

As Jewish communities both in Israel and in the Diaspora evolve, our relationship to Zionism emerges with new questions.

The Future of the Zionist Idea

Arthur Hertzberg

The question posed is about the future of Zionism in America. Being a Jew, however, I am immediately tempted to answer the question with another question of my own: Are we asking about the future of the Zionist organizations in America or about the future of the Zionist impulse and idea?

The answer to the first question is clear and unmistakable. The Zionist organizations in America are either barely holding their own or they are on the way to vanishing. They mattered once when they led the battle against that large part of the Jewish community that was opposed to Zionism; they matter very little now that the community as a whole is pro-Israel. To be sure, there are small Zionist bodies, especially on the right, which are very busy fighting for an Israel which will not give up one inch of "the undivided land of Israel," but these attacks have not forced any fundamental changes in the policies of any Israeli government. The only time in recent memory that Israeli governments have recoiled from actions that they would have undertaken if pressure from the Diaspora had not been

so fierce has been on the issue of "Who is a Jew." In this battle the fight has been carried not by the Zionist bodies but by representatives of the wider community such as the Welfare Funds and the United Jewish Appeal. The various Zionist organizations may continue to exist because of the good work they do in Israel (e.g., Hadassah and several other organizations of Zionist women), or as playthings, or megaphones for several kinds of partisans. But the days of Stephen Wise and Abba Hillel Silver, when Zionist leaders had the stature to influence, and even determine, the policy of the Zionist movement, are past.

The real question, therefore, is whether the Zionist idea, in its American version, has a future. But one must first answer the question: What is American Zionism? What vision does it represent?

Since its very beginning in the 1890s, even among the few who regarded themselves as followers of Theodor Herzl, Zionism in America has been a melding of three themes.

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It never denied the *Galut*. It never thought that it should try to lead the Jews in America to abandon this land and move to Palestine. The American Zionists, with very few exceptions, were sure that the Jews in America were safe. Zionism existed to create a fundamental truth in the old jibe that an American Zionist is a Jew who gives another Jew a contribution to help send a third Jew, probably from Eastern Europe, to Palestine. The second "American" element in Zionism, from its very beginning, was the notion most clearly expressed by Mordecai Kaplan nearly a century ago: The endeavor to create a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine would act as the pragmatic, unifying task of American Jews. It would be the substitute religion for a community that was not practicing Judaism with any particular faithfulness to its traditional forms. The third (and fuzziest) element in American Zionism was the idea that the Zionists were bringing to America from Palestine some of the new Jewish culture and new Jewish verve that the pioneers over "there" were creating. This did, indeed, produce some dances, such as the *hora*, and some popular songs, but it did not produce a serious commitment to modern Hebrew language and culture. On the other hand, it is encouraging that American Jews who have spent time in Israel often return with a measurable increase in the temperature of their caring and commitment as Jews.

Will this American Zionism continue? Of course it will. American Jews will continue to defend Israel in the debates about its policies. They will continue to value, and even to overvalue, its achievements in every field of human endeavor — and they will, sometimes, try to correct Israel quietly, or not so quietly, when it strays from what one or another faction among Jews in America may think is the right path. In sum, the relationship between American Jews and Israel will continue in the paths that have been defined in the last hundred years.

But in recent years the relationship has changed very radically — indeed, fundamentally. For most of the last fifty years, American Jews as a whole, and especially those who

are most Zionist-oriented, have believed without question that their labors for Israel — and the memories of the Holocaust, which were inherently related to these Zionist endeavors — would be the certain preservatives of Jewish consciousness and concern. This has been disproved. The rate of intermarriage has risen to an unprecedented level of at least one in two, even though American Jews have been doing wonders for Israel and commemorating the Shoah everywhere from Constitution Mall in Washington to every small town on the prairies of the Midwest.

It is clear now, beyond any doubt, that the passion for Israel has represented, primarily, the momentum of deeply ingrained Jewish loyalties from the past. Those who were rooted in the Jewish religion and in ancestral memory translated this caring into their labors for Israel. Such roots are a precondition to the survival of Jewishness — and, therefore, that commitment must first be created within the American Jewish community by education, and by faith. The Zionist impulse will continue to exist in America not, as we once imagined, as the new American Judaism, but rather as the prime beneficiary of whatever religious and cultural revival we Jews in America will be able to create for ourselves in the next century. The trips to Israel will help, and years of study there will help even more, but the foundation can only be a caring and ever more learned Jewish community in America.

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The Reluctant Aphrodisiac: Israel in Our Communities

Jay Shofet

I made *aliyah* from New York in 1986 as the head of a tiny but hopeful North American *aliyah* movement. My fellow activists and I were trying to put *aliyah* squarely on the agenda of the American Jewish community. Zionism had been a revolution in Jewish life, but we sensed that the American Jewish community welcomed only the evolutionary, incremental approach.

