The Jewish Agency for Israel presents
GLOBAL JEWISH FORUM V
MOVING ISRAEL EDUCATION

Source Book
- for educational use only -
Welcome to the Global Jewish Forum V

- Moving beyond the communal headlines to examine the deep issues that drive them.
- International Jewish leaders deliberately not taking decisions, but together deciding to deliberate.
- Young committed adults sit around the table with institutional leaders, sharing perspectives and gaining understanding.

– Moving Israel Education -
  What is Israel Education for? What are we trying to do?

Throughout the Jewish world millions of dollars, pounds, pesos and shekels have been spent on innovating, rethinking, reshaping and reimagining Israel Education. Have we made progress? Are we closer to where we wanted to reach?

Some will say that we are doing just fine, others will say we are on the edge of catastrophe. Some decry Israeli policies that alienate the learner, while others blame the rootlessness of the learner, and still others bemoan intermarriage or the weakness of Hebrew teaching.

This plethora of voices seem to confirm what we have known for some time: Israel Education in the Jewish world is a hugely complex enterprise.

At this, our fifth Global Jewish Forum, we would like to explore whether we are succeeding in addressing this complexity. With the help of the groundbreaking research of Dr Alex Pomson in North America and Australia, we will find out about what our young people are really learning from what we think we are teaching. Then we will ask ourselves the question: Is there a formula for teaching about a complex Israel in a complex world?

Looking forward to a fruitful morning of learning and dialogue!

Makom Team
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Global Jewish Forum V

Moving Israel Education

November 10th, 2013 / 7 Kislev, 5774

Opening: Kathy Manning, member of the Makom Committee, and immediate past Chair of the Board of Jewish Federations of North America

The Makom Matrix of Israel Engagement

Dr. Alex Pomson: What’s going on with our kids?

Videos and small group discussions

Latest research findings

Break

Robbie Gringras “It’s more complicated than that.”

Open Salon conversation moderated by Yonatan Ariel

- Dr Zohar Raviv, International VP for Education Birthright Taglit
- Simon Klarfeld, Director of Young Judea
- Sarah Tuttle-Singer, Social Media Editor, Times of Israel
- Dyonna Ginsberg, Director of Service Learning, Jewish Agency for Israel.

Natan Sharansky – Closing remarks
Some numbers...

Every year
there are 2,000 young people on short Israel programs.
10,000 are on youth programs in Israel of over three weeks
45,000 are on Taglit-Birthright
11,000 are on Masa
500 are Onward Israel
1,500 are on other programs in Israel

The Jewish Agency sends altogether 1,800 shlichim around the world
There are over 1,400 Jewish schools throughout the Diaspora, with
500 of them twinned to schools in Israel
There are over 600 JCCs in the Diaspora.

The Diaspora is home to 200,000 College Jewish students around the world, 80% of whom are at 150 campuses.
The Five-fold Approach

Elephants in the Room
We must engage with what is burning inside the participants. If we marginalize the Israel-related issues that are of central concern to our participants, then we risk marginalizing Israel for them. This approach requires courage, honesty, and optimism.

Local vistas
No one size fits all. Every country, and every community within every country, has its own cultural assumptions which influence the ways they may engage with Israel. These must be addressed and incorporated into the programming.

Multi-vocality
We do not believe in presenting both sides, we believe in presenting many sides. One’s understanding of issues will always be strengthened when placed in dialogue with different understandings. Yet the need to present a multi-vocal Israel is not just a matter of educational technique: It is a much truer representation of Israel’s complex nature.

A Jewish conversation
When engaging with modern-day Israel we must draw on and refer to otherwise Jews and their writings throughout the generations. In this way we place Israel in the context of Jewish civilization, and ensure that Israel will not be an optional add-on, but rather a central element of our Jewish lives.

Bettering, not battering
It is this final andragogy that we see as crucial. Programming must point to opportunities for the participant to make a difference. It can never be enough to intelligently learn of Israel’s flaws without being introduced to those organizations and people who strive to fix them. We suggest that the successful engagement with Israel leads people to slip off the fence and take a stand to work at bettering, not battering Israel.
The Makom matrix

The Makom Matrix\(^1\) was born out of a recognition that “loving Israel” is not sustainable without knowledge, and that “knowing about” Israel is insufficient without personal connection.

Up until recently Israel education has been judged on a sliding scale of connection. How far “inside” the Israel discourse have we brought the learners? The further “inside” the learners, the more affection there is for Israel, and the more Israel is a component part of the learners’ Jewish identity. Israel is, in this sense, inside them. By contrast to be on the outside could be compared with the wicked son in the Haggada on Seder night. Someone on the “outside” would place him/herself on the outside of the Israel discourse, talking of Israelis and Israeli concerns in the third person plural, rather than the first.

In this understanding of Israel Education, success would be defined by how far students move from right (“outside”) to left (inside).

Outside  

\[ \rightleftharpoons \]

Inside

We at MAKOM propose the addition of a second axis referring to knowledge – a high-resolution or low-resolution view of Israel, in order to allow us to gauge a careful combination between knowledge and connection.

In this measure, “Low-resolution” would suggest that green is green. “High-resolution” on the other hand, allows for green to break down into its component parts and become blue and yellow. And Hamas. And Environmental Issues. And Egged buses. And Maccabi Haifa soccer club. And and… The higher the resolution, the more knowledge, detail and nuance we are able to access.

\(^1\)Developed collaboratively by Esti Moskovitz-Kalman, Robbie Gringras and Dr. Alex Sinclair at the Makom Lab
In the early days of the State, the appropriate goal of Israel education was to bring learners into the bottom right-hand quadrant. The broad picture was clear and demanding: We needed to establish a State. Instinctive commitment was the order of the day, and nuances were not as important.

We believe that in order to engage with Israel and to commit to Israel these days, the learner must be familiar and comfortable with complexity. Hence the current aim for Israel education must be for us to bring learners in to the top right-hand quadrant.

The **bottom right-hand quadrant** is where hugging takes place; of giving love and support to Israel. The **top right-hand quadrant** is the place for both hugging and wrestling. Those who live in the **bottom right-hand quadrant** understanding that Zionism is about living as a Free Jewish People in our Land. But they also believe that these three values, Freedom, Jewish Peoplehood, and Our Land, coexist in perfect harmony. In the **top right-hand quadrant**, we also affirm that Zionism is about living as a Free Jewish People in our Land, but we acknowledge that there are often tensions and conflicts between these values!

**How to apply the matrix to your work**

Where would you situate yourself on the matrix? Where would you place your students on this matrix? Where would you like to bring them?

If for example you situate your learners in the **bottom right-hand quadrant**, (emotionally committed to Israel, but lacking detail and nuance), then you might aim to bring them upwards into the **top right-hand quadrant**, to combine their affection with knowledge. If you were to place your learners in the top-right hand quadrant, judging that they have a great deal of knowledge about aspects of Israel but no affection or identification, then the work would be to find intelligent ways of inviting them “inside”, moving towards the top right quadrant.

So far so straightforward. The questions arise those we might locate in the **bottom left-hand quadrant**. How might we bring this learner into the top right quadrant? A traditional approach would suggest we need first to bring students inside at the “low-res”, and then take them up into a “high-res” connection with Israel. “First get them to
fall in love, and only then raise the resolution”. We would suggest that there is a flaw in this “right-angled vector”, and that we should aim for a more diagonal, spiraling vector that develops the learners’ capacity for complexity as an integral part of getting to know Israel.

**Using the Matrix as a getting-to-know-you tool**

Present the Matrix on a whiteboard, and then invite people to draw a line on the Matrix tracing the development of their connection to Israel.

“I was born in a Zionistic community that taught Modern Hebrew in kindergarten [bottom-right], then I went to a Zionist youth movement [line moves gradually upwards] then Rabin was assassinated and I was devastated and disillusioned [line swerves to the left], and then I went on Masa [line travels diagonally upwards and to the right]”

“I was born in a town far from any Jews, with very little connection to Israel [bottom left], then I got to New York and started learning about Judaism [line moves to the right and slightly higher]. Then I went to study at Pardes and fell in love with Israel and everything about it [line moves sharply upwards and slightly to the right] – and then I learned that according to this country I am not officially Jewish and I just want to go home [line shifts dramatically to the left, and higher].

In this way the Matrix points to an overall aim of our work, offers a tool to map the parameters of success, and a method for discussion Israel connection.
The “Hatikvah” Vision

לחיות עם חופש ובארץ

To be a Free People In Our Land

We would suggest that a framing understanding of what Israel means to the Jewish People, boils down to four values as expressed in the penultimate line of Israel’s National Anthem. An exploration of the four elements might be at the heart of every Israel Engagement curriculum, the theme of Yom Ha’atzmaut celebrations, and the basis on which a ‘broad tent’ of Israel advocacy might be built.

לחיות - To be - The way in which the creation of the State of Israel served and serves the survival or the Jewish people. To be in the sense of ‘exist’. It would likewise explore the idea of ‘normality’ that Israel was expected to engender. To be in the sense of ‘let it be’…

עם - People - The way in which Israel is connected to the Jewish People culturally, historically, religiously. Where Israel expresses its connection to the Jewish world and its meaning. At the same time this sub-theme would address the nature of Jewish collectivity.

חופש - Free - The nature of freedom as embodied in the creation of the State. Not simply the freedom of Pesach, which celebrates a freedom from suffering and persecution, but also the very particular form of freedom that Statehood has brought: the freedom to take responsibility for oneself, the freedom to grant or refuse freedoms to others. Freedom would also refer to the freedom to create, to innovate, and to renew.

בארץ - In our land - The specificity of the land of Israel as a geographical, political, and historical entity with deep significance to the Jewish People. This sub-theme would also address the question of ownership: the proof of ownership and the expectations and responsibility of ‘owners’.

Were we to remove the word People –עם – from this phrase, we would be left with what was the Meretz slogan in favor of the Gay Pride March in Jerusalem 2006. “To be free in our land” is a worthy aspiration that pays no heed to a shared Jewish collective. Were
we to remove the word Free –掮ף – “To be in our land” we might sum up the cultural non-military approach of R. Yochanan ben Zachai, establishing Roman protection of Yavneh’s scholars. And removal of In Our Land – coppia – “To be free” would leave our theme with no reference to Israel!

To our mind, the other advantage of this four-point organizing theme is that it can give respect to unresolved questions and concerns. To what extent Israel has ensured the continued survival of the Jewish People (יהודי), how far Israel has strayed from or developed its culture (שעון), whether Israelis take full responsibility for their collective and individual actions (שׁוֹחֵן), and a Diaspora Jew’s connection to the land (כארץ) – all these are issues that can be aired and housed within this overall structure.

This four-point set of principles can also offer us an effective pathway into rejoicing, reflecting, and defending Israel. For no matter how one chooses to define our current situation, the Jewish People is closer to normality and more equipped to survive and fend for itself than it was before 1948 (ח糧), is more capable of acting as a collective (שעון), more free than ever in history (שׁוֹחֵן), and living in the land of our forefathers (כארץ). Looking at Israel through these principles, we can find reason for joy as well as reflection.

What does Lihiyot Am Chofshi b’Artzenu mean to you? We offer five different answers. You can find four of the answers below: The fifth you will have to provide yourself!

a. The New Exodus – Rabbi Irving ‘Yitz’ Greenberg

The creation of the state was an act of redemption of biblical stature. The numbers of Jews involved… dwarf in their total, the number who were redeemed from Egypt. The sweep from the degradation of slavery in Egypt to the heights of Sinai and the Promised Land had a shorter arc than the swing from the depths of Auschwitz to the heights of Jerusalem. If ever such a swing were necessary to reassert the claim that history is the scene where God’s love and redemption is manifest, it was in the 1940s, after Auschwitz. The redemption then was nothing less than a renewed witness in a world where all transcendence seemed to have collapsed.
In the case of the State of Israel… the human role in redemption is dominant and self-assertive… In this new era, God becomes even more hidden, the circumstances of redemption even more ambiguous. This ambiguity serves a twofold function: It allows those who prefer to interpret the activity as purely secular to do so, and it permits the religious soul to recognize the divine role out of mature understanding, and free will rather than out of “coerced” yielding to divine force majeure…

The State of Israel was designed to place power in the hands of Jews to shape their own destiny and to affect or even control the lives of others. Creating the state meant that Jews took on major responsibility for saving their own lives… Taking power and the costs of power in human lives and resources have become central concerns of the Jewish people. Inescapably, Jewish hands become dirtied with blood and guilt as they operate in the real world. The classic Jewish self-image – the innocent, sinned-against sufferer whose moral superiority sustained self-respect – is being tested and eroded. Ethical muscles not flexed for centuries are now used; sometimes they are stiff and sore…

It is a basic measure of human dignity that my life is not cheap, that I chose for whom it shall be given, that my family, not my enemies, inherit me. Thus, the power created by the state upholds the covenantal statement of human dignity and the sacredness of life. The assumption of power – and therefore support of the State of Israel – has become central to Jewish life everywhere… After two decades of living vicariously through Israel, American Jewish came to see that they must also take responsibility for Jewish power. As a result, they and other Jews of the world have arrayed themselves for political activity and to influence the foreign policies of their national states in support of Israel. Thus, Galut Judaism is coming to an end – even in Galut!

The Jewish Way, Rabbi Irving Greenberg

b. Purpose and Continuity, not Survival – Rabbi Dow Marmur

The conventional view of contemporary Jewish history sees the Holocaust as a prelude to the creation of the State of Israel. This is the myth of Holocaust and redemption… When United Jewish Appeal missions stop in Auschwitz on their way to Israel and the
March of the Living takes Jewish children to Poland for Yom Ha’Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, and then on to Israel for Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israel Independence Day, the message is that the Holocaust is a prelude to Israel and that the two must be understood together.

By contrast, I believe that the Holocaust is the last and most gruesome manifestation of the old paradigm, the one that left Jews to the mercy of others. I view Israel as the celebration of the new paradigm, the one that enables Jews to have as much say in their own destiny as any other free people. The conventional view regards Israel as a potential victim and equates anti-Zionism with the old anti-Semitism. My approach celebrates Israel as the victor and views Zionism as the liberation movement of the Jewish people. This means the Holocaust and Israel belong to different categories.

... the old paradigm is dead and the return to the land, as formulated by Zionism, is the new paradigm. The difference between the two approaches is fundamental. To view the Holocaust as a prelude to Israel leads to a very different perception of the Jewish state... The former sees Israel as a refuge for persecuted Jews and an avenue of escape in case life becomes difficult in the Diaspora. The latter sees the land of Israel as a place where the Jewish people, at last, can testify to the Jewish faith — just as the Bible has charged us to do, and as we have been unable to do because we have been persecuted. It is the difference between a Judaism based on survival and a Judaism based on purpose and continuity.

From Judaism after the Holocaust, 1994
http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?id=822

c. America the Promised Land – Rabbi Jacob Neusner

If ever there was a Promised Land, we Jewish Americans are living in it. Here Jews have flourished, not alone in politics and the economy, but in matters of art, culture, and learning. Jews feel safe and secure here in ways that they do not and cannot in the State of Israel. And they have found an authentically Jewish voice – their own voice – for their vision of themselves...
America, the freest and most open society Jews have ever known, is not only good for the Jews, but better, for the Jews, than the State of Israel... Zionism promised that the Jewish State would be a spiritual center for the Jewish people. But today, in all the Jewish world, who... reads an Israeli book, or looks at an Israeli painting, or goes to an Israeli play, or listens to Israeli music? Israel is a client state... the State of Israel depends upon a generous America. That’s perfectly natural in a world divided between the superpowers. But it does not add up to independence... Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist as well as Orthodox Jews enjoy religious equality in America, but not in the State of Israel... non-Orthodox Judaisms dominate world Jewry, but the State of Israel treats them as heresies...

Jacob Neusner, Is America the Promised Land for the Jews?

In the final pages of her book, The People on the Street, British-Jewish writer Linda Grant, writes of her grandparents who emigrated to England from Lomza in Poland, and of her friend Samir el Youssef whose parents fled to a Lebanese refugee camp from the Arab village of Bassa in 1948. This section begins after visiting, with Samir, the site of the ruins of Bassa in Northern Israel:

d. I saw us all – Linda Grant

Samir had told me a little story as we walked through the streets of Jerusalem, about how, in his twenties, he had read a novel by Aharon Appelfeld, back in the days when the Palestinian national movement was reading Israeli writing as police readers... to take precious quotes as weapons in its struggle.

The novel was about two boys running through Nazi Europe, escaping for their lives, and at the end of the novel they escape, they board a boat for Palestine. ‘And I was relieved. And then I thought, how can you be relieved? They’re coming to steal your country!’ This little anecdote, about literature, about its subversive power of empathy, about how listening to the story of the other has its own power, is what remains.

The Zionists made something, they made a country and a story. Everything exists for
better or worse, but everything exists, the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai wrote. It exists, that Israel, it cannot be undone. The village of Bassa no longer exists, it can no more be resurrected than the Jewish life of Lomza. Still, the story of both these places continues, stubbornly persisting, winding through the decades.

We drove back to Tel Aviv. Everything looked different. The night air blew in from the sea. The people walking through the streets, along Ben Yehuda, past the Supersol, the synagogue, Café Mapu, the silversmiths, the falafel café, the convenience stores – all looked more real than they had ever done before, more complicated, more interesting, more human. More frail and more tough, more of everything they were already, and even less capable of being the receptacles for slogans.

I saw my parents there, walking arm in arm, along the beach-front lights. I saw Samir’s grandparents alighting from the bus that brought them south from Bassa. I saw Jaffa, I saw Jonah washed up on its shore from the whale’s belly. I saw us all. And I know I was among people who are not so pleasant and whom suffering has not improved. To love them is no easy thing, and so I thought that this is where I belonged, as a person who has come to understand that to love is not a sentimental matter. Love is pain and loss. It must end in grief and mourning because we will close our eyes one day and our beloved will vanish for all eternity.

But only in this city does life for me exist in each of its three dimensions, our human tragedy with all its comic elements. And still it does.

The People on the Streets, Linda Grant 2006
The Core Jewish Values

that drive The Jewish Agency’s work

Bein Adam l’Chevrato – Between a Jew and his society

The shared responsibility and concern for others was and is an inseparable part of the ethos of the Jewish People, integral to both the world of values and the orientation of Jewish civilization. From this perspective, Judaism is not a heritage that aims to cultivate individualism, but a heritage with a collective orientation that is focused, with genuine concern, on the “Other,” instituting social solidarity as a fundamental principle. The great Jewish thinkers, beginning with Rabbi Akiva in the Talmud, through recent scholars like Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, expanded on this topic, emphasizing the point that every person was created in the image of God, and is therefore challenged with responsibility to help others by virtue of each person’s very humanity. Throughout history, depending on the era and living conditions of the Jews, different definitions were employed to determine who was a member of the circle of Jewish social concern. When the Jews were persecuted and oppressed, the hostile host societies were excluded from the circle that benefitted from the Jewish sense of communal responsibility. Today’s social context, when we see how many nations offer freedom and protect the humanity of their residents, we find that Jewish social experience is enmeshed in general society in a manner that creates mutual responsibility for the surrounding public.

Bein Adam L’Morashto – Between a Jew and his heritage

The Jewish People, as a collective, has existed for more than 5,000 years. Throughout history, the Jews shaped their lives in accord with their shared heritage, both as individuals and as a group. So too, they contributed to the development and preservation of the vitality of Jewish traditions, continuing to create culture, language, and religion. From these, they developed stories, customs, ceremonies, and law that fashioned common memories and a general orientation to the world. Indeed, it is hard to speak about the concept “Judaism” without relating to cultural heritage. This heritage
is the essence of our collective identity, and the glue that has strengthened us as a People throughout history, even as many nations, civilizations and mighty empires, rose and fell. A great strength of this heritage is its adaptability to the changing needs of Jews through different eras and in varied contexts. Jewish heritage provided the glue to keep the community together.

**Bein Adam L’Artzo - Between a Jew and her Land of Israel**

We face challenges regarding the Land and its value. Two of the most dramatic events in the Jewish People’s narrative, the Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah, did not take place in the Land of Israel. Moreover, for nearly two-thousand years, most of the Jewish People did not live in the Land, nor did they even merit a visit. Thus, the weight of the connection to the Land, whether at the individual or collective level is diminished and weakened. This gave rise to George Steiner’s notion that “our homeland is the text”. And we have the challenge of bringing the idea of a “national house on the earth of the Land of Israel, for the People of Israel” to people who have, over generations, become accustomed to landlessness.

The Land of Israel is the remarkable ground of the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish People. Some too regard Israel as the Promised Land, pledged by God.Either way, the Jewish People developed a unique and powerful connection to this Land, beginning with the first journey of Abraham and Sarah. This connection continued throughout Jewish history, even when there was minor physical presence of the nation in the Land. According to Jewish collective memory, the geographical space of Israel is where the transformative political and religious experiences of the People took place for the People, as a People.

A sense of Hibat Zion – the Love of Zion – permeated our customs and teachings, which in time gave birth to modern Zionism. Moreover, in a global era human migration is valued, and in a “post-nationalistic” time the weakening connections between individuals and place, remove the significance of distinct geographical identities. Yet in “green” local consciousness, the values of
sustainability oppose transporting people, food, and other products to the detriment of the environment.

One result of the many years of Israeli-Arab conflict is the divisiveness it has caused among the Jewish People. Whether in the Land of Israel, or in the Diaspora, people ask penetrating questions regarding the very legitimacy of the Jewish People’s dwelling in the Land. All of these factors complicate the relationship of Jews to the Land.

**Bein Adam L’Amo - Between a Jew and her People**

Among the concepts that are available to describe the Jewish collective, none is more accurate than this: a people – the Jewish People. Yet in our era, each person has many identities and the definitions of each are voluntary, not mandatory, and very fluid. It is virtually impossible to speak of foundational content and specified behaviors for defining Jews. It is also very difficult to identify what we, as Jews, have in common. It is because of this challenge that the strongest concept for us to connect to this collective is “Peoplehood.” We are a group of individuals with a common past, and shared aspects to our fate (and of course, those in the process of conversion are individuals who intentionally join Jewish history and destiny).
The Core Jewish Values that drive our Work

Between me and my Land
B'lah Yisrael
Engaging with the land and the state of Israel

Between me and my Heritage
El Yisrael
Embracing Jewish Civilization as a source of inspiration, ideals and values

Between me and my People
El Yisrael
Caring for Jews around the world

Between me and my Society
El Yisrael
Sharing responsibility for our collective wellbeing
Written in response to the play by Caryl Churchill, “Seven Jewish Children”.

First presented at Theater, DCJCC.

The Eighth Jewish Child

Tell her that it’s more complicated than that.

Tell her that we love Israel.

Tell her that we hate Israel.

Tell her that Israel is in our veins, like oxygen, like a virus, like an antibody.

Tell her that to be Jewish is far more than watching the news and looking for balance, and far more than being a Zionist, and far more than just praying to God.

Tell her that Zionism isn’t a dirty word like racism. Zionism is a complicated word with good intentions and ambiguous results, like idealism.

Tell her that everyone is a human being, everyone is their own story, and everyone you meet is a potential friend however different they may discover you are.

Tell her that everyone is a potential enemy because they fear your difference, because they fear your memory, because they fear the Muslims, because they fear.

Don’t tell her that.

Don’t mention Muslims. Don’t mention anti-Semites. Don’t mention the Holocaust. Don’t mention Gaza. At least not in the same sentence.

Tell her that to be Jewish must be more than only listening for tears, it has to be about striving for justice.

Tell her that she can be Jewish anywhere in the world, but that Israel will come with her. Israel is the biggest project that the Jewish world has taken on in the last few thousand years, and it needs all the help it can get, even when it says it doesn’t. Sometimes helping Israel will mean backing its actions, sometimes helping Israel will mean protesting them.

Tell her to say what she thinks about Israel wherever and whenever she wants to. Tell her not to worry about giving ammunition to our enemies, because they create their own ammunition. They do fine without needing ours.

Tell her that those who don’t like us will always pretend to understand us.

We don’t even understand us.
And we would never dare write a 10-minute play about it.
Tell her it’s much more complicated than that.

© Robbie Gringras
“Why Israel?” Re-Viewing Israel Education Through the Lenses of Civic and Political Engagement

ALEX POMSON AND DANIEL HELD

This article takes up categories from literature on political and civic engagement to help make sense of data collected from interviews with 40 American Jewish day high school students about what they think and feel about Israel. Viewed through a set of lenses that distinguish between the manifestations and motivations of political and civic engagement, the article helps clarify why young Jews, even when actively and positively engaged with Israel, are uncomfortable labeling themselves as Zionists. The analysis points to an important distinction between the concepts of Israel as “home” and “homeland.” The article also raises important questions about what is presumed to be an increasing distance or alienation from Israel among young American Jews.

In recent years, the term Israel engagement has become a catch-all construct applied to almost every new initiative to teach about, connect to, and advocate for Israel. Dozens of programs and organizations have been launched promising to deliver an experience or outcome described as “Israel engagement.”

The promiscuous use of this term constitutes both a problem and an opportunity. On the one hand, it is possible that the construct has become so widely used that it is

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3 A sample of the wide variety of initiatives that all promise Israel engagement includes: The Hartman Institute’s “iegage” initiative; MAKOM – the Israel engagement network of the Jewish Agency; Hillel’s Centre for Israel Engagement; Legacy Heritage Fund’s Israel Engagement Innovation Project; the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life exploration of “Israel engagement beyond hasbarah”; Makom ba-Galil’s construction of Israel engagement; PEJE’s Israel Engagement Community of Practice; Jewish Federation of Dallas’s “Israel @ the Center”; the iCenter’s “Project InCITE”; and initiatives in any number of schools and synagogues across North America.
close to meaningless. Like other overused terms like “curriculum integration,” “student growth,” and “menschlichkeit,” it refers to a set of practices or outcomes to which so many lay claim that it is hard to know what it can sensibly indicate other than that a set of activities is valued. On the other hand, conceiving of Israel education as the work of cultivating “engagement” provides an opportunity to break out of what until now has been a highly insular conversation about Israel education and to study its practices in ways that are informed by other educational fields also concerned with the task of engaging youth.

It is this second, constructive, possibility that we attempt to advance with this article. We take up categories from literature on political and civic engagement to help make sense of data collected from interviews with American Jewish day high school students about what they think and feel about Israel. Viewed through a set of lenses that distinguishes between the manifestations and motivations of political and civic engagement, how these young people talk about Israel and what connects them to it acquires new substance and nuance.4

CONCEPTUALIZING POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – MOTIVATIONS NOT MANIFESTATIONS

Much like the field of Israel engagement, interest in how to cultivate political and civic engagement in American youth has been inspired by widespread anxiety. In this instance, anxiety has been caused by declining rates of participation in public life among successive generations of young people and, especially, in traditional forms of political participation, the most visible symptom of which has been declining turn-out in national elections. These anxieties have led a multitude of foundations and public agencies to launch experiments—in schools and universities—that, in the words of one of the most prominent programs, seek to prepare students for responsible democratic participation and to help them become more fully engaged in political life (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2010). The particulars of these experiments are less important for our concerns than the theory-building work that lies behind them and that brings greater precision to conceptions of engagement and its motivations.

Seeking, for example, to get clear what they meant by engagement, Sherrod, Torney-Purta, and Flanagan (2010) launched the publication of the Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth by defining engagement in terms of, what the authors called, “manifestations.” These manifestations included: political involvement or civic activity; concern for others and tolerance; and allegiance, attachment, or membership (pp. 6–8). This typology of manifestations involved a reconceptualization of Flanagan’s own earlier work (in Flanagan & Faison, 2001) in which she employed a

4 We are aware, also, that by viewing Israel engagement in these terms, we point to a more fundamental question of whether it might be fertile to conceive Israel education in the diaspora as a form of Jewish civic education. That is a question we intend to explore in a further article.
more conventional distinction between civic knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. In her earlier work, the forms of engagement she identified were: civic literacy — knowledge of community affairs and political issues; civic attachment — a feeling or belief that the individual matters; and civic skills — competencies in achieving group goals.

In designing a national study of public engagement among youth — the National Civic Engagement Survey (NCES) — Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli Carpini (2006) also focused on manifestations, but they introduced some additional distinctions in to their conceptual framework. Drawing on the work of Brady (1999), Putnam (2000), and Verba and Nie (1972), they distinguished between four “forms” of engagement — the first two of which gave expression to motivations for engagement, and that also distinguished between their political or civic content, while the latter two more closely resembled Sherrod et al.’s (2010) manifestations. Structuring their research instrument were four “forms”:

- Political engagement — activity aimed at influencing government policy or affecting the selection of public officials;
- Civic engagement — participation aimed at achieving a public good, usually through direct hands-on work in cooperation with others;
- Public voice — the ways citizens give expression to their views on public issues . . . through such activities as signing petitions, engaging in email campaigns, writing letters to the editor; and
- Cognitive engagement — paying attention to politics and public affairs, through activities such as following the news in the papers, and talking about politics with friends and family (pp. 51–54).

In his 2006 study of Why We Vote, David Campbell distanced himself still further from analyzing engagement in relation to its manifestations or expressions; this, he explained, was because of the confusing way in which different motivations can lead to the same public activity (pp. 3–5).

Probing the underlying forces behind what brings people to vote, Campbell mined a long tradition of scholarship and political theory, that runs through Verba and Nie’s (1972) book, Participation in America, back to James Madison’s characterization of political participation as “protecting one’s interest” and Alexis de Tocqueville’s depiction of civic participation as driven by “fulfilling one’s duty.” Exploring anew this well-trodden conceptual path, Campbell distinguished between what he called “politically motivated public engagement” — public activity motivated by instrumental considerations, and “civically motivated public engagement” — public activity motivated by a sense of duty regardless of the outcomes. This distinction allowed him to develop what he called a “dual motivations theory” of public engagement that in turn promised an increase in voter turnout as a result of investing in the civic commitments and behaviors of adolescents.
Colby et al. (2010) ground their argument for “preparing undergraduates for responsible political engagement” in categorical assumptions that are similar to Campbell’s even if their conclusions are radically different: They are doubtful that investment in civic (or nonpolitical) engagement can guarantee political participation. As a starting point they also make clear that they are concerned with motivations rather than manifestations.

As they explain:

Although the political realm can be described by characteristic features, including particular contexts . . . activities . . . or targets of action . . . the core meaning of the term political is not ultimately derived from its association with any finite set of domains, undertakings, or focal points. (p.31)

In the terms we used above, we might say that for them the political is not defined in relation to a particular set of manifestations. They continue:

Rather, the defining feature—what makes a given activity political—rests on the political nature of the goals or intentions [emphasis added] animating the activity: goals connected to individual and group values, power, and choice or agency, and the desire to sustain or change the shared values, practices, and policies that shape collective life. (pp. 31–32)

Colby and her colleagues (2010) employ a much broader definition of what constitutes political motivation than that at the heart of Campbell’s (2006) work, which is concerned with the specific instrumental goal of pursuing political interests in the electoral arena. Thus, by way of example, they characterize as political an instance where young people greet patrons at a cinema or theatre with brochures about changes they can make in their homes to reduce global warming; an action intended directly to change other people’s behavior (p. 35).

This example presumes a much broader concept of the political than one tied to the outcomes of representational democracy. In functional terms, however, their work proceeds from a similar interpretative starting point as Campbell’s: an assumption that in order to distinguish between different forms of engagement and what might bring about the enactment of those forms we have to get clear the different impulses that motivate them; less the expressions they take. Both authors agree, however, that it is inefficient to broaden the forms of public engagement—the opportunities for individuals to participate in activities that have an effect beyond themselves and the people beyond their immediate sphere of influence—without getting clear the different motivations that might in the first place bring people to participate in those activities.
WHAT MOTIVATES ISRAEL ENGAGEMENT?

A similar argument about inefficient investment can be made in relation to the field of Israel education. As anxiety about the greater distance between American youth and Israel has intensified so have efforts to increase or diversify the range of opportunities for young people to experience Israel, connect with it, and learn about it. It is presumed that the more points of contact there are between Israel and the lives of young American Jews, the deeper will be their understanding of and connection to the Jewish state. Unquestionably, this profusion of activity represents an unprecedented investment in the forms or manifestations of Israel engagement. But ultimately we wonder whether this investment is not well enough focused without sufficient attention to the motivations that these activities stimulate and from which they are presumed to derive. Given the repeated flaring of controversy about whether (young) American Jews are (increasingly) disillusioned/alienated by Israel’s politics or whether they are growing apart from Israel because of the changing demographics of the American Jewish community, it is worth asking, for example, whether these manifestations are conceived to spring from a desire to advance or defend a particular set of shared interests (a political motivation) or from a sense of duty and shared responsibility (a civic motivation). Greater clarity about these intentions will better illuminate whether programs indeed address the shifting values and concerns of young adult American Jews and whether or not program goals are appropriately focused.

In an earlier work of ours, we took more interest in the manifestations than the motivations of Israel engagement (Pomson & Deitcher, 2010). Analyzing Israel education in day schools, one of us directly connected what were called the “outcomes of Israel engagement” with the programmatic vehicles that produced them, urging the more efficient and coherent deployment of the vehicles of Israel education. As Sherod et al. (2010) did when framing the Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement, our earlier work employed a conventional set of categories so as to bring order to a congested field by distinguishing between the outcomes of Israel education in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Distinguishing between the manifestations of Israel education in this way, we thereby highlighted the heavy emphasis on attitudinal outcomes in the day school context.

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5 This assumption is a consistent thread connecting a number of the articles in a special issue on “Israel Engagement Beyond Hasbarah” in the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life’s journal, Contact: http://www.jewishlife.org/pdf/autumn_2011.pdf
6 While we have been collecting and processing the data for this article, two such controversies have included the debate triggered by Peter Beinart’s (2010) New York Review of Books essay about the death of Zionist feeling among young liberal American Jews, and subsequent responses to it (http://blogs.jta.org/politics/article/2010/05/24/2739289/responding-to-beinart); and in a more scholarly tone, the debate collected in Contemporary Jewry surrounding Cohen and Kelman’s (2007) so called “distancing hypothesis” (http://contemporaryjewry.org/24.html).
While drawing attention to an imbalance in the outcomes that schools aspired to produce, we overlooked the kinds of motivations that schools sought to cultivate so as to produce these valued outcomes. To put it differently, we didn’t ask what particular motivations schools presumed they were cultivating in students in order that they be cognitively, attitudinally, or behaviorally engaged with Israel. To take an example, our work called attention to whether, for instance, schools are focused on providing students with opportunities: to study how water shortages in Israel effect the quality of life in the country and Israel’s relationships with its neighbors (a cognitive outcome); to be concerned about the water level in the Kinneret just as many Israelis are (an attitudinal outcome); or to raise funds for organizations like the JNF that are involved in improving Israel’s environmental situation (a behavioral outcome). We expressed disappointment that the energies and resources of schools were primarily invested in attitudinal outcomes, less frequently in behavioral outcomes, and even more rarely in cognitive outcomes (a critique that we still think is important!). But following Campbell (2006), on the one hand, and Colby et al. (2010), on the other, we can see that in the long-run what kinds of outcomes schools cultivate is less significant than whether they aspire to deepen students’ concern for and knowledge about the State of Israel’s stability and safety (a political concern) or their concern with the welfare of Israelis (a civic concern). The specific tasks in which students are called to engage are ultimately less important than the reasons schools communicate about why students should engage in these tasks—or why, to put it bluntly, Israel should matter to them. It is these motivations that are potentially of importance long after a specific program is concluded whatever its specific form.

In a study of education about Israel in North American community day schools, Kopelowitz (2005) moved toward a similar conclusion. He developed an analysis that employed a distinction between what he called “two basic types of Israel engagement—symbolic and social.” He explained:

Symbolic engagement uses the link to Israel as a means to define the school as a Jewish institution and create a sense of “Jewish transcendence” in that the students in the school will feel that they are part of the larger Jewish People. In contrast, social engagement goes beyond the symbolic level and encourages students to form an ongoing relationship and commitment to Israelis and Israel. (p. 1)

Employing a survey of how Israel is manifest in the physical environment, ceremonies, and programs of schools, Kopelowitz drew out what schools seem to indicate to their students about, what he called, “why Israel.” In this respect, his conceptual framework mirrors that of Zukin et al. (2006) in their weaving of manifestations and motivations of engagement in order to develop a broader picture of public political and civic engagement.
Kopelowitz’s (2005) categories of symbolic and social engagement do not map directly onto the categories of the political and civic that we have been using (one can imagine, for example, how symbolic engagement can nurture political and/or civic outcomes; and how, conversely, civically motivated engagement may be expressed in symbolic or social forms). One can also question more fundamentally Kopelowitz’s assumption that the form taken by a manifestation of Israel engagement implies a particular motivation (how might one categorize, for example, a visit to school by a group of Israeli soldiers; as social or symbolic?). However, his move toward uncovering the motivations that schools attempt to cultivate in their students is persuasive. Ultimately, it is these motivations—or what students in fact end up learning from their schools about “why Israel”—that will shape their cognition, attitudes, and behavior in other contexts.

Our interest in the motivations for Israel engagement that schools seek to cultivate, and, in turn, in what actually motivates students to engage with Israel, has encouraged us to look anew at data we collected during the course of a study concerned with understanding how Jewish high school students think and feel about Israel, and what they say has been the role of their schools in shaping their thoughts and feelings. The study was conceived as complementing our earlier work so to explore the impact of the various vehicles of Israel education we had previously identified (Pomson, Deitcher, & Muszkat-Barkan, 2009). Here, in the remainder of this article, we take up Campbell’s (2006) distinction between civically motivated and politically motivated public engagement, so as to probe the extent to which there is a gap between how, on the one hand, young people conceive of the grounds for engaging with Israel, and, on the other, what they perceive as the grounds on which their teachers make a case for engaging with Israel. To adapt Kopelowitz’s (2005) language, we thus turn our attention with this article to making better sense of what students think about “why Israel.”

**METHODOLOGY**

The 40 interviewees in this study came from four schools identified as representing the range of modern Orthodox and liberal high schools in North America in which it is estimated more than 12,000 students are enrolled (Schick, 2009). The four schools from which students were drawn were carefully sampled. Including Jewish high schools from different regions of the country and Jewish communities of different size, the schools represent different parts of the modern-Orthodox and community day school spectrums so as to reflect the various educational currents within these networks. The four schools, two of which were K-12 schools and two stand-alone high schools, included a community day school on the west coast (“Community”); a modern Orthodox day school in the mid-west (“Kook”); a community day school on the east
coast [“Kehilati”]; and a modern Orthodox day school on the east coast [“Soloveitchik”].

The interviewees from these four schools were all 11th graders and were selected through careful consultation with educators so as to represent the mix of students in their school. Students were identified who could be articulate when interviewed and who would not simply be “poster-children” for their institutions. We were interested in hearing the widest range of opinion in each institution. Students were asked to participate in a project interested in hearing what “young people think and feel about Israel.” They were under no obligation to participate.

An extensive literature makes apparent that there are special difficulties in conducting research with adolescents. These include the problems of developing a “joint culture of communication,” building a basic rapport between researcher and subject, and minimizing the power imbalances between interviewer and interviewee (Christensen, 2004; Tinson, 2009; Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, & Chapman, 2008). In all interview situations there is a tendency also for subjects to adopt a posture or to present a preferred image of themselves; these patterns are heightened among adolescents because of their stage of emotional development.

Aware of these challenges, the format of the interviews was designed after a process of consultation with colleagues and with students themselves about the research options that they expected to be most meaningful in this process. The interview protocol was semi-structured but used a mix of forms such as open-ended questions as well as some sentence completion exercises. All interviews were 30–40 minutes in length, and were conducted in a quiet space on the school premises by a researcher relatively close in age to the interviewees, the second author of this article.

In what follows, we focus on responses to two clusters of questions from the interview script, one that asked interviewees to say what in their view a Zionist is, and whether they think of themselves as Zionists, and one question that asked them to complete a sentence that began “to me, Israel is.” We have found it useful to look at students’ relationship to Israel through a question about Zionism because of the multiple constructions of Israel’s political, cultural, and theological significance in Zionist thought. For this reason, responses to these questions, and also supplemental conversation that touched on related matters, neatly brings in to view how young people conceive of different possible grounds for engaging with Israel.

7 School names and student names are all pseudonyms.
FINDINGS

Politically Motivated Engagement

In terms of the manifestations of Israel engagement, the subjects of our study seem highly engaged across all aspects of Zukin et al.’s (2006) categories— including cognitive, political, and civic engagement, and also public voice. Some of this engagement is more volitional—including participation in teen travel, youth group programs, and following news about Israel in their own time. Other manifestations of engagement seem more circumscribed such as participating in school events that mark celebrations and commemorations in the Israeli calendar, and studying Israel’s history and contemporary society.

Given their generally high levels of Israel engagement, we were initially surprised (and, actually, confused) that about a third of the interviewees either flatly rejected, or wavered about whether to label themselves as Zionists. Time and again, when they were asked, “Do you consider yourself a Zionist?” we heard responses like that of Mike, a Kehilati student. At first, Mike stated: “I do consider myself a Zionist.” A moment later, he reconsidered: “Actually, I changed my mind. I don’t consider myself a Zionist. I know many, many Zionists in this school, and I don’t consider myself a Zionist.” Rachel, another Kehilati student, also expressed the same uncertainty:

I don’t really know, because I’m all for the State of Israel and all for Jerusalem and I support Israel no matter what, but I would say that I’m a strong believer. I would just not put the specific label and the restrictions on saying that I am a Zionist.

Our initial explanation for these widespread expressions of indecision was that the students were simply reluctant to label themselves one way or another, particularly with a term that, in some circles, is controversial. A similar pattern has been widely noted among young women who were reluctant to call themselves feminists, seeming more uncomfortable with the label than with the behavior it described (Hogeland, 2000).8

However, looking at our interviewees’ comments through interpretative lenses that distinguish between politically and civically motivated Israel engagement, it becomes apparent that almost all of the students in our sample view Zionism as a politically motivated form of public engagement, and many—like Mike and Rachel—are uncomfortable with it in those particular terms. This perspective was made explicit in Mike’s characterization of a Zionist:

A Zionist is someone . . . who always supports Israel no matter what. Who ensures that Israel, and acts to ensure that Israel, has security and

8See also, http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/fem_label.html; http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/fem_label2008a.html
stability in the world and will always be around for Jews to go to. They will build it up, they will protect it, and they will advocate for it.

Similarly, Rachel explained:

A Zionist, to me, is just someone, as I said, [who] is a firm believer in the establishment of Israel, supports Israel and, in a way, I’m describing myself, but a Zionist to me shuts out any kind of other options of Israel that could change the whole outlook of Israel in the eyes of other people, in the eyes of the Jews, in the eyes of Americans, everyone else.

Of course, seeing Zionism as a politically motivated concern does not necessarily lead to the alienation of all students. Noah, another Community student, captured the notion of Zionism as a politically motivated concern with great succinctness—“I think a Zionist, in a broad sense, is believing that Israel has a right to exist.” He then proceeded to indicate that he is comfortable conceiving of his relationship to Israel in this way. He says:

I definitely believe that Israel has a right to exist, and that the reasons it was founded, for being a safe haven for Jews, for bringing Jews back to their homeland and having us come back there and go to our holy sites where history is and also be back in that space and then figure out ways to address other peoples’ rights to be there. I think all of that is very important and very worthy, so I would classify myself as a Zionist.

Robert, a Soloveitchik student, talks in a similar way, and then makes clear that he is fully comfortable with thinking about himself in these terms while appreciating where and why it would be legitimate disagree with him.

A Zionist is someone who . . . gosh . . . wow. I think at its core it’s just anyone who actively supports Israel’s right to exist because that’s something that’s constantly being challenged. Israel’s right to legitimacy is being challenged by Iran, by some in the United States. And I think a Zionist is someone who stands up and says—it’s not the way it is. Israel belongs to the Jews and they’re going to continue living and thriving in it.... I don’t hate people who aren’t involved [in supporting Israel]. I dislike when people show up to the Salute to Israel parade and say—Israelis are murderers. And those people are funding terrorist activity and supporting Ahmadinejad. I don’t like it when people do that. I don’t like people who do that. I strongly disagree with them, and I think they’re encouraging murder. But people who aren’t actively Zionists, I guess they have a right not to support Israel.
Civically Motivated Engagement

With students expressing reluctance to confer upon themselves the label Zionist, how is it that they also demonstrate such high levels of engagement with Israel? Jordana (from Soloveitchik) and Jane (from Kehilati) offer a clue, pointing to a distinction between their sense of what Zionism is and their own civically motivated engagement with Israel. When Jordana describes a Zionist she says, “they go to rallies. They express their opinions. They tell it to other people and try to convince them that [Israelis] deserves their own state.” When, however, she describes her own relationship to Israel, she says, “To me, Israel is a home for me, personally, and I think for every Jew.” She continues in language that also possesses theological or romantic-nationalist tones:

I think the whole beauty of Israel is that when people go to Israel, even if they don’t want to make aliyah, I think they still feel some kind of connection to the land, so though it’s not necessarily their home-home, it’s still a type of home for them.

The contrast between a Zionist’s politically motivated public engagement, manifest in rallies and in attempts to convince others and her own civically motivated engagement with Israel described by a sense of “home” starts to bring in to focus how the students’ understanding of what a Zionist is and their own connection to Israel can so dramatically part ways. Jane (from Kehilati) offers a similar contrast: “The founding of a Jewish state, like to me, that’s Zionism, or that’s what’s accepted as Zionism, that there should be a state for the Jews.” Her own relationship to Israel, however, is based on civically motivated engagement, a relationship to the people. “To me,” she says, ‘Israel is a home for the Jewish people.”

Mordechai (another Soloveitchik student) offers a clear articulation of his civically motivated engagement with Israel, and in so doing clarifies that this engagement is not motivated by political concerns. Born to Israeli parents, Mordechai’s relationship to Israel is rooted in his relationship to the people of Israel.

It’s always felt like a goal of mine to be committed to Israel. . . . I think if you look at Israel completely as a political issue, it’s a mistake. . . . Israel is where my entire family is and it would be a mistake not to see it as a major facet in my Jewish life.

It’s worth noting that while students with no immediate family in Israel—like Jane and Jordana above—express this kind of civically motivated connection to the people of Israel, it is those students whose parents are Israeli or who were born there themselves who are most likely to do so. Thus Davida, from Community, who says that she is not a Zionist because she doesn’t “do anything,” does, however, describe herself as “proud of Israel and of being part of that and all.” She then goes on to say that Israel
is “my home. . . I’ve always considered Israel more of a place where I belong than California, for instance.” Similarly, Noami (a Soloveitchik student with an Israeli father) explains that she doesn’t think of herself as a Zionist because she’s “not going to do something radical to get people to . . . really go out of my way to, what’s the word . . . to kind of, not defend Israel, but to talk about it and to tell people about it.” However, she makes it clear that “to me, Israel is a second home, in a way. . . . It is a place I call home, if you know what I mean.”

David, another student (this time from Kehilati) with family connections in Israel, describes these relationships in vivid fashion, clarifying how dense social networks—something that David himself calls, with great insight, “small things”—underpin strong civic motivations (a point that is at the heart of Campbell’s (2006) argument about the sources of civically motivated public engagement).

To me, Israel is a place where I can go to. . . . To me, Israel is part of home, growing up with my mom and grandparents that were very connected to Israel and grew up there with a lot of family. Going there is like going home. It’s like . . . going to my cousin’s house and like [being] there for a week and then going to another cousin’s house for a week and then going to Shabbat dinners in-between and all dinners, in between, to families and families’ houses, and. . . . It’s a home away from home.

Complicating the Categories

The differences between a politically and civically motivated engagement with Israel can be tracked through the different ways that interviewees use two words: “homeland” and “home.” We have already seen how a number of students conceive of Israel as a home and how home serves as a succinct metaphor for their personal connection to the people of Israel and to Israel as a physical place. “Homeland” expresses a different relationship. It is a term that often came up in our interviews, but that only three interviewees related to in the first-person singular or plural. It was much more likely, instead, to be used in conjunction with the term “Jewish people,” a more formal construct. Thus, Noah from Community explains that “Israel . . . was founded for being a safe haven for Jews, for bringing Jews back to their homeland.” Or in the words of Doug from Kehilati, “A Zionist is, I guess, a Jewish person looking for a homeland, in my view, for the Jews.” Homeland, it seems, is a pre-eminently political concept; one that interviewees indicate has value for Jews in general, but rarely for them personally. The distinction can, however, be a subtle one. Thus, Bradley readily identifies himself as a Zionist and then goes on to define a Zionist as “someone that supports the homeland of the Jewish people in Palestine.” Yet when asked to complete the sentence “to me, Israel is . . . ,” he says, “Israel is home.” In Bradley’s case, his relationship to Israel has both a strong personal and public component. For him, at least, both the political and civic merge.
An even stronger instance of the blurring of our political and civic categories comes from those students who see Zionism and positive engagement with Israel as ultimately being expressed in aliyah—immigrating to Israel—something that a minority of them plan to do themselves. Although a small number of community day school interviewees reported that they were seriously considering making aliyah, almost all of those who talked in this way came from the Orthodox schools, and in particular from the Kook school. With few exceptions, the Kook students indicated that they were wrestling with the equation of Zionism with aliyah, wondering if one could be a Zionist if one didn’t intend to immigrate to Israel, even at some point far in to the future. Thus, Ari says:

So we all say that we’re Zionists, and it’s difficult to translate exactly what that means. But I would say that I guess the belief in Israel and that moving to Israel and . . . not necessarily that you need to pick up and leave and go to Israel this second, but that that’s always in your heart and knowing that really, ultimately, the goal is that we should all be in Israel, and that if you can’t do it right now, that you are always working towards the point where you can get to Israel.

Interpretatively, it is difficult to determine whether the motivations that these Kook students display can be characterized as demonstrating either civically or politically motivated engagement. In large part, that is why until now we have not quoted from any of the responses of the students from this school because so much of their talk is tied up with the centrality of aliyah to any serious engagement with Israel. (The tendency of Kook students to talk in this way also accounts for why when we were building our research sample, we sought out interviewees from an additional modern Orthodox school because the Kook sample did not appear to represent the broader modern Orthodox community with which we were familiar.)

Throwing in one’s lot with the State of Israel, and becoming an Israeli citizen, is surely the ultimate civically motivated act, especially when the reasons for acting in this way derive from a Tocquevillian sense of duty rather than from the satisfaction of personal needs or from the advance of personal interests. And yet when our interviewees talks about aliyah as the pinnacle of Israel engagement, it suggests that they conceive of it not only in personal or civic terms but also as an act possessing a public symbolic dimension—as a performance—connected to a larger movement. Aliyah, in these terms, is an act of political engagement so as to support the political entity that is the State of Israel.

The responses of two Kook students provide some sense of what makes this so complex. Sam, for example, explains what it means to be a Zionist, repeating himself so as to clarify what he means.

I’m a Zionist in the sense that I do support the idea of a State of Israel and I think this is true of a good amount of people, especially in this community.

I’m a Zionist in that I support the idea of a State of Israel and I do support
people making aliyah. I think that’s an amazing thing that . . . they are doing the right thing and that they are helping the Jewish future.

For Sam, these aren’t abstract notions, as he explained later in the interview. “To me Israel is my homeland and I would love to go back there and I would love to be there, not necessarily right now but hopefully sometime in the future.” For him, the Jewish homeland may indeed ultimately be his home. Aliyah, in this respect, sounds more like a political statement than anything else.

Dvora, another Kook student, by contrast, provides additional detail that communicates the civic significance of making aliyah. Yet, in her framing of the civic contribution that the new immigrant makes, there are strong political resonances particularly in the notion that aliyah is a manifestation of support for Israel. It is a more “dedicated” kind of Zionism to make aliyah . . . By making aliyah and by moving there and being involved in . . . even just economically, and politically and everything like that. Socially, you’re there. You’re involved. So that’s part of supporting Israel.

Our sense is that in the charged political climate in which these young people live, making aliyah is not just about joining in “common work” with the Jewish people—engaging in civically motivated behavior, nor is it only an act of personal transformation; it is also an act of public political engagement, freighted with public symbolic significance.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

With the exception of those students who think about Israel engagement in terms of aliyah, our analysis reveals a deep bifurcation between how most students personally relate to Israel and how they seem to have been taught about Israel and about Zionism. Zionism, most believe, is the project to create and sustain a Jewish state—a politically motivated public endeavor. Few have a sense that Zionism might be concerned with the transformation of Jewish culture or the upbuilding of a particular kind of society. As such, Zionism is disconnected from how they personally see Israel as having meaning for themselves. By contrast, on the personal level—what is meaningful for them as young American Jews—is almost completely empty of the political content associated with Zionism, and is instead much more concerned with civic relationships, and the qualities of family and home. This is an orientation that is very much in tune with analyses of American youth in general with which we started this article that depict their alienation from politics but enthusiasm for civic and social action.

It is tempting to attribute this gap to what the interviewees have been taught in school about what Kopelowitz (2005) called “why Israel,” but surely that is only part of the story. In school—and especially in the classroom—students evidently encounter a sense of Israel as a contemporary issue that needs to be explored from a historical
perspective and understood in relation to contemporary political conflicts. That is no doubt an orientation that entrenches a sense of Israel as a political issue. But that is also an image further reinforced by the popular media, where Israel’s frequent appearance invariably occurs in relation to political debate and conflict. Israel is encountered, both inside and outside school, as something—an issue—that people debate. It is not only the interviewees’ teachers who employ political language to talk about “why Israel.”

Against this backdrop it possible to see that Peter Beinart’s (2010) argument that young American Jews have become alienated from Israel because of its illiberal politics is right but also doubly wrong. Beinart seems to be right that (some) young Jews have little time for Israel as a political concern. But wrong, first, about the source of their alienation. Young Jews—or to be precise, the limited sample of young Jews we interviewed—are alienated from Israel not because of the particular politics they find in Israel but rather because they find, both in school and in the media, that Israel is primarily framed as being important in political terms. Most of them have little patience for any kinds of politics, liberal or illiberal, wherever in the world. Beinart is also wrong to portray this alienation from Israel as all there is to say about the relationship of young Jews with it. As we have seen, when Israel is encountered as a civic concern it is much more interesting and meaningful, and in fact of great personal significance to many—thus their common depiction of it as home.

This conclusion, supported we believe by the data presented here and by other recent studies of what connects young people to Israel, such as Sasson (2009) and Grant (2011), has significant implications for what approaches to Israel education and what forms of curriculum it may be meaningful to develop. We don’t have space here to explore those implications (those are the tasks of a future article) but suffice it to say we think there is a need and an opportunity to develop these approaches in forms that cultivate and respond to civically inflected motivations rather than those that are bound to Israel as a political construct.

Of course, politics is important. Israel’s political interests ought to be defended. But as the work of Colby and her colleagues demonstrates, there are particular ways to cultivate the political commitments that underpin that defense, and these ways are not the same as those that can produce civic engagement. Policy makers should not be disappointed that their investments in person-to-person relationships and civically focused programs don’t deepen political engagement. Political and civic motivations are two different things. In this vein, Colby et al. (2010) quote Adam Weinberg of Democracy Matters: “When I wanted my daughter to learn how to swim, I didn’t give her bike-riding lessons. I gave her swimming lessons” (p. 38). Political engagement is rarely if ever nurtured by cultivating motivations for civic engagement; civic engagement is. If the conceptual ground-clearing that our analysis has enabled can establish even this seemingly obvious conclusion in relation to Israel engagement, then we will have taken a small but important step toward helping students better
understand why Israel. We hope, also, that the perspective we employ here stimulates
discussion about a further, no less important, question of whether it might be useful to
think of diaspora-based Israel education as a form of Jewish civic education.

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PART ONE: LOOKING BACK

A People Without a Land

Some generations back, say, two hundred years ago, no one would have understood the problem of teaching Israel. There was then no State of Israel. Yet, though the overwhelming majority had never seen it and had no clear idea about its concrete physical reality, almost all Jews were vitally connected to Eretz Yisrael (The Land of Israel). This connectedness was created, first and foremost, by the fact that most Jews living then, whether in North America (there weren’t many!) or in Germany, Russia or Morocco, were perceived by gentiles and by themselves as being “in exile.” The meaning of Eretz Yisrael was as obvious as the meaning of the Jewish lives they lived. Judaism and all it encompassed was their total identity. And that naturally included “The Land of Israel.”

What brought about this unfortunate and unnatural situation of galut, exile? As Jews everywhere knew from their study of Torah and from their prayers, “Because of our sins we have been exiled from our land...” The people of Israel had not lived faithfully (enough) by God’s covenant. Those interested in historical detail knew that some seventeen hundred years before, the legions of Rome had defeated the Judean nation in war, destroying the Holy Temple and scattering (in stages, throughout hundreds of years) its people. Since then, much of Jewish life had been spent remembering, mourning, and waiting.

To be a Jew in 1800 still meant, for almost everyone, to live within a liturgical and ritual tradition that was saturated with exile - and the hope of the foretold Return. The Land of Israel and Jerusalem had a prominent place in the prayers recited thrice daily, and in the blessing recited after each meal. Five or six times a day, God was implored to “rebuild Jerusalem.” The holy land and the holy city were mentioned at weddings: under the wedding canopy celebrants were assured that “there will still be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sounds of happiness and rejoicing and the voices of bridegrooms and brides.” The words of comfort to mourners were also a liturgy, wishing them that they merit being “consoled in the
consolation of Zion and Jerusalem.” There were entire days given over to national mourning, particularly the day of the Temple’s destruction, the ninth of Av (Tisha B’Av) on which Jews sat on the floor in stockinged feet and literally wept as they read the biblical Book of Lamentations attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, a witness to the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians.

But there was also hope and anticipation. The redemption would come. God would take His people out of captivity and restore them to their land, just as Ezekiel had foreseen in his vision of dry bones. These bones, strewn about without hope, would again be covered with flesh and stand upon their feet, a mighty host, taken out of their graves and returned upright to their soil (Ezekiel 37). In God’s good time, the exile would end and the nations would acknowledge the sovereignty of God. That would mark the advent of the Messianic age.

Some Jews even two hundred years ago, especially if they were in Western Europe or in the new nation called the United States of America, already entertained certain doubts. They may have seriously considered the notion that the great revolutions of their times, the French and the American, had created a new world, heralding blessing and freedom for all. Some were already insisting that a genuine Messianic redemption had begun, putting an end to exile without anyone having to move to the land now called Palestine. Some were becoming skeptical about the religious beliefs of Judaism and its requirement to wait for God’s redemptive acts and live by (possibly) outdated laws. There were great things happening that made ancient hopes seem quaint, and obsessive. There were new nation-states that had their own humanly devised laws, guided in their promulgation by universal reason. Who needed more than that?

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This way of thinking became more widespread through a movement known as the Enlightenment. Furthermore, in many Western countries Jews began to enjoy what became known as Emancipation. They were given or promised the rights of citizenship. They were invited, though not always with sincerity, to see themselves as members of the nations which had, until then, grudgingly hosted them and sporadically persecuted them.

Modern Zionism Arise

Yet, the absence of Emancipation in the Eastern European countries of most dense Jewish settlement, and the obstinate endurance of hatred of Jews (now “scientifically” dubbed anti-Semitism) in enlightened lands, spurred a movement for a radical
solution to what its leaders called “the problem of the Jews.” That movement was called Zionism and its flamboyant leader who thought he had the solution to that problem was Theodore Herzl.

The radical solution was to return the Jews to their ancient land, just as the Jewish tradition had foreseen, but with a difference. Most of the leaders of the new movement were indifferent to religion; they did not anticipate divine redemption and did not think that exile was caused by sin. For them, the only sin of the Jews was passivity, the failure to redeem themselves, as nations such as Greece and Italy and Germany were doing, through national liberation movements. They wanted Jews to be “a nation among the nations,” to save them from their unhappy status of being everywhere, guests. They were determined not to be emancipated by others but to emancipate themselves. They were ready to build on religious memories of their people and even invited religious Jews to join them, but the rules were clear: Hebrew, a centerpiece of the “national heritage,” would be a spoken and secular language, not a holy tongue. Perhaps, as Herzl suggested, it would not be spoken at all. (He thought it might be better to make German the language of the renewed Jewish state.) Jews would live by their own “rational” and progressive laws, in their thoroughly modern and “enlightened” commonwealth. Religion would be a private matter.

Not everyone was enamored of this idea of Zionism. Cultural Zionists like Ahad Ha’am believed that Jewish culture was morally superior to that of the Christian world, or at least Jewishly more authentic for Jews. They considered Herzl’s political Zionism a form of assimilation to gentile norms and ideas under the cloak of Hebrew. Many traditionally religious Jews viewed it as an act of impudence, a veritable rebellion against God. Jews living in nations that had enfranchised them, like the United States, England, France, and Germany, were concerned that Zionism would call their civic loyalties into question. Most of them, especially those already acculturated, looked upon Zionism as a regressive movement that sought to return the Jews to their past, to a previous stage of history long left behind in the march towards a pristinely spiritual identity.

In North America, the few who were unabashedly Zionists were mainly members of an immigrant generation, traditional Jews who pasting together Ahad Ha’am and Herzl, saw the old-new homeland as a haven both for Jewish culture and for the homeless Jews still trapped in benighted lands. There were even a number of Western Jews who found their true Jewish identities by “going on aliyah” and others who took part in philanthropic enterprises, like the advancement of medical care in Israel, so impressively undertaken by the Hadassah movement in the United States. However most of the others in the Western democracies, and sometimes even the professed Zionists, were preoccupied by the national ethos and aspirations of their own
countries. True, alongside it and from the distance, many admired the new city-builders, the pioneers, the romance of modern Palestine. Even so, the land remained somewhat remote for them: a vision, not an emergent reality.

The Emergence of the Jewish State

After the Holocaust, all that changed. The nightmare of the political Zionists, that without a homeland Europe’s Jews were doomed, had materialized beyond anyone’s direst fears. Palestine, which was now home to a thriving From then on, Israel began to be an aspect, central or peripheral, of almost every Jew’s consciousness. For many it became the most cogent embodiment of Jewish life, certainly more universally and traditionally “Jewish” than some of the early Zionists had envisioned it would be. When Israel’s existence seemed endangered, in the weeks before the Six Day War of 1967, the process of the “Israelization” of Jewish consciousness among Diaspora Jews was consummated. In June 1967, Jews throughout the world perceived the danger to “The Jewish State” as a threat to their own existence. In Israel too it was perceived as an over-powering Jewish event: after their astounding victory secularists wept upon returning to the Western Wall, the only remnant of the ancient Temple, and everyone spoke of miracles. Modern Jewish history seemed to have come together, and some religious Jews claimed that everything that was happening, even secular Zionism - the brazen disregard for religion by the state’s architects and builders - even the unparalleled sufferings of the Holocaust, was all part of a pattern of divine redemption. The exile was ending. The process of Return had begun and the prophecy of Isaiah rang with the compelling actuality of a banner headline:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of good tidings, that announces peace...Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem (52:7, 9)

Today, some thirty years later, that historical moment is recalled as one of the most dramatic in Jewish history. Like all great moments in Jewish history, it continues to instruct us, though there are some who say that it presently misguides and deceives us. In dream-like memory and cruel awakening, it affects the present in many ways. Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day) is part of what was then and of what we still are. The political controversies about the current peace process between Israel and its Arab neighbors including the Palestinians, is part of it. The insistence of both major political parties that Jerusalem will never again be divided, is part of the memory and a brake, though some would say a wistful one, on the unraveling of that great moment.
Israel Today - A Completely New Reality

Israel itself, the parents and grandparents of almost half of the young generation originate in the Islamic lands of North Africa and the Middle East. For these tribes of Israel, the land never ceased to be a religious symbol; it was never secularized as the embodiment of a “solution.” More recently, over half a million Russian Jews have arrived in the country. For some of them, Jewishness itself is a novelty; for most, religious symbols and Jewish cultural life are alien.

The majority of all living Israelis have not personally experienced their country’s political establishment; those moving into their thirties have never known an Israel confined to its pre-1967 “green line” borders. There are more Orthodox people in Israel than Herzl could have envisioned, and they are very different from one another: “Lithuanian” Yeshiva types, Sefaradim, right-wing political Zionists settled in Judea and Samaria (“the West Bank”), Hasidim. For all of them too, Israel is a fact of life; Hebrew, a spoken language. There are also many Israelis who are uncertain about their Jewish identities and even some who are not concerned with the question at all. For them, being Israeli is identity enough.

And, of course, there is a new generation in the Diaspora. Like their counterparts in Israel, they ask new questions about their Jewish identity. Many even feel that they can reject this identity and, conversely, that they are invited to choose it. Armed with this consciousness, considerable numbers of Jews are simply disappearing. Yet others are finding new energies to articulate their Judaism in ways that bear the imprint of new environments of freedom, and new spiritual challenges. For many Diaspora and Israeli Jews alike, the “other Jews” don’t seem to matter so much anymore. Non-religious Israelis are only moderately interested in American Jews, though they are very much interested in America! For the majority of non-Orthodox Diaspora youth, Israel is far away, different. Paradoxically, when it looks the same as the place they come from: western, allegedly affluent, a land dotted with high tech industry and glitzy shopping malls, it seems even more irrelevant.

And yet, the Jews remain a peculiar world people, difficult to understand and impossible to define. Are we a religion like, say, Christianity? Then what are Jewish atheists? Are we a nation, like the Dutch? Then what are Jewish Americans? Are we a tribe, an enlarged family, with roots and memories? What, then, do people who are so different from one another have in common? What does a foreign country, even if it does have a Jewish majority, have to do with a Jew in Texas, especially, if he or she converted to Judaism? Why does Israel matter? How will Jews understand themselves better and see new vistas of opportunity in their Jewishness through the prism of Israel? These are the questions that underlie this discussion.
PART TWO: ISRAEL ISSUES THROUGH THE EYES OF ISRAELIS

Israel is a small place, but it is rich in the significance that Jews bring to it, that they “remember” about it. Moreover, the person who looks at it finds certain objective data that set it apart from other places. How can it be described? What is special about it? What problems characterize it?

Let us look at five things that, taken together, are unique to Israel and its people. They are the features that Jews are most likely to think about when they think of Israel as an issue within their Judaism and their Jewish belonging. In this section we will examine these points primarily from an Israeli perspective; in Part Four, the same five points will be viewed through the eyes of North American Jews.

1. Israel as the Land of Judaism

The very category “Israel” raises eyebrows. Isn’t Judaism a world-view, a religion, a culture and a tradition? How can it have a land? Has not most of Jewish history been lived elsewhere? Here, very briefly, is the way the Bible relates to these questions. God made a covenant with a particular family, to “walk in His ways,” to do righteousness, to be His witnesses, to be a great nation, to be “a blessing.” The religious mission given to the family of Israel, to bring the divine Presence into the life of the families of the earth, into the social and political world, requires that the “witnesses” live a social-national life in a land assigned for that purpose. The Bible refers to this land as God’s inheritance but, in the covenantal scheme of things, it is the land for the people of Israel to be God’s inheritance, as servants and partners. God’s presence is symbolically there through the Temple, but also morally, through the just society demanded of Israel by the Torah. There are commandments that are applicable only in the land, such as the Sabbatical year in which fields must lie fallow, but they represent an entire social conception of a holy life, understood as a social and collective charge.

So, the Land of Israel is Eretz Hakodesh, the Land of the Holy. That sounds like an awkward way of saying, “the Holy Land,” but it isn’t. The Land of Israel is holy for Christians because “God walked there.” For that faith community, the land of Israel captured a tremendously significant moment of divine history, through the person of Jesus. Moslems too consider the Land as holy because of the activity of Mohammed, the last and greatest of Allah’s prophets. Thus for the Moslem, and even more, for the Christian the Holy Land is a place for pilgrimage, for walking “in the footsteps” of holiness. But for the tradition of Judaism, Eretz Yisrael, “the Land of the Holy” is not
like that. It is the place of the Binding of Isaac, the place of divine worship in the Temple. It is the place where a holy life, morally, spiritually, even sexually, is required of the people of Israel lest, as the Torah warns, “the land will vomit you out.”

After the divine Presence departed from the land, together with the people of Israel, it became, in a sense, even more holy. While living thousands of miles from Jerusalem, most Jews considered it common knowledge that the Messiah would enter the gates of Zion, and that he would judge the wicked of Edom from there. The resurrection of the dead “in latter days” would commence in Jerusalem. Jews who somehow reached the land, for pilgrimage or to die there, bowed to the holy ground and kissed its earth upon arriving. No wonder many hoped that a small packet of soil from Eretz Yisrael would be placed under their heads at the time of burial. No wonder that The Exile was associated with all the malaise of an unredeemed world, and The Return, with its final redemption and perfection.

No wonder, too, that the masses of Jews who were attracted to Zionism in Eastern Europe were galvanized by the idea of returning to “the land of holiness,” where their ideals (now often secular and socialist ones) and their dreams of redemption (existential, social, national) would be realized. They spoke glowingly of aliyah (ascent) to the land. After all, they knew the verses from the Book of Psalms (24:3) by heart: “Who shall go up (ya’aleh) to the mount of the Lord? One of clean hands and pure heart, who has not sworn deceitfully...” They knew that, in Temple times, people “ascended” to the Temple on pilgrim festivals. They knew that one entered the land via the plains and then “ascended” to Jerusalem. They remembered well the psalmist’s words, “I shall lift up my eyes unto the hills from whence my help comes.” In going back, they were going up, returning to an ideally remembered self.

But, as they and we have discovered, it is not simple to live with remembered holiness, no matter whether it is revered or rejected. As the American-Jewish writer Maurice Samuel once observed, there are ghosts everywhere in the sacred land. The Mosque of Omar bestrides the place of the Temple. This is maddening if you wish to rebuild the Temple but fortuitous if you really do not. Archeologists on digs and contractors at housing developments discover ancient bones, part of the holy and heroic past, that the ultra-Orthodox demand be left undisturbed. Is the produce of the seventh year to be eaten in the land of the Sabbatical? How can a state in this country be less than an example of virtue for everyone else? How does one live with so much holiness? What other nation has to hear, in the foundational phrases of its language, from its landscapes, from its scholars who remember and its fanatics who constantly rebuke, that this land requires a holy and covenantal life, that being “vomited out” is a clear and present danger? How can one be truly secular in the land of Judaism?
How can one bear the weight of genuine piety in the “Land of the Holy?”

Furthermore, the entire monotheistic world takes an interest in what the Jews, who after all rejected Christianity and Islam, are doing in The Holy Land. Is this the greatest historical romance of all time, the return of God’s people to the land of covenant? Or is it the colossally impudent act of trespass of an infidel nation? The world can’t make up its mind about the

nature of its astonishment: is it scandalized or impressed or even awed? In the meantime, this small people in its miniature commonwealth is seemingly always in the news and on the covers of Time and Newsweek. Is this a compliment, or a danger? Were the Zionists mistaken in thinking we could become a “nation among nations” in the land that so heavily imposes itself on the spirit?

And yet, which Israeli Jew will not point proudly, though sometimes with embarrassment, to the uniqueness of life in the land of ancient kings and prophets, to the price demanded for living in it, to the meanings mined from its rocky landscapes? On the beaches of the Philistine coast, on sunny Sabbath mornings, when colorful balloons fly about and fun reigns and life seems fine just the way it is, all that is forgotten. But not for long, never completely.

2. Israel as the Land Where the Jews Live as a People

In the context of the lives of many Jews today, “Jewish peoplehood” seems like a strange idea, both jarring and reassuring. It is jarring because they think of their native lands as the place where their nation lives; it is reassuring in its message that the Jews too have a stake in contemporary history, that they are really there. Some scholars tell us that until the great increase in Jewish population in the nineteenth century Russian empire, which coincided with the growth of national consciousness among many groups, including many who were subjugated to others and oppressed, Jews did not see themselves that way.

They knew, of course, that they were God’s people. He had, in the words of the blessing, chosen Israel “from among the nations . . . and given us His Torah” but that “nationhood” was somewhat liturgical. They also perhaps had heard of historical instances of a Jewish societal presence, where Jews had even had a share of power, like in “the Golden Age” of medieval Spain. Yet generally the reality was of kehillot, communities centered around religious and educational institutions.
Certainly, Jews in the contemporary world outside of Israel do not generally live their Jewish lives as a people. In fact, like the Gentiles around them, they are likely to be much less community-minded than their ancestors in Europe and North Africa or Iraq. They tend to live more as individuals, who choose to join others in some communal framework, or to refrain from affiliation. It is all as they desire and decide. Israel, on the other hand, is, in a sense, a completion of the process that began in Eastern Europe. In Israel there is a “critical mass” of Jews who through their institutions and national presence determine the “public space” of the country and what it should look like. Here, they are a majority.

And being “the people” of this place, one can see them on a social canvas. Here, all the qualities for which Jews have been known, or which they imagine themselves to possess, come into play. Jews think of themselves as being fiercely independent in judgment and are proud to proclaim that “where there are two Jews there are three opinions.” On the other hand, Jews speak proudly of their sense of community and frequently cite the Talmudic adage that “all Israelites are responsible for one another.” Thus, when under attack, this people that under normal circumstances admits to inordinate bickering, to petty and grand animosities, and to unending controversy, believes that it will stand like a solid wall against adversaries.

Israel is the only place in the world where one can see who the Jews are when they are responsible for the public sphere, when it is theirs. Problems arise that never surfaced in small groups of Jews or among individuals. It becomes clear that Jews do not necessarily shrug their shoulders existentially in the face of danger like they do in Fiddler on the Roof. Those who are responsible for the existence of an entire society learn different habits of response. In fact, one discovers about the Jews what could have been picked up from reading the Bible: they have a warrior streak in them, and they are not naturally allergic to military arts. There is even some fanaticism among them: again, select chapters of the Bible strike that chord. Convictions are sometimes articulated in vigorous and not always delightful ways. Social habits as practiced “at home” are often uncouth.

Moreover, in Israel the Jews sometimes look too particularistic, not universal enough. This is not because Israelis are more “particularistic” than others, say the French or the English, but because we have not thought about Jewish existence in the way we think about France and England. On the other hand, in comparison with some other modern nations, many Jews in Israel will seem unduly universal, especially some who have moved away from religious tradition. One discovers that while the Jews of Israel have astoundingly “made themselves at home” in Eretz Yisrael, they also, at the same time, seem to have trouble taking national life in a national territory seriously. After all, isn’t the “nationalism” of Judaism that of “The Book?”
It takes time to get used to being the people of this place. It also requires making room for the Arabs of Israel who are not “this people” but certainly of this place. So, should it be their public space too? Should there be a new “Israeli” entity? And yet, wasn’t Israel established to make it possible for the Jews to live as a nation like all nations?

Herman Cohen, a German-Jewish philosopher who lived through the early years of the Zionist movement, was not fond of Zionism and even mocked it. On one occasion he disparagingly said of the Zionists: “These fellows wish to be happy,” as though it was somehow undignified, a betrayal, for Jews to be happy before Messianic times. Jewish life was too complicated for Jews to be “fellows,” to be happy, to be like other people could be. Cohen need not have worried. Indeed, the Jewish public space exudes energy and a desire to be happy. For those with historical perspective, the energy and the desire are often deeply moving and sometimes exhilarating. But nobody still thinks that being happy is simple.

3. Israel as a Political Entity

To be a political entity, a state, is that feature of living as a people that focuses on the responsibility to govern; it is that aspect of Jewish life that also turns outward, to the relationship of the Jews as a people with other peoples. It has to do with power, its uses, and its limits. Thus it divides political parties and diverse administrations. It brings into view institutions of government like the Knesset and national symbols like the flag. These institutions generally make Israelis feel proud, identified. But Diaspora Jews may feel uncomfortable with them. After all, as Jews, they are not politically identified with them.

For Israel, whose existence has been called into question from its very beginnings, the responsibility to govern is, to a large extent, the responsibility of the state. However the responsibility to defend its citizens, in practice, falls upon these citizens themselves through army service. Naturally, therefore, the experience of military service has played a large role in the social and existential consciousness of the average Israeli Jew, erecting a social and even cultural barrier between him or her and Jews in the Diaspora. This divide also separates the average Israeli Jew from most Israeli Arabs, and to an extent, from those ultra-Orthodox Jews whose army service is indefinitely, usually permanently, deferred because of their yeshiva study. A large extent, the responsibility of the state. However the responsibility to defend its citizens, in practice, falls upon these citizens themselves through army service. Naturally, therefore, the experience of military service has played a large role in the social and existential consciousness of the average Israeli Jew, erecting a social and
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The political life of Israel as a Jewish state is greatly complicated by the historical experience of persecution in the exile. On one hand, this political life is characterized by a great, almost overwhelming desire to be accepted and to gain the status of an equal among the nations, irrespective of past (or even present) religious differences, especially as these differences are considered part of history in the prevailing secular consciousness. On the other hand, this historical experience engenders great suspicion among Jews. They fear that their isolation is still a dominant fact, perhaps a perennial one, of Jewish life. Israel has no natural bloc of allies; it is the only Jewish state. The Jews, even as a political entity, are still, so it is claimed, treated as enemies of Christ, as a pariah nation. The fact that the majority of political debates in the United Nations have had Israel as their subject, generally for rebuke or condemnation, reinforce this perception.

The question, which of these two experiences - of having made it as a “nation among the nations,” or having merely found a safer or higher ground for self-defense in a hostile world - is perhaps the main focus of political controversy in Israel today. Some believe that it is now becoming possible, thanks to Israel’s perseverance and strength, to achieve a long-sought peace between Israel and its neighbors. Others see the peace process as a ploy designed to divest Israel of its strength and ultimately to destroy it. This controversy has aroused world-wide interest, an interest which is in itself open to diverse interpretations.

4. Israel as the Land of Jewish Culture

We have already mentioned Ahad Ha’am, the Zionist leader who envisioned a modern, largely secular, “reworking” of Judaism that would have its real address in the spiritual center to be established in Eretz Yisrael. Ahad Ha’am’s conception, of course, reflected the world at the beginning of the century, when there was no fax or e-mail, no cheap travel nor the affluence to make such travel frequent, and no pervasive and electronically omnipresent “Western culture” in Jewish life. Yet, despite these developments, Israel still does largely understand itself as such an Ahad Ha’amian “place for Judaism,” though different groups within the country have different understandings of what Jewish “place” should be like. After all, Israel is the only country in the world where the Jewish Sabbath and festivals are the official days of rest, where the Hebrew calendar is recorded on public documents together with
the Gregorian one, where Hebrew is spoken and the Bible is an integral part of public school curriculum, where the public school is, except among Arabs, a Jewish school. On Yom Kippur the country still comes to a stand-still and Purim brings with it a carnival atmosphere. And Israel, culturally if not politically, sees itself as “there” for all Jews, the entire “Jewish people.” And yet, given the realities of the contemporary world, Jewish culture in Israel is not really as Ahad Ha’am envisioned it.

For one thing, Orthodox Jews, whom he considered a vestige of medieval life, play a vastly larger role in determining what counts as Jewish culture than he could have imagined. Much of the communal and visible Jewish cultural action is where they are: in religious settlements, in religious happenings like the dancing at the Western Wall on Simchat Torah, in legislation designed to protect the Jewish character of Israel. This legislation includes the maintenance of rabbinical courts, the unavailability of civil marriage, and the by-laws of most municipalities that prohibit public transportation on Sabbaths and festivals. Much of this, and especially the legislation, is condemned by its opponents as clerical. It is said to drive secular, or religious but non-Orthodox, Jews away from Judaism.

What some Jews consider most dangerous, and others, essential to the historical integrity of Judaism, is that the religious “establishment” of Israel, largely through Orthodox Jewry’s political parties, insists on determining what “counts,” not only as culture but as religion in Israel. True, Israel as a democratic state allows freedom to non-Orthodox religion, Conservative and Reform, but those get little public support or funding. In a sense, the status of these large and significant groups of world Jewry is like that of other religions. They can do what they want (except perform civilly recognized marriages and conversions) but they are mainly ignored, excluded from power. Some argue that this is a good thing, that what is grievously hurting religion in Israel is its proximity to and involvement in political power, but there is an element of “sour grapes” in that argument.

So, the Jewish religion one sees in Israel, at least in its public manifestations, is predominantly different from what the non-Orthodox Israeli Jew associates with significant cultural and spiritual life, though it is what s/he associates with religion. Religion is often incomprehensible to Israelis, even primitive. Yet it is sometimes perceived as exotic, a plausible and tested address for existential leaps into faith and community.

The average Israeli, whether hiloni (secular) or dati-moderni (“religious but modern”), would like, in principle, to take pride in the varied Jewishness of Israeli culture. S/he is proud of serious Israeli film, literature, and art, and can point to its “Jewish influences” or character. Israelis will note that the knitted kipah is nowhere at home in the public sphere as it is in Israel, no less than the sunburnt head of the kibbutznik.
and the well-cut suit of the businessman or the uninhibitedly displayed *tzitzit* (fringes) of the ultra-Orthodox Jew. Jewishness, in all shapes and garbs, has nothing to apologize for in the public space of Israel.

What sometimes troubles the “average” Israeli, secular or religious, is that the shared Jewishness of all is perhaps being lost. The religious one may come to feel that religious behavior in public is somehow suspect, and that the religious person is being de-legitimated. And secular people may be increasingly concerned that “the religious” think they have a monopoly on Jewishness and on values. In both groups there are individuals who worry that, in generations to come, not enough people will really care, either way, that different groups will live behind self-imposed wall.

In the span of forty years or so, Israel has changed radically. There is more poverty than there was, and almost no one is ideologically spartan. The orange groves are fewer, and the roads, replete with interchanges, are more numerous and wider. Israel is dotted by luxurious hotels, and there is an abundance of personal computers and cellular telephones. The hot summers are increasingly transformed by air-conditioning; the winter chills are dissipated by efficient heating systems. Everywhere there are traffic jams as cities grow more dense and suburbs sprawl. At Israeli universities, one can study any recognized field and attain a degree in it. Preparing for a good life, that is, good for the individual, is very much part of the scene.

5. Israel as a Thriving Western Country, Living a Natural Life

Israelis are justly proud of what they have achieved, and they see the economic, scientific, and cultural development of Israel as, in some ways, a uniquely Jewish accomplishment. Despite the economic boycott of Israel by the Arab world, despite the paucity of natural resources, despite the underprivileged background of so many of its immigrant populations throughout the years, despite frequent wars and constant military call-ups, Jews have once again succeeded in wrenching achievement from adversity. Friendships made during compulsory army service have engendered closely knit business associations and corporations. Self-reliance borne of isolation has led to inventiveness, and invention. Aridit has sparked irrigation techniques that draw international attention. Israel is a name in medical research, in high tech, and in problem-solving along the entire spectrum of modern society.
The generosity of world Jewry which has given unstintingly to Israel is part of that story. So is the “business head” of the proverbial Jew of yesteryear, which survived the revolution of Zionism, that ostensibly was to change Jews and make them more natural.

There are shadows lurking in the corners. The pioneering spirit languishes while kibbutzim play the stock market. Some social critics, here as elsewhere, tell us that the shopping mall, now unbelievably popular in Israel, incorporates the worst features of Levantine market places and American consumer culture: noise, music, alternatively soothing and unsettling, the tyranny of fashion, the stupor of masses engaged in mindless shopping. And, of course, we are reminded that much depends on international investment, which depends on progress in the peace process.

Nor should one neglect to mention the growing gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” in Israeli society. How long until streets in Haifa and Tel Aviv become home to our own homeless? And what is all the development doing to Israel’s ever-fragile ecology?

Away from these murky corners, there is the broad sunlight of having made it. Public service is efficient or automatic. Tolerance for shoddiness in services and products is declining; medical service is generally excellent, innovative, professional. Israel is rapidly becoming a state of the art place - in most areas that count in making life more comfortable, and in a sense, more moral and sensitive. Its leading men and women of letters are widely translated; its theater is performed at international festivals. Israel’s political life is firmly positioned in the democratic world. There is rowdyism before elections, but there are no tanks on the street on the morning after them. The press and the media are free, and highly critical. There are still three opinions wherever there are two Jews.

Without a doubt, the process is part and parcel of what the early political Zionists had in mind when they envisioned the Jews in their own land as normal, freed of complexes, excessive reflectiveness, yet confident, energetic, and competent. Many Israelis who have never read the treatises recognize the accomplishment. They are confident, sometimes allowing themselves a certain arrogance. But that will probably go away, if only because it is bad for (international) business.

The achievement cuts two ways. Being as good as America and Europe is enough if there is something in ideology and identity that is more, or at least significantly different, than what happens in these Western continents of achievement. Otherwise it is like “keeping up with the Joneses” when you can - in the open world of today - be Jones, if you wish. Where the real Joneses live, you do not have to put up with religious zealots, the constant threat of terror and war, the uncapitalistic notion gnawing at you that, yes, “all Israelis are responsible for one another.”
Which will win out? Identity, and some self-limiting rootedness? Or getting ahead, which is best done for the individual and the country itself by travelling light - unburdened by moral and fraternal, yet “irrational,” commitments?

Educators are beginning to realize that it is at this national and existential juncture that their most pressing concerns are located. Israeli society is coming to understand that its future depends on education. Some would say that even in Israel it is not superfluous to explicitly add: Jewish education.

Otherwise it is like “Keeping up with The Joneses,” when you can - in the open world of today - be Jones, if you wish.

PART THREE: THE CHALLENGE OF AMERICAN ZIONISM

The history recounted in Part One of this essay constitutes the pre-history of most American Jewish encounters with Israel. King David and the Maccabees, the stirring conquest of the promised land and bitter exile from it, fill childhood imaginations among contemporary American Jews as they have for Jews across the centuries, everywhere. What is more, they continue to haunt and nourish adult minds. The land that first came to life for many an American Jew in posters on the wall at Hebrew School, sustaining many lazy reveries on a late Thursday afternoon, often lives on through larger-than-life heroes such a Golda Meir (and, later, Yitzhak Rabin). Heroic national achievements - whether the ingathering of the exiles, or the rescue at Entebbe - take place on a scale that dwarfs local federation campaigns and synagogue building drives.

Here lies the primary difficulty in creating and sustaining a connection between Diaspora Jews and Israel. Diaspora Jews generally relate to the land, the state, and even the people of Israel as myth. And they have no choice but to do so. For myths can be appreciated from afar, whereas the complexities of everyday reality cannot. The heart can swell in Cleveland or San Antonio at images of a people reborn, deserts reclaimed, ideals made actual, and life snatched from the clutches of mass death. But what can one do, there and elsewhere, with the nitty-gritty of bureaucracy and political infighting, with unemployment and pollution, even if the growth in GNP is spectacular, and the myth - in the persons of immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union - lives on amidst the everyday and in fact causes many of the problems through which the myth is dissipated? The very success of Zionism, and the creation of Israel’s real-life society, have ironically rendered the State impossible to grasp from afar. For this understanding one must come close - which most Jews in America of course have not done.

They have not visited, even once. They have not acquired the literacy in Hebrew which would facilitate appreciation of cultural products and daily newspapers from across
the ocean. They do not read publications such as the *Jerusalem Report* or the *Jerusalem Post* on a regular basis. It is no surprise, then, that American Jews born after the Holocaust and the creation of the State - lacking first-hand witness of the myth-in-action - do not have the same profound feeling for Israel as did previous generations. For the latter, blue JNF boxes were ubiquitous, and heated debates over the proper direction of Zionism are a memory never to be forgotten. So too were debates over whether Zionism was compatible with Judaism on the one hand or American patriotism on the other.

There is a further problem: if many American Jews do not really know what to do with Israel, even as myth, how to place it in the mosaic of self-identity, it is because myths of long ago and far away can be integrated into daily life in the here and now only if they are not attached to someone else’s here and now; not brought down to earth at another point of specificity; not claimed (and interpreted differently) by people who in the abstract (according to myth) are related but who speak a foreign tongue and live a life far removed from one’s own. What shall one do with them, the story they claim, the spin they put on it? How can it all be brought close?

The answer traditionally provided by American Zionism to this question has been: do not bring it close. Louis Brandeis “translated” Herzl’s political Zionism for American ears by eliminating its sting, the “negation of the Diaspora.” American Jews, Brandeis insisted, were not doomed to the cruel Herzlian choice between assimilation and anti-Semitism in exile, or emigration to the Jewish State. They themselves had no need of a homeland, having already arrived and been welcomed at the greatest home the world had even known. Zionism was a way of providing a home for Jews who did need it, and thereby of extending the dream shared by Judaism’s prophets and America’s founding fathers - freedom, justice, opportunity for all - to Jews denied it by poverty and persecution. American Zionists as a rule did not understand their commitment to be one of self-realization through *aliyah*. They would “build” the Land but not “be built” through it. Their Zionism involved no transformation of the self. It was, in a word, philanthropy.

When Solomon Schechter, the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, joined other American Jewish leaders in promoting Ahad Ha’am’s brand of “cultural Zionism,” he too introduced a fundamental change in it. The work of national regeneration, he believed, would bring Jews back to the religion of their ancestors - an outcome which Ahad Ha’am believed impossible. More than a difference of theory was involved. The cultural renaissance which for Ahad Ha’am was the goal of Zionism, its purpose and raison d’etre, was for Schechter and those like him merely a means. Ahad Ha’am pictured a spiritual center in the Land of Israel creating Jewish culture and exporting it to the Diaspora, the culture living fully only in and through the activities of those who actually inhabited the land of Israel. Schechter, however, pictured Jews
living full religious lives - thanks to the revitalized center - throughout the Diaspora, as they had for two millennia. One could be a Jew wherever there were Diaspora institutions such as synagogues, schools, and seminaries like Schechter’s. The center would remain very much in service to the Diaspora. The homeland would be the instrument of the Jewish people’s flourishing everywhere.

This point of view became explicit in Mordecai Kaplan’s book, *A New Zionism*, published in 1955 - the most important statement on Zionism by the most influential American Jewish thinker of the century. Kaplan had written unequivocally in his magnum opus, *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934), that American Jews could experience Judaism only as a “subordinate civilization,” and that only Jews in Palestine could have Judaism be their “primary civilization.” There is no reason to believe he changed his mind on this point. But he proclaimed in the later work, a bare seven years after the State’s creation, that “Zionism has to be redefined so as to assure a permanent place for Diaspora Judaism.” The claim is extraordinary, and takes us at once to the gap in self-perception which has plagued dialogue between Israeli and American Jewish leaders for nearly fifty years now. Kaplan set forth what should perhaps be called the credo of American Zionism: namely that the Jewish State exists in order to help the Jewish people “become a fit instrument of this-worldly salvation for every Jew, wherever he resides.” In helping their Israeli “others,” then, American Jews were in reality helping themselves.

This is not what Ben Gurion had in mind, to say the least. Nor does it accord with the understanding of most Israeli Jews, who have more and more come to resent American paternalism and to insist that they hold the central place in contemporary Jewish history. The building on the campus of Tel Aviv University, which in English is called the Diaspora Museum, is called in Hebrew, the Home of the Diasporas. Israel is the only home Jews could possibly have, according to a common Israeli conviction. The Jewish State, reborn in the Holy Land, is the inevitable outcome of Jewish wanderings - and the only location of Jewish life which will remain once every current Diaspora way-station exists only as an exhibit in this or another museum.

**PART FOUR: ISRAEL ISSUES THROUGH THE EYES OF NORTH AMERICAN JEWS**

In our generation, there is a felt desire to achieve greater understanding between Israeli and Diaspora Jews. This requires greater humility on both sides before the vicissitudes of history than either Kaplan or Ben Gurion could muster. Increased knowledge of each other’s origins and achievements will also help. Even so, however, the encounter of Diaspora Jews with Israel that we, in this essay, are hoping to foster should not aim to result in agreement. That is not the point of the exercise, and
certainly not the standard by which its achievement should be judged. It would be enough to set the two parties over against one another, have them see and listen to one another in the midst of Israel’s landscape. That challenge is huge enough. In this spirit, we return to the five topics outlined in Part Two.

1. Israel as the Land of Judaism

The most obvious problem with “the Land of Judaism” is that most American Jews have no substantive connection to Judaism; indeed, one of the main purposes of “Israel experiences” and “missions,” whatever the age of those involved, is fostering such a connection. Some twenty percent of American Jews will have no relationship to a Jewish institution over the course of their entire lives. Barely half are connected by actual membership at any given moment. On the other hand, signs of vitality abound; a growing minority of American Jews does accord Judaism and the Jewish community a central place in their lives. Israel has played a key role in the formation of these identities. But can it continue to do so? Israel as the Land of Judaism on a broader scale? Will not the identification of Israel with Judaism - which most American Jews have chosen time and again over their lives not to embrace in any significant way - preclude the relationship which we are trying to foster? It might; but one has no choice, given the indelible connection in every Jewish (and Christian) American consciousness between the land and the sacred histories played out upon it. There is some evidence, too, that just as American Jews who might not actually “believe in God” (whatever they interpret the declaration to mean) may experience signals of “transcendence” and be open to the presence of ultimate meaning, so too they might thrill to the antiquity of the holy land, the connection it affords to a mysterious and grand history that spans three millennia. One need not believe in the God once worshipped on the Temple Mount to experience a surge of meaning when walking its precincts (or the tunnels underneath). Nor does the pastiness of all this history necessarily interfere with the sense of connection. On the contrary, it may make the relation safe. The past is past, thank goodness. Those who parade in the black garb of bygone centuries thankfully make their outdated loyalties clear, most American Jews would say, beyond all threat of contagion or imitation. The holiness of these sites is, all things considered, therefore a plus, a draw. We all want - and perhaps even need - to experiment with the sacred, in order to learn how much we will permit ourselves to be touched by it, and changed.

A similar attraction born of distance holds with regard to the holiness of the land. American Jews are overwhelmingly not farmers, or even active gardeners. They have the urban dweller’s normal romance of the land, wilderness and pastoral alike. Israel’s attraction to American Jews in past generations lay in no small measure in its
kibbutzim, the proud rejection of commerce and the professions in favor of a life the Diaspora visitor would not choose but wishes, in a small corner of consciousness, that he or she could try out for a time. The decline of the kibbutzim in recent years is likely to arouse the same perplexity among American Jews - and the same subliminal satisfaction - as the failure of secular Israelis to be “religious” in the American manner. (We will turn in a moment to American dismay at the apparent move by many Israelis to become too religious, in part by voting for religious political parties: an idea which to American Jews, fearful of the Christian right, is anathema.) American Jews still take immense satisfaction in the sight and smell of fields cultivated by Jewish hands. This does not require an ideology of labor, à la A.D. Gordon. All that is needed is nostalgia: vague longings for a time of genuine community and purer faith - a time populated by venerated ancestors.

A more immediate connection with Israel as holy land is furnished by Israel’s status as the place in which the holy work of the people Israel is again most visibly accomplished. Israel is the site of the project which called the Jewish people into being - becoming “a kingdom of priests and holy nation” - and which gives purpose to its existence still. American Jews take pride in the Jewish tradition of social activism, and believe that they carry it on through their own labors. To the degree that Israel lives up to the prophetic ideal in the sight of all the nations, it elevates Diaspora souls. Injustice, taken for granted in one’s home community, is grating and alienating when encountered in the holy land. The green and brown of that earth - the first sight of which visitors eagerly crane the neck to see out airplane windows - appeals in part because it is the earth that prophets once walked and impoverished immigrants still kiss. American Jews will likely always hold Israel to a standard which they would not impose on themselves or their country; when pressed they recognize that this is unfair and irrational, but continue to do so nonetheless. They would perhaps argue correctly that they have no choice. In Israel the demand for holiness, if not its actual achievement, comes with the territory.

2. Israel as the Land Where the Jews Live as a People

Jewish peoplehood is a myth for American Jews - larger than life, but rarely if ever experienced first-hand. It is, to that degree, very much a fiction. True any Jew not engaged in massive denial knows that the Holocaust aimed at encompassing him or her too, and but for allied armies (and perhaps divine intervention) might well have done so. It takes only another increment of self-awareness for American Jews to recognize that Israel touches them as well: hence the shudder at its enemies’ attacks,
the outrage at the state’s failures and imperfections. A positive sense of Jewish peoplehood is another matter, generally lacking. One has experienced synagogues, organizations, local federations, but American Jewry as a whole? Unless one goes to a General Assembly or other national meeting, the words do not compute. All the more so is this true of the Jewish people - a greatly-extended family that one knows is out there, and is perhaps eager to experience, but that remains for most an idea, an image, unfurnished as yet with content.

The hope of making Jewish peoplehood more than a fiction or a hope perhaps draws American Jews to Israel. It is part of what they want to feel there, and unless they are kept (as many visitors are) in a cocoon of careful programming, they likely will. The best site of encounter may well be a public bus: teeming with varied faces and physiognomies and yet, one knows, united by external enemies (the terrorist bombers have made this graphic) as well as self-chosen destiny. The act of traveling together, literally, may well suggest to them for the first time that they are bound up with Jews around the world, even if Jews are not exactly unified. So too the tangible presence of the Holocaust in Israel, the stories heard from survivors and children of survivors, pieces of a history that come together and are reinforced by the clear and present national danger to the existence of the Jewish State and so to the Jewish people. All of this comes home to one in Israel, indeed contributes to the eerie sense that one has come home.

Lie awake at night because of jet lag, turn on the radio by the bed and flip the dials, and one hears Arabic all around except for the distant and familiar sounds of the BBC or Voice of America - and the soothing Hebrew melodies of Israel. It is all the more vivid, in the dark: more fearful to know who one is and who one is not, and then perhaps strangely comforting. What one does with this in the light of day, or back at home, is another matter;

How one renegotiates one’s identity as American Jew and Jewish American, if that proves necessary. But the process has begun. One has recognized connection not only to the holy land and the ideal project underway upon it but to the worldwide people concentrated in this place as it has not been for two millennia. That people is now exposed, vulnerable, available, active. It works collectively on a grand scale, without apparent reduction in its diversity. That is a lot for the newcomer to absorb.

3. Israel as a Political Entity

“Every state is founded on force,” the great sociologist Max Weber quoted from Leon Trotsky, the “non-Jewish Jew.” In Israel this is immediately apparent, and a source of powerful sensation to the visitor. Everywhere there are Jews with guns. Indeed, in
nearly exact reversal of the Diaspora, where few policemen are Jewish, where it is a point of pride for Jews not to hunt, and where relatively few Jews serve in the all-volunteer army, in Israel carrying a gun is a mark of Jewish identity, guns being denied to Arabs who have not served in the army, which is the vast majority of them. The Jews are the soldiers. Teenage American boys may readily identify with the soldiers; teenage girls may find them attractive; adults may also discover such kindly feelings in their hearts while reflecting on their own mixed feelings at the sight of Jewish power. This is perhaps at the core of what American Jews are countering when they come to Israel, the focus of the Israeli’s “otherness.”

However, several features of Israel qua Jewish state complicate the raw encounter with Jewish power. One - a negative for many Diaspora Jews - is Israel’s political chaos, the lack of etiquette in Knesset debates, the vitriolic free-for-all that fills the newspapers on a daily basis. With the state’s enemies so powerful, and the blessing of the state’s existence after two millennia so palpable, one would think the parties could get their act together, and act together for the sake of Jews and Judaism. How can it be true that “we are one” if Israelis themselves are so divided? Jewish politics, played out on the scale of a state rather than an organization like Federation or Hadassah, is often not only perplexing but deeply disturbing.

Then there is the fact of patriotism, which is out of style in the West, but still present to a significant (even if reduced) degree in Israel. How wave the blue and white flag, even nostalgically, when one no longer feels comfortable waving the red, white, and blue? How cheer for Israel’s soldiers when one reacts to one’s own military with skepticism? Aren’t nationalism and ethnic assertiveness a source of strife and calamity everywhere in the world today, wreaking havoc in the former Yugoslavia and threatening to tear even Canada apart? Even in America, the rancor of identity politics is increasingly ugly and a cause of concern to Jews. How then embrace Jewish nationalism unequivocally in Israel - particularly in the face of Palestinian claims that they too deserve a portion of the land, and Israeli Arab claims that they have been denied the full rights of citizenship in the State of Israel? Can a Jewish State truly be democratic? The questions may be new to Diaspora visitors; and they are disturbing.

Finally, Israel can seemingly justify its frequent resort to force, its reliance on the guns which are ubiquitous, only by appeal to the Jews’ status as victim. They are still out to destroy us, for the moment with suicide bombers rather than with invading armies. We are barely five million; they are tens of millions. We are, if no longer entirely alone, nearly so. We therefore have no choice but to protect ourselves forcefully, often causing suffering to others in the process.
This is distasteful to many Diaspora (as to many Israeli) Jews, on several counts. Having trumpeted the Jews’ claim to victimization for twenty years in America, and built a Holocaust museum to document the claim for generations to come, American Jews are now finding that others - principally blacks - are using the language of victimization to press claims, particularly against Jews. The community has as a result soured on appeals to victimization. Nor are Diaspora Jews any more comfortable than Israelis with the ascription of weakness, the memory of suffering. Better perhaps to sin than be sinned against by Arabs - though the justification of the “sinning” by the “being sinned against” is no less a source of discomfort. One suspects that many Diaspora Jews have chosen never to visit Israel in part to avoid confrontation with these features of Jewish existence at the end of the twentieth century. Better to remain inside “fortress America,” and face the cruel choices of political life not as a Jew, a member of a threatened people, but as a citizen of the most powerful state on earth.

4. Israel as the Land of Jewish Culture

Here we come to a paradox: to the degree that Israeli culture is authentically Israeli, growing out of the Israeli reality and responding to its particular circumstances, it will be inaccessible to most American Jews. To the degree that it partakes of the universal modern culture of the west, it will be accessible - but not especially Israeli, and so not a worthy part of an Israel experience. It is assuring to learn that the paintings on the wall at the Tel Aviv galleries look very similar to those on view in New York and San Francisco, but it makes one wonder why one needed a “spiritual center” in order to create this culture, Jewish only indirectly, perhaps not even in name. Why - except for superficial purposes of adorning one’s home with Israeli goods - would one want to import such objects to America? On the other hand, to the degree that Israeli culture takes place in Hebrew, on stage or on the page, or reflects an experience of the world not shared by Diaspora Jews, it will remain opaque to Diaspora sensibility, and reduce the sense of connection. The alienation may be all the greater if the culture on view is Jewish and yet strange. There is no quick-fix overcoming of this problem; myth is more easily appropriated than the particularities of reality, including cultural reality.

One element of the Israeli scene, however, can be immediately grasped: the public character of Jewishness - Purim on the streets and on the busses; the singing and tinkle of silverware from a thousand succot; the peace of Shabbat in Jerusalem; the calendar mirroring Jewish rather than gentile rhythms; the presence of kippot and kapotes. American Jews cannot but notice that religion is
a vital part of Israeli culture. The fact surprises and perhaps upsets them. Religion is not meant to infuse all of life, by common definition, and Judaism -for all that one defines it in public as a “way of life” - functions in American reality and understanding as a religion. Culture is TV, Hollywood, the museum, the symphony. It can be Jewish only in the way that Mel Brooks and Seinfeld are Jewish, at best in the way that Schindler’s List is Jewish. Individuals make it so. Collective Jewish culture appears strange.

It reminds American Jews how far they have traveled to reach this place, Israel. The fact of public Jewish culture is overwhelming to them. It is a feature that they struggle to process while in Israel; they may well wonder upon returning to America whether it can in any way find a parallel there, and if not, how much they will miss it. Their former notions of identity and Jewishness are thereby challenged.

The questioning is all the more acute because the present generation of Americans, including Jews, does not seem to derive the meaning from high culture that its parents did, perhaps because the divide separating high from popular culture has all but vanished in the contemporary West. One does not as a rule turn to music or the arts to fill transcendent holes of meaning in the self. Culture is rather a source of pleasure and entertainment. Jewish culture is consequently a source of satisfaction, when one experiences it in America, a source of welcome connection to ancestors or tradition, an assertion and confirmation of one’s acceptance, but Jews are unlikely to turn to it for more than that. In Israel it seems by contrast to play a central role, vital to sustaining a new and still fragile sort of identity.

5. Israel as a Thriving Western Country,
Living a Natural Life

You are riding back to the airport, head and heart full to overflowing with the sensations of Israel, and there in the night sky, on the hills of Mevaseret Tzion, just outside of Jerusalem, rise the golden arches of McDonalds. The sight perhaps stimulates other memories: traffic jams rivaling those of America (though the roads are generally narrower), beaches where the same sun beats down on the same swimsuits; supermarkets stuffed more than ever before with every American and European product. Diaspora Jewish visitors have likely come to appreciate the achievement of this normalcy. No more rationing. No more tents or corrugated huts. No more dire need, perhaps, for American
philanthropy. Israