The variation from tradition is that in many cases the bride as well as the groom will smash the glass). The differences between secular and religious ritual might in many cases be the interpretation given to the ritual rather than the ritual itself. The subject merits study. As to the second question, we are skeptical about the prospects for secular ritual. The kibbutz movement invested energy and resources in devising secular rituals and they have all but vanished today. This topic also merits careful investigation. In many instances the secular have not replaced one ritual with another but have incorporated tradition into their lives by changing the rhythm or pattern of their lives in conformity with tradition. The Sabbath or the Jewish holidays are set apart by special meals, reading special books, listening to special music.

As we have said, in Israel unlike the Diaspora, the opportunity for recovery of the tradition and of secular Judaism is always close at hand. But it is also possible that Jewish renewal in Israel will come only with some dissociation from Zionism and Israeli nationalism. In a period where national and even ethnic loyalties are increasingly frayed among the westernized middle class Jews of Israel, Judaism must represent something beyond an expression of national identity. Israel, as we have seen in the case of

intellectuals, serves too readily as a synonym for Judaism. The decline of national allegiance, which is far more pronounced amongst the secular than amongst the traditional or the religious, bodes ill for secular Judaism as well.

ENDNOTES

¹ Interview with Meir Yoffe, September 27, 2002. Yoffe is the Director of Panim, an umbrella and service organization for a variety of Israeli groups dedicated to strengthening Jewish identity and knowledge among Israelis. Many if not most of the organizations are defacto secular. They cooperate with one another regardless of their religious orientations so that whereas some of the organizations define themselves as Orthodox they are of a decidedly moderate variety that acknowledges the Jewish legitimacy of non-Orthodox groups. Yoffe was basing himself on his own observations and on remarks in the text of the Shenhar Report. On the Shenhar Report, see below.

² A dramatic example of the secularization of modern Orthodox and religious Zionist thought is found in Yoske Achituv, "Towards an Illusion-free Religious Zionism," A Hundred Years of Religious Zionism vol. III "Philosophical Aspects," (Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), pp. 7-30. Achituv, in our opinion the most brilliant and creative Orthodox-Zionist thinker says that religious Zionism must rid itself of four illusions: a meta-historical and metaphysical conception of history; incorporating mystical foundations in the term "beginning of redemption; incorporating promises of the prophets and the sages in cultural, historical and social projections and finally the vision of a renewal of ancient times and the possibility of a state conducted in accordance with Jewish law.

³ A forthcoming study by Kimmy Kaplan is devoted to the topic of the Israelization by which he means the secularization of the *haredim*.

⁴ See for example, Yaacov Shavit, "The Status of Culture in the Process of Creating a National Society in Eretz-Israel: Basic Attitudes and Concepts," in Zohar Shavit (editor and main author), The Construction of Hebrew Culture in Eretz-Israel in the series The History of the Jewish Community in Eretz-Israel Since 1882 (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy for Sciences and Humanities and The Bialik Institute, in Hebrew, 1998), pp.9-29 and the extensive literature cited therein. In our opinion, however, the topic has not been exhausted.

⁵ On post-Zionism and its relation to radical secularism see Bernard Susser and Charles S. Liebman, Choosing Survival: Strategies for a Jewish Future (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 127-134 and Charles S. Liebman, "Reconceptualizing the Culture Conflict Among Israeli Jews," Israel Studies, 2 (Fall, 1997), pp. 172-189. Reprinted with some revision in Anita Shapira (ed.), A State in the Making: Israeli Society in the First Decades (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, in Hebrew, 2001), pp. 249-264.

⁶ We are thinking particularly of a recent article by Zvi Bekerman and Marc Silverman, "The Corruption of Culture and Education by the Nation State: The case of Liberal Jews' Discourse on Jewish Continuity," Journal of Modern Jewish Studies 2 (2003), pp. 1-18.

The authors strike us as benign post-Zionists, a label which they themselves might reject. While we demur from their conclusions, we find their critique of the ideological foundation of secular Judaism in Israel, of the inconsistency between liberalism and national identity of much merit.

⁷ Interview, November 4, 2002

⁸ Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, "Society, Culture and Language: Secular and Religious," Ha'aretz, June 11, 1965 and "Secular and Religious" Ha'aretz, June 18, 1965. We are indebted to Anita Shapira for bringing these columns to our attention.