Aliyah had ceased to be a "dirty word" in the American Jewish establishment. By the mid-1980s, federations began supporting local *aliyah* efforts, and Israel programs had become an institutionalized feature of Jewish life. Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Metrowest (NJ), and several other communities began to both assist their own potential immigrants, and to prioritize sending community members—particularly teens—on educational trips to Israel. It seemed as if the typical American Jewish pattern of high emotional attachment to Israel but low actual engagement with Israel was about to be broken. The federation world looked poised to do what the Zionist movement never could: make sincere involvement with Israel an important feature of American Jewish life.

A decade later, I returned to my native New England as an *aliyah* emissary of the Jewish Agency for Israel. I was guardedly optimistic that I would be able to foster an even greater attachment to Israel than was common prior to my *aliyah*. Yet after three years of representing Israel in the US, I view the Israel-Diaspora relationship with a sense of great frustration.

While there are exceptions, American Jewry as a whole seems stuck in an ambivalent holding pattern on the question of how involved it wants to be in Israel. I've met scores of committed Jewish professionals and lay leaders who, like the majority of American Jews, have still never been to Israel. In

1986, 11,000 North American youth went on Israel-experience programs. The number dropped precipitously the following year due to security concerns, and only recently has the number exceeded the pre-intifada level. While *aliyah* holds steady at 3,000 a year, non-Orthodox *aliyah* has actually declined. Just 1/20 of 1% of the American Jewish community makes *aliyah* yearly, the lowest rate by far of any free-world Jewish community. This is not the pic-

ture of a Jewish community that has embraced a relationship with the Jewish State.

This disaffection from Israel is all the more surprising in a city like Boston, a community in the vanguard of the Jewish renaissance movement. I was certain that my message would be welcomed by a community that is working toward "universal adult Jewish literacy" by "changing the culture" of liberal Jewry, ac-

cording to Barry Shrage, the President of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies. Yet, to my disappointment, the Jewish establishment here has marginalized my efforts toward heightened engagement with Israel. Relative to most other Jewish communities, Boston allocates significantly less money to Israel, sends fewer teens and students there, sends far fewer adults on missions, and offers less scholarship aid for Israel experience programs. Unlike virtually every other major North American Jewish community, Boston has not supported *aliyah* efforts whatsoever and hosts no Israeli community emissary. While Boston has recently begun to foster direct connections to Israel through its Haifa project, it is only on par with Dnepropetrovsk, Boston's adopted community in the Ukraine.

This is not only inadequate ideologically, but it is also tactically misguided. The Boston approach assumes that attachment to Israel is a natural function of Jewish identity—i.e. the more Jewishly identified and knowledgeable the individual, the greater

American Jewry seems stuck in an ambivalent holding pattern on the question of how involved it wants to be in Israel.



the connection to Israel. True enough, but this is only half the story. As research indicates, for Jews at all levels of affiliation, Israel is a potent *source* of Jewish identity as well as a *function* of it.

Some Jewish leaders understand this, which is why the trend toward greater Israel involvement has increased. Detroit is a community at the forefront of the integration of Israel into its building of Jewish life. "Israel is the greatest opportunity we have in the 20th and 21st centuries for Jewish identity development," according to Robert Aronson, Executive Vice-President of the Metro Detroit federation. To that end, Detroit has sponsored the two largest North American Jewish missions to Israel, with 1300 and 900 participants. Rather than spending time at the usual tourist sites, the participants visit Israelis and a region of Israel in an involved, personal way. "Israel," believes Mr. Aronson, "has a unique and irreplaceable ability to motivate."

Other federations agree. North of Boston, the North Shore Federation and philanthropist Bob Lappin have been teaming up for several years to provide a free Israel summer trip—complete with pre- and post-trip programming—to every North Shore Jewish teenager. Half of all Jewish teens in the area go to Israel, as opposed to just 3% of Jewish teenagers nationally. The North Shore makes this a priority, not in the belief that this trip is a "magic bullet" solution for Jewish continuity but as an acknowledgment of Israel's powerful motivational potential.

Moreover, consensus is growing that an educational experience in Israel is the natural birthright of all young Jews, now and forever. The aptly named Birthright organization is a new partnership of major philanthropists, the United Jewish Communities (formerly UJA), the Jewish Agency, and with unprec-

edented significance, the Israeli government. It is gearing up to ensure that by 2001, every young Jew in the world will be offered a free, 10-day Israel experience—or, hopefully, even more financial help for a longer trip.

Like some twisted Gift of the Magi, the American Jewish community and Israel each possess what the other needs. Israel, if "done right" by the Jewish establishment, can be a powerful source of Jewish identity to large numbers of Jews from all backgrounds. By "doing Israel right", i.e. integrating an attachment to Israel into the natural life-cycles of Jews, Diaspora Jewry will also enrich and enhance Israel in myriad meaningful ways.

When I began my stint as an Israeli emissary, I had hoped and believed that Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations would spark a dynamic new phase in American Jewry's relationship with Israel. In Boston at least, I've seen little evidence of this. Regardless, Israel beckons, vibrant and purposeful, whether or not the communal leadership leads in this direction. If American Jewry fails to intensify its relations with Israel during the next half-century, last year's jubilee anniversary celebrations might turn out to have been, sadly and to our mutual detriment, the high-water mark in Israel-Diaspora relations. Still, to the extent that models like those offered by Detroit and the North Shore can be emulated throughout North America, I remain guardedly optimistic.

Jay Shofet, the outgoing New England Regional Director of the Israel Aliyah Center, will be returning to Israel this summer with his wife Barbara and children Shani and Nadav. They will live in Lapid, a new community in the Modi'in region.

From Aphrodisiac to Relationship: A New Course for the Israel/Diaspora Relationship

Barry Shrage

Jay Shofet is a hardworking, smart, *shaliach*. He's living in Boston, a community filled with innovative efforts to build a new, stronger, and more durable relationship between Boston Jews and Israelis. And yet he misses much of the activity and misperceives much of the rest. Why?

Our pioneering community-to-community efforts with Israel began in 1991, and we spend close to \$800,000 per year. Our projects include: direct pluralism; economic development; Ethiopian resettlement and human services programs (compared to about \$200,000 in Dnepropetrovsk). We believe that

the best long-term way to increase *aliyah* is by increasing people-to-people programs and economic development activities. Although the Jewish Agency has never appreciated our approach, we believe it has the greatest chance to succeed and it's becoming the norm in several communities.

Boston helped pioneer the Passport to Israel Program (The Myra And Robert Kraft Passport to Israel Program) – the prototype of the Birthright model. We have two full time, local "Israel Desk" staff who have organized volunteer-led "Passport to Israel" Committees in more than thirty of our largest congregations who have helped this program grow. Boston currently spends over \$500,000 each year to send teens and college students to Israel. Are our efforts invisible because we do not use the Jewish Agency-approved community *shaliach* program?

We do not believe in large-scale, one-shot mega-missions (too expensive, too little impact), but we do send more college students and young adults on missions each year than any other American community except New York.

Why can't a bright, enthusiastic and talented *shaliach* like Jay Shofet perceive this? The Jewish Agency, which manages the entire *aliyah* effort, continues wonderful and even heroic work in lands of instability and oppression. It does less well in un-

derstanding the radical changes in identity and structure in lands of freedom like the United States or even Israel itself, where the very idea of Zionism and its relationship to Judaism is in the midst of profound change.

To increase *aliyah* and strengthen the relationship between American Jews and Israelis, we must continue to work with our brothers and sisters in Israel for an international renaissance of culture and learning, of community and justice, volunteerism and pluralism that is just beginning to grow from Haifa to Jerusalem to Dnepropetrovsk to Boston.

Together we must strengthen our common vision of a serious, non fundamentalist, inclusive, literate and spiritual Judaism with Israel at its core that can bind our communities together and fill the world with the light of Torah, with a vision of justice and with a spirit of caring.

Barry Shrage is the President of Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies.

(For more information on Boston's new renaissance strategy, see "Rethinking Israel/Diaspora Relations: View from North America," in the Journal of *Jewish Communal Service*, Volume 74, 2/3, Winter/Spring 1997/98 and the CJP website: www.CJP.org, or www.shma.com.)

When the Heart Trumps the Mind

Daniel Gordis

Not long ago, I wrote a book about why the Jews matter. In one of the last chapters of *Does the World Need the Jews?*, I suggested that to make a difference in the world, Jews needed to live everywhere, not only in one tiny country. For many reasons, I argued, Diaspora Judaism was just as vital as Israeli Jewish life, and Jewish life in North America was no less important for the Jewish people's future than life in the Jewish State.

A year after the book came out, our family came to Israel for a year's sabbatical. We wanted our children to learn Hebrew and to develop a love for Israel. Then, we figured, we'd pack up and head back home. Two months after arriving, my wife Beth and I just knew we didn't want

to leave. Since then, we've sold our home in Los Angeles, I've resigned from my job, and we've decided to stay. "What happened?" everyone understandably asks.

There's no simple answer. Yet given everyone's suspicions, one thing should be said up front: I still believe what I wrote. I still think that Jewish life in North America is a wonderful and creative experiment. I still believe that American Jews can make profound and unique contributions to the Jewish people – and to Israel, and I still do not consider Israel the only place to live a meaningful Jewish existence. So why the move? Sometimes, I guess, the heart can trump the mind.

On the surface, my life was great in the States. Professionally, I was building a new rabbinical



school, an opportunity important and challenging far beyond anything I'd dreamt about. Jewishly, we had it all. We loved our community, our children went to great day schools, our neighborhood was filled with people walking home from *shul* on Shabbat morning. There were dozens of kosher restaurants, book stores, *mikva'ot*, day schools of all denominations, Jewish high schools of various sorts, and our children were growing up surrounded by an entire community that lived just the way that they did. But despite all that, I now realize, it never really felt like home.

Here in Israel, the days too frequently begin with horrifying newspaper reports about Israeli soldiers having been killed in Lebanon. At the end of those days, as I tuck my children into bed, I shudder to think of Avi, my nine year-old son, going up north in just a few years. I watch his little body, gaze at his innocent face, and wonder if we're being fair to him; if we're making the right choices for him. And yet, my gut tells me that this is his battle, that somehow, he belongs in this complicated business, frightening though it is.

Our choices, of course, are about more than battles. They are about destiny. One of the things that we've watched with fascination is the way in which our children have come to feel that this place, this language and this culture, is theirs. During the Wye River negotiations, analysts on TV noted that without an agreement, Arafat would declare a state in May 1999. Avi simply exclaimed, "That's crazy! How can he declare a state in the middle of our country?"

We explained that this place isn't only ours, that other people have claims to it as well. But what struck me most was that after only a couple of months into our stay, our children saw this place as "ours." They, too, I realize, sensed that we'd come home.

Being "home" also means being willing to encounter the difficult aspects of Israeli society. Several Fridays ago, I met a few Palestinian families whose houses had been bulldozed because they were built without build-

ing permits. (Israel's unofficial policy is to withhold permits in order to eventually diminish the Palestinian presence, making the land easier to annex in the future.) Later that afternoon, I told Beth about the horrifying stories of what the soldiers had done, how they'd laughed and jeered while Palestinian children wept as their home was reduced to rubble. Avi happened to be in the kitchen at the time, and was horrified. "Abba," he asked, "why would we possibly move to a place that does such terrible things?" Because it's our home, I found myself instinctively saying. And since it's ours, we have to make it better.

As I tucked him into bed that Shabbat, I again thought of him nine years from now, in the army. But this time, I worried not for his life, but rather for his soul. Will he grow up to hate, as those soldiers do? I knew we simply couldn't let that happen. Somewhere in this world, I thought, there must be a place that Jewish children feel is theirs, a place where the songs are their songs, where the history is their history, where the place doesn't just welcome them, but exists for them—a place where they won't have to fight, and a place where being Jewish will also mean being just.

Can it happen? I guess we've made *aliyah* because we desperately want the answer to be "yes." When we ask ourselves what we ultimately want to leave our children, the most important gift we can imagine is having them become part of this crazy, complicated and wondrous place. What, after all, can parents give their children that is more important than a home?

Daniel Gordis is completing his tenure as Dean of the Rabbinical School at the University of Judaism. Beginning this summer, he will be Associate Director of the Jerusalem Fellows Program in Jerusalem. He is the author of God Was Not in the Fire: The Search for a Spiritual Judaism and Does the World Need the Jews? His next book, Raising Jewish Children, will be published by Crown Publishers in September.

Wrestling with Israel

Marcia Freedman

I am at home in body and spirit in the Middle East and nowhere else. My senses are sated, my mind and heart involved. I am committed to *tikkun olam* and I am politically engaged. My spirit is fed by my

surroundings and by what I do. Despite my often ambivalent thoughts and feelings about my people, they are nevertheless my people, and our national homeland is Israel.

But if I have had a love affair with Israel all these years, she has repeatedly betrayed and disappointed me. The Zionist enterprise is flawed, and perhaps deeply so. Many of us are just beginning to grapple with the contradictions. How do we reconcile Zionism's failings with our proud national consciousness as Jews? There have been many things in Israel's 50 years of history of which, as a Jew, I am ashamed. Ironically, it is this very sense of shame that fuels my activism in Israel.

I went to Israel in 1967 and left 14 years later, exhausted and seriously isolated after a decade of leadership in the feminist and peace movements. I assumed I would return sooner or later. Throughout the 1980s I was too angry to even think about returning: Israel invaded Lebanon; the Palestinian refugees at the Sabra and Shatilla camps were massacred under Israeli eyes; Jewish settlement in the occupied territories grew at a feverish pace; the *intifada* began and the Israeli response was brutal.

But then in 1993, Yassir Arafat, the "terrorist," and Yitzhak Rabin, the exemplar of *sabra* "right stuff," shook hands on the White House lawn. The peace process had begun. I watched that moment on television, tears streaming down my face, and an inner voice whispered, "You can go home now."

In early November 1995, I landed at Ben Gurion Airport. Three days later Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, and the month I had expected to be the start of a new future turned into a month of mourning. I mourned together with the entire nation. We grieved not only Rabin the man, we mourned the loss of some of our most precious Zionist beliefs: Jew had killed Jew; an Ashkenazi had killed an Ashkenazi; the killer was a *yeshiva bocher*. The dead man had been one of the formative symbols of *sabra* heroism and stoicism. The dream of peace was dead. The work I had wanted to do—Arab-Jewish coexistence—was no longer the most urgent that needed to be done, overshadowed by a need to work toward Jewish-Jewish coexistence. Reality had changed overnight.

It took another two years to decide that I could return to Israel on a more permanent basis. But I no longer trusted Israel with my life. I had learned the hard way that life in Israel is unhealthy. There is an early Zionist saying about Israel as "*eretz ochelet toshvei'hah*," "a land that consumes its inhabitants." It is true. Life is not smooth, achieving economic security is not easy, we still have to stand in line at the post

office to pay our monthly telephone bills, we open our newspapers and turn on our radios several times a day, always expecting drama, and never being disappointed for long.

The work of *tikkun olam* is especially dangerous to one's health. Early carriers of the *tikkun* message usually absorb the first shock of angry response. Mine was only one example. The feminist voice, first heard in the early 1970s, was so frightening that it was literally called "a threat to the security of the Jewish State." Feminism's challenge to Israeli machismo was seen as a potential undermining of the Israeli armed forces and the Jewish family. In the face of such antagonism, I left Israel in 1981. I was exhausted.

The Jewish State is deeply resistant to change, requiring as it does recognition that something needs fixing, that something is broken. Because the cloak of denial is so thick, the work of *tikkun olam* in Israel must always begin with the slow and painful psycho-political work of breaking through layers and layers of false consciousness, much of it officially supported. This is difficult, painstaking work that wounds those who do it. *Eretz ochelet toshvei'ah*.

When I decided to return to Israel, I did so with the knowledge that to be able to be politically active and remain healthy, I would need a refuge. I now divide my life between Jerusalem and Berkeley, half the year in each place, as if in ritual re-enactment of those two defining moments in my life, *aliyah* and *yeridah*.

As some Jews wrestle with God, I wrestle with Israel.

Marcia Freedman is a founder of the Israeli feminist movement and a former Member of Knesset. She is the author of *Exile in the Promised Land* (Firebrand Books) and numerous articles. She is active with *Kol Ha-Isha*, the Jerusalem Women's Center, which is engaged in multicultural feminism, and with *Bat Shalom*, the Jewish/West Jerusalem partner in the Israeli-Palestinian women's peace network, the Jerusalem Link.

Errata

Our apologies for our misspelling of Rabbi Harold Schulweis' name in the April issue.



The Emergence of American Zionism

Mark Raider (New York University Press, 296 pp, \$20.00 paper, 1998)

American Jews and their history typically fare poorly at the hands of Jewish Studies specialists. Too new, too modern, ungrounded in Jewish classical texts and culture, too shallow, so the critics would have it. Even where modern Jewish history is concerned, the big story is in European Enlightenment, Emancipation, breakdown of tradition, and so on. That goes for the history of Zionism as well. As a movement of European origin, the history of Zionist thinkers, ideologies, and movements typically follows the course of action from Europe to Palestine, from Congresses to *yishuv* to statehood.

American Zionism lurks as the poor relation in this drama: insignificant ideologically and numerically, an almost total failure when it came to *aliyah*, the classical measurement of Zionist commitment. How does Zionism, a movement to solve the problems of the Jewish people via the creation of a politically sovereign state, resonate with the "exceptional" story of religious freedom and social opportunity embodied in American Jewish history? Finally, how could American Jews connect to a Jewish enterprise founded by ideologues along largely cooperative, socialist democratic lines, when their own energies went into acculturating into the greatest capitalist state in the history of the world?

In Mark Raider's important new book, this narrative of Zionism and its historiography comes in for some much-needed revision. While rarely overstating his case, Raider argues that at least in the American Jewish context, Labor Zionism played an important role in the history and development of American Zionism. Raider also argues that Zionism, in general, made a deep imprint on the American Jewish community, as it moved from being overwhelmingly immigrant to acculturated American between the Wars. In the process, Raider restores an ideological dimension to the story of American Zionism and American Jewry. How did this coalescence of Labor Zionism and American Jewry happen? Raider argues that "Labor Zionism...resonated not only with the Jewish experience but also with the American ideals of democracy, pluralism, and social justice." In other words, like so much else in the American Jewish story, the "fit" of Judaism and America was an important element in what became socially and religiously ac-

ceptable, unlike in eastern Europe, where often Jewishness was defined directly in oppositional terms to gentile culture and social norms.

In a series of chapters tracing Zionism's development in the *yishuv* and concurrent developments in the United States, Raider recounts the story of the nexus between Europe, Palestine, and America up through the post-World War II campaign for Jewish statehood. He argues that after World War I, Labor Zionism played upon the romanticized image of Palestine as a frontier. In a striking chapter on the "Zionist Pioneer," Raider shows through a perceptive "reading" of Zionist iconography the various artistic images that American Jews had projected onto Zionism generally and the *halutzim* particularly. This set of images indelibly imprinted the *yishuv* on American Jewish consciousness as revolutionary, warrior, farmer, watchman, redeemer, builder, scientist, cowboy, and discoverer. The range of images also suggests one of Raider's key points; namely that Labor Zionism succeeded in American Jewish life, far beyond what its numbers would suggest. Its success resulted from toning down its appeals to ideological purity, and instead recognizing the heterogeneous nature of American life with appeals to broad ideas like economic justice and social democracy.

With the ascendance of Ben-Gurion and his Mapai Party in the World Zionist Organization in 1933, the Left increasingly gained power in Palestine, building a vast network of institutions that carried through into statehood. American Jewry followed suit, accepting along broad lines the Labor agenda, and increasingly making Zionism a core element in the fashioning of an American Jewish identity and communal culture. Raider's book is an important contribution to understanding how this new identity emerged, as well as suggesting that to the extent it relied upon a distant object, it both served American Jews as well as enabled them to avoid tackling larger issues of Jewish identity and culture perhaps closer to home.

Rabbi David Starr is the Dean of Boston's Me'ah Program, an Instructor of History at Hebrew College and Adjunct Lecturer at Brandeis University.

For one 19th Century Kabbalist, in an obscure work called "Discussions of Angels," 'the air of Israel' is that which fosters non-self-conscious healthy spirituality. Tzadok HaCohen of Lublin understands there to be an essential difference between the spirituality of exile existence and that of Israel's. Exile is a fundamentally unnatural Jewish state. It requires therefore unnatural religion. Excessive emphasis on legal detail, the pretense of pompous dress, and a fear of directly engaging our sexuality are all symptoms of Babylonian climate.

Israel in her ideal state is the place where holy imagination roams free. It is the place where 'being' in all of its mundaneness is the core of the holy. Not the blessing but the eating, not the wedding ceremony but the marriage, not pious prayer but intoxicated prophecy are the stuff of Israel's climate. Mitzvah for R. Tzadok, while necessary and at its root divinely mandated, is but the garb of the holy experience. The sacred itself is life in all of her magnificent simplicity. In the 'air of Israel,' just breathing (which in Hebrew is 'neshima'), is a soulful, neshama act.

Mordechai Gafni is a Rebbe who writes and teaches in Israel. He is the Director of Minad: The Center for Jewish Culture.

Wisdom is an accumulated attribute. In the Land of Israel, we tend to see things through many layers of past experiences, which are very close by measure of geography and spirituality. Sometimes it feels like the Prophet Isaiah or the sage, Rabbi Akiva, are hovering close by, keeping tabs on our progress. And in truth, we often deal with the same issues that concerned earlier generations—both moral and political.

If, as I believe, the challenge of the Torah is to create a society that is both holy and just, then this is the task of our generation as well. And because building such a society has always required Jewish independence, our contemporary Zionist struggles – both internal and external – are linked to those who fought and dreamed in this Land before us. Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Judah Maccabee, Yohanan Ben Zakai, and many others, are all part of the same vision of Jewish fulfillment. With their wisdom shaping ours, let us hope that we get closer to realizing it.

Yitzhak Sokoloff is a political scientist, educator and tour guide. He is the Director of Keshet: The Center for Educational Tourism in Israel.

Rabbi Kelman's comments on the passage from the Talmud represent an important set of challenges to Israel and its supporters. Ahad Ha'am envisioned an Israel that would be a spiritual center for all Jews everywhere. In just fifty years, Israel has become the center of Jewish life. Its intellectual, economic, and strategic strengths are outstanding. Already Israel has exported some of its wisdom to the world: its pioneering work in environmental resources are studied by other countries; Israel has become a recognized leader in technology and communications;

Israel's rescue of endangered Jewish communities is a model of interpersonal ethics for all peoples.

May the air of the Land of Israel guide Israel wisely through its future challenges! And may we continue to take pride in our homeland, building a meaningful partnership through which Jewish life in Israel and in our communities throughout the world will be energized.

Ronald S. Lauder is the President of the Jewish National Fund and the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation. He is an international philanthropist and businessman.

Surely it is the air, the sunlight and the resulting photochemical reactions that will make us all wise.

If we take heed, the air and our natural surroundings will teach us how best to protect our health and environment. But now, in the small space of Israel, we have fossil fuel power plants that emit toxic pollutants in the north, and car emissions that plague Tel Aviv and turn to ozone in the sacred city of Jerusalem.

Israelis are only in the first stages of monitoring pollutants, a process that will help identify how best to reduce harmful emissions. While the air has more to teach us, we've already learned that the choices we make each day — to carpool or take public transportation — can help clear our air, reduce climate change, protect crops, prevent illness, and save lives.

The air in Israel inspires us to remember that prophets once breathed this air. Being conscious of air quality also compels us to take every opportunity to give future generations clean air that will bless them with long, healthy lives.

Judy Lehrer is Co-Chair of the Greater Boston Chapter of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.

The air/climate of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise.

אורא דארץ ישראל מחכים

Baba Batra 158b

I am not sure it's the air, maybe it's the light, and maybe it's the fact that in this small space we have Jerusalem, the Galilee, the Negev, the wilderness. There is something both unrelenting and mystifying about this place; not to mention its history. This is a place where everywhere you step you sink into a piece of the great Jewish story. Following the footsteps of Jeremiah, Isaac Lurie, Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, prophets, mystics, dreamers, and pioneers, Israel makes demands on us. Who are we, what should we be?

Every moment is always a momentous moment here, we are always at some great crossroad of the Jewish experience. This is the place whose name is so fitting, for we wrestle with humans and God, and we endure. Are we wiser for it? Are we more compassionate? We are in motion and in the making. It is all our making now. The rebirth of Jewish statehood is a blessing. The challenge is to be a blessing for all of us and for others.

Rabbi Naamah Kelman is the Director of Education Initiatives of the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem.

*NiShma is the Hebrew word for "let us hear."



Building Personal Connections: My Hope for Zionism

Brian Jaffee

Depending upon whom is being asked, the subject of the Zionist movement in America could elicit either the sound of a death knell or the sound of birds chirping. There are those who believe Zionism is on its last legs in the American Jewish community; others insist that Zionism is, or soon will be, enjoying a revival among American Jews. Doomsayers point to our fading connection to many things Jewish; optimists insist that more positive developments will come from the growing numbers of American Jewish teenagers who spend their summers in Israel on programs run by Zionist youth movements, synagogues, and community federations.

These trips to Israel are of particular importance to the health of the Zionist movement in the 21st Century, for they will aid in the development of a real Zionist passion in the Jewish community. American Jews must get beyond the popular, yet incomplete, definition of Zionism as a movement dedicated to the achievement of a modern political State in the biblical homeland of the Jewish people. If that were the full definition, we could declare the end of the Zionist era. Zionism is not yet finished because it involves much more than the simple, albeit important, basic political and territorial necessities. Zionism asks that Israel remains a focal point in Jewish life.

Sending our youth to Israel and encouraging them to discover Israel for them are important keys to the future of Zionism. Young people travel through Israel and live what they learn: They spend time on *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*, living with Israeli families and socializing with their Israeli teenage counterparts. They work in development towns with new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union and from Ethiopia. Rather than seeing only the "idealized" Israel, they

experience and learn to love a more realistic Israel. This leads to a more sophisticated and informed community of budding young Zionists that will grow up to articulate the reasons why *Eretz Yisrael* needs to remain central in Jewish life, and they will continue to foster a connection to Israel that will last for the rest of their lives.

Being a Zionist in the 21st Century should mean developing a sense of greater peoplehood, a sentiment that is diminishing rapidly among American Jews. More than just anecdotal evidence suggests that sending teenagers to Israel nurtures that connection. These young people, particularly the ones affiliated with Zionist youth movements, are exposed to an Israel that takes them beyond historical sites. Movement programming and use of the Internet allows American Jewish teenagers to build relationships with their Israeli counterparts, create friendships that serve to broaden their understanding of each other, break down barriers, and correct stereotypes. When Israeli and American Jews converse about being Jewish, they build a sense of oneness. This is a crucial piece of Zionism's future and the future of Jewish community: Preserving while at the same time igniting a lasting cultural, spiritual, and ethnic connection between Jews in Israel and throughout the world.

Brian Jaffee is the National Senior Advisor to Young Judaea, the Zionist youth movement sponsored by Hadassah. Brian attended his first Young Judaea convention when he was 9 years old and has spent a lifetime attending Young Judaea's camps and programs. Since graduating from the University of Wisconsin (Madison) with degrees in History and Political Science, Brian has worked in the Young Judaea national office, as advisor to the peer-led National Executive Board.

A Sh'ma Archive

We have received several bundles of early issues of *Sh'ma* in response to our request for back issues. Rereading some of these back issues is a study in the development of American Jewish consciousness, and a perusal of the historical map our thinking has charted. We are hoping to create a complete *Sh'ma* archive. Please continue to call and send us your old copies. We extend our appreciation to Marsha Marks and Harry Cronson, who have recently sent us past issues of *Sh'ma*.

**Link your congregational
youth group to the best
website for teenagers:**

www.jvibe.com

Dear Editor,

Pluralism has multiple connotations: The "hard" version is, 'every interpretation of Judaism is equally correct'; the "soft" version is, 'Jews ought to respectfully tolerate other interpretations of Judaism.' The first often leads to intellectual apathy that is disaster for our people. The second leads to rational discourse and is a national imperative for Jews.

The challenge in modernity is not anti-semitism but lack of Jewish commitment. I prefer a world in which Jews are divided because they care passionately about their beliefs, where they argue for their views and live their Jewish principles. I live an Orthodox halakhic life because I believe deeply that this interpretation of Torah is correct. Serious heterodox Jews also have strong convictions. Believing Conservative Jews do not think that Reform Judaism is right, and no principled Reform Jew believes in Orthodoxy. Convictions give our Jewish lives vitality. They help us fight off the ravages of acculturation. Whatever our persuasions, believing Jews will have something meaningful to give their children.

It makes sense for responsible Jews to be sympathetic to all interpretations of Judaism that nurture Jewish identity. They are part of the solution to assimilation, not part of the problem. When the rhetoric subsides we all understand that Rabbi Kook was correct: We need each other. Could today's Orthodox Jews have become staunch defenders of Israel had not non-Orthodox Jews founded the State? Would Conservative and Reform Jews have established their day schools had not Orthodox Jews demonstrated the effectiveness of that education? And where would any of us be today without liberal organizations that lobby for Jewish interests and support for Israel?

We need stronger Jewish passion today. We should teach Judaism as we see it and persuade others with reasoned arguments, not ad hominem attacks. This is the legacy of Hillel and normative rabbinic tradition. Pluralism as tolerance is a boon to us all.

Dr. Eugene Korn, Bergenfield, New Jersey

To see more letters in response to our April pluralism issue go to <http://www.shma.com>.

Living Words: The Best High Holiday Sermons of 5759

To order your copy of *Living Words* please send in a check before June 1st for \$12.95 (\$9.95 plus \$3 for shipping), made out to *Sh'ma*, with a note indicating the check is for our Book of Sermons (payment on orders after June 1 are \$15.95). Send checks to:

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The books will be sent out by the middle of June. Your cancelled check is your receipt.

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Sh'ma Classified Ads

Sh'ma will be including a few ads each month for Jewish organizations and institutions seeking Jewish professionals in the areas of rabbinics, education, academia, and communal service. To post a listing (\$100.00), please contact the Sh'ma editorial office. Advertisements may be faxed to (781) 449-9825 or sent by email to jflsusan@aol.com.

Director of Jewish Studies

San Diego Jewish Academy

The Academy, a pluralistic community school in the midst of significant growth, is seeking a Director of Jewish Studies. With 500 students in K-8, the school is adding a high school and will be moving to a new \$36 million state-of-the-art campus within the next few years. The Director will supervise the Jewish Studies and Hebrew faculty, strengthen the curriculum, and enhance the Jewish atmosphere of the school community. Requirements include: Rabbinic ordination or advanced degree in Jewish Studies, advanced degree in education, and 5 years experience in Jewish day school leadership.

All responses will be kept confidential.

Resumes to: Mark I. Berger & Associates, Attn: SDJA, PO Box 19585, San Diego, CA 92159, or fax (619) 303-1201

We extend our appreciation and our good wishes to our outgoing Hornstein intern, Dinah Zeltser.

Head of Jewish Studies *Cleveland's new Pardes High School*

The new, independent Jewish high school of Cleveland invites resumes from experienced, committed teachers who are life-long learners and who love teaching adolescents. Pardes offers an integrated college preparatory curriculum in general and Judaic studies in an environment that respects the diverse approaches to Jewish tradition. For the 1999-2000 year, Pardes seeks a Head of Jewish Studies and teachers in most Judaic fields.

Send Resume to: Howard L. Fine, Ph.D., The Pardes School, 23811 Chagrin Blvd., Suite 310, Cleveland, OH 44122. Visit our web site: www.pardesclv.org.

Sh'ma Fellows

Sh'ma is planning to initiate a Fellows Program, a group of six graduate-level students to meet monthly in Boston and serve as a sounding board for new ideas while learning about the inner workings of this publication and Jewish publishing. We invite prospective Fellows to send Sh'ma a one-page letter describing yourself and what contribution you could make to the sacred conversations of North American Jews entering the 21st Century.

For the past 29 years, Sh'ma has served as a gathering place for independent voices eager to be heard across the Jewish religious, social, and political landscape. Through our diversity, intensity, frequency, and constancy, we have served as a public diary of the North American Jewish experience. In the pages of Sh'ma, we discuss topics that cut to the very core of our Jewish sense of self. Our tactic is dialogue — rich conversation of differing positions presented in an honest, respectful, and purposeful way. We cover topics as diverse as the politics of gender; trends in new Jewish social and political involvement; questions of culture and personal identity; ritual innovations; and new readings of ancient texts.

Applicants should be graduate-level students in fields of Jewish studies, reside in the Boston area, and be able to make at least a one-year commitment to the program. Please send information before June 15 about yourself to:

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Email: jflsusan@aol.com

Notification of acceptance will be sent in early August, and the program will begin in October, 1999.

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