⁹ People and World: Jewish Culture in a Changing World: Recommendations of the Committee to Examine Jewish Studies in the General Educational System (Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education, 2002). The Report itself was submitted in December, 1993.

¹⁰ Interview, October 31, 2002

¹¹ On the role of religion and the use of traditional symbols in the *Yishuv*, and on the role of religious symbols in the strengthening of national identity see for example: Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, The Civil Religion of Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), Anita Shapira, "Religious Notions of the Labor Movement," in Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira (eds.), Zionism and Religion (Jerusalem: Mercaz Zalman Shazar, in Hebrew, 1994) pp. 301-327 and in that same volume, Shmuel Almog, "Religious Values in the Second Aliyah," pp. 285-300; Moti Zeira, Rural Collective Settlement and Jewish Culture in Eretz Israel During the 1920's (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, in Hebrew, 2000); and Nili Aryeh-Sapir, Shaping an Urban Culture: Rituals and Celebrations in Tel-Aviv in Its Early Years (Tel Aviv University: doctoral dissertation, in Hebrew 2000).

¹² Shalom Lilker, Kibbutz Judaism: A New Tradition in the Making (New York: Herzl Press, 1982).

¹³ Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn and Elihu Katz, Beliefs, Observance of the Traditions and the Values of Israeli Jews – 2000 (Jerusalem: Avi Chai Foundation and the Israel Democracy Institute, 2002).

¹⁴ There are a handful of anti-religious who do report that they observe some of the tradition. The Guttman Report eliminated them from their analyses. As we shall see in the Table I, even a few of those who report that they are anti-religious and observe no part of the tradition, do indeed observe some traditional practices.

¹⁵ The anti-religious category includes not only those who are hostile to the religious establishment but those who really are opposed to religious practice. For example, in our own interviews we spoke to a kindergarten teacher in a secular school. The curriculum in

such schools includes a ceremony, each Friday, of lighting candles and welcoming the Shabbat. Our respondent reported that some parents objected to any religious ceremonial.

¹⁶ Those born in Israel whose fathers were also born in Israel, constitute 16 percent of those secular who observe something, 20 percent of those secular who observe nothing, and 28 percent of the anti-religious who observe nothing. Levy, Levinsohn, Katz, Israeli Jews..., p.14 in the Highlights.

¹⁷ Daphna Canetti, Democracy and Religious and Parareligious Beliefs in Israel: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives (University of Haifa: doctoral dissertation, in Hebrew, 2002). We are grateful to Dr. Canetti for providing us with a break down of her data.

¹⁸ Riv-Ellen Prell has suggested to us that the high proportion of believers among secular Jews, and the especially high proportion among college students may be due to the influence of eastern religion which has penetrated Israeli youth culture. This, as we suggest in our conclusion is a post-modern phenomena strengthened by the few months or longer that so many Israelis spend in India and other eastern countries following completion of their army service. Daphna Canetti finds confirmation for this in her interviews adding that it isn't only trips to the east but participation in periodic "spiritual festivals" that have become popular among young Israeli Jews.

¹⁹ Charles S. Liebman and Yaacov Yadgar, "Israeli Identity: The Jewish Component," Anita Shapira (ed.), Israeli Identity in Transition (Connecticut: Praeger Press, 2004), forthcoming.

²⁰ In addition to the Guttman Report 2000, noted above, the studies include" Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn, Elihu Katz, Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction Among Israeli Jews (Jerusalem: The Louis Guttman Institute of Applied Social Research, 1993) [the Highlights of that Report are reprinted in Charles Liebman and Elihu Katz (eds.), The Jewishness of Israelis (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), which also includes an analysis of the 1993 Report]; Yair Auron, Jewish-Israeli Identity (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim Publishing House, 1993); Michal Shamir and Asher Arian. "Collective Identity and Electoral Competition in Israel," American Political Science Review 93 (June, 1999) pp. 265-277; Uri Farago, "The Jewish Identity of Israeli Youth, 1965-1985," Yahadut Zmanenu 5 (in Hebrew, 1989), pp. 259-285; Uri Farago, National identity and Regional Identity in Israel," Azmi Bashara (ed.), Between I and We (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute and the Kibbutz Hameuchad, in Hebrew, 1999), pp. 153-168; Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Stephen Sharot, Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in Israeli Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Yochanan Peres and Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, Between Consent and Dissent: Democracy and Peace in the Israeli Mind (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, in Hebrew, 1998); an unpublished study by Ezra Kopelowitz and Hadas Franco of 160 students in Rupin college in 2001 (for a report of the study with a summary of the findings see Ha'aretz, September 12, 2002, p. 3B) ; Jacob Shamir and Michal Shamir, The Anatomy of Public Opinion (Ann Arbor: The University of

Michigan Press, 2000); Stephen Sharot, "Jewish and Other National and Ethnic Identities of Israeli Jews," Steven M. Cohen and Gabriel Horenczyk (eds.), National Variations in Jewish Identity (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 299-316; Eliezer Leshem, "The Aliyah from the Former Soviet Union and the Religious-Secular Cleavage in Israeli Society," Moshe Lisak and Eliezer Leshem (eds.), From Russia to Israel: Identity and Culture In Transition (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, in Hebrew, 2001), pp. 125-148; and Alec Epstein, "Continuity and Change in the Characteristics of the Identity of Russian Speaking Jews in Israel," Gesher 147 (Summer 2003, in Hebrew), pp. 19-33.

²¹ Amos Elon, The Israelis (London: Penguin, 1971).

²² Laura Zarembski, The Religious-Secular Divide in the Eyes of Israel's Leaders and Opinion Makers (Jerusalem: The Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, 2002).

²³ This description of Ma'agal Tov, provided by the institution itself is found in the Report prepared by Meir Yoffe titled, Mapping Programs That Promote Tolerance and Unity in the Israeli Jewish Public (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency for Israel, June, 2001, in Hebrew), p. 105

²⁴ Alma College, Center for Secular Judaism: Submitted the Think Tank on the Issue of the Jewish people (Tel Aviv: Alma College, December, 2001), p. 26.

²⁵ Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics records the Jewish population as those living in Israel less Arabs. In fact, the "Jews" as they appear in the Bureau's publications includes non-Jews who are not Arab. Israelis avoided thinking about the status of the foreign worker

²⁶ Guy Ben-Porat, "Between Consumerism and Tradition, Israelis and Saturday Shopping Centers," forthcoming. On the association between western values in general and consumerism in particular and Israeli secularism see Liebman, "Reconceptualizing the Culture Conflict..."

²⁷ The book appeared as part of the series "Judaism Here and Now" published by Yediot Aharonot, Israeli's largest selling newspaper. The series is an interesting test case of the effort to provide contemporary texts whose purpose is the creation (strengthening) of a secular Israeli Jewish identity.

²⁸ This was confirmed in private correspondence.

²⁹ Dedi Zucker (ed.), We the Secular Jews: What is Secular Jewish Identity? (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, in Hebrew 1999), pp. 9-12. Another edited volume of importance is: Yehoshua Rash (ed.), Regard and Revere – Renew Without Fear: The Secular Jew and His Heritage (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, in Hebrew, 1987). [This is the English title of the volume which the publishers lists. The Hebrew title uses the term *hofshi* rather than

hiloni for secular] Another relevant volume is Yaakov Malkin, What Do Secular Jews Believe: Beliefs and Values of Hofshiim (Tel-Aviv: Poalim, in Hebrew, 2000).

³⁰ See, for example, Eliezer Schweid, The Idea of Judaism as a Culture (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, in Hebrew, 1985 and Zionism in a Post Modernistic Era (Jerusalem: Hassifria Haziyonit, in Hebrew, 1996). We do not review Schweid's secular conceptions because, despite our deep admiration for his work and an acknowledgment of his influence on our own conceptions of Judaism, it is our impression that he carries little influence today among Israeli secularists who view him as overly academic (Schweid is a distinguished professor of Jewish philosophy), and as too conservative, too much of an apologist for religion.

³¹ Eli Ben Gal, "Between *Hofshiim* and *Hilonim*," in Zucker, pp. 167-173.

³² Nissim Calderon, "The Bells of the Jubilee," in Zucker, p. 74.

³³ This notion has its origins among the more anti-religious (anti-tradition) Zionist thinkers in the late nineteenth century continuing through the work of Y.H. Brenner, a literary figure of enormous significance to radical Zionists.

³⁴ Amnon Denkner, "To Live with Internal Contradiction," in Zucker, especially page 82.

³⁵ A. B. Yehoshua, "Life as Paradox," in Zucker, p.19.

³⁶ Yael Tamir, "Revolution and Tradition," in Zucker, pp. 174-183.

³⁷ See her personal statement in the document prepared by Gavison and Rabbi Yaacov Amidan, Foundation for a New Social Contract Between Those Who Observe Commandments and *Hofshiim* in Israel (n.p.: The Shalom Hartman Institute and the Yitzhak Rabin Center, in Hebrew 2001), p. 39.

³⁸ Yaron London, *Datiim V'hofshiim*," in Zucker, pp. 23-39.

³⁹ Ruth Calderon, "A Time for Homiletics," in Zucker, pp. 194-198.

⁴⁰ Tamir, p. 183.

⁴¹ Yair Tzaban, "An Unashamed Secularist," in Zucker, pp. 111-131. This article was translated into English and appears under the title "An Unabashed Secular Jew," in the annual Contemplate: The International Journal of Cultural Jewish Thought 2 (2003), pp. 5-14 (to be continued in the forthcoming issue).

⁴² For example, Tom Segev writes that "anyone who says that he believes in God cannot be considered totally secular" Tom Segev, "Who Is Secular," Ha'aretz (September 25, 1996), p.1B.

⁴³ Yaakov Malkin, What Do Secular Jews Believe? (Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, in Hebrew, 2000). Although his book is of little intellectual value, what Malkin says is important for our purposes because he is probably the best known “professional” secularist in Israel. Malkin edits the Hebrew language quarterly Secular Judaism and is the academic director of Meitar, the College of Judaism as Culture. He is co-dean of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism which ordains Humanistic rabbis.

⁴⁴ Immanuel Etkes (ed.), The East European Jewish Enlightenment (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, in Hebrew, 1993 and the extensive bibliography listed in the appendix.

⁴⁵ Tamara Novis, “”Raising the Bar,” Jerusalem Post, City Lights (August 1, 2002), p. 10.

⁴⁶ Charles S. Liebman, "Secular Judaism and Its Prospects," ...

⁴⁷ Jewish Israelis: A Portrait ... p. 82.

⁴⁸ Jews and Israelis: A Portrait... p. 85.

⁴⁹ The reader must bear in mind that this figure like all others includes Russian Jews. As we already noted, they constitute 19 percent of the secular sample and may have skewed the results somewhat by weakening the Jewish identity of the secular sample as well as weakening the Israeli components of that identity. We were unable to obtain the information that would have allowed us to do a secondary analysis of the Guttman data and corroborate if and to what extent this is the case.

⁵⁰ For a detailed description of these institutions and organizations see the Report by Meir Yoffe, Mapping Programs That Promote Tolerance and Unity ... The reader is overwhelmed by the plethora and variety of groups.

⁵¹ Bekerman and Silverman, “The Corruption of Culture...” would argue that this is impossible as long as Judaism is associated with the national state.

⁵² Alma College, Center for Secular Judaism..., p. 1.

⁵³ David Sperber, “Yiddishkeit: Oil on Canvass, 2002,” Deot (June, 2003, in Hebrew), pp. 30-33.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 30

⁵⁵ For more detail on what one might call the Judaization of Hashomer Hatzair and its effort to attract religiously traditional youth see Ha'aretz, “Hashomer Hatzair observes the Sabbath,” (March 17, 2003), p. D1,D4.

⁵⁶ But it is important to note that Israeli culture and identity in the last few decades has swung back and forth between two extremes of national identity: a particularistic-Jewish extreme on the one hand and a universalistic-secular extreme on the other.

⁵⁷ On the other hand a number of factors moderate this tendency. The violent struggle against Israel in the second intifada is the most important. But another factor of great importance is the post-modernist orientation that encourages the individual to explore and identify his/her the particular groups through which one is defined. This, the post-modernists believe, is necessary in the context of globalization. This may encourage the effort to rediscover aspects of Judaism viewed through a contemporary prism; first and foremost among them, aspects which are identified as “spiritual” or mystical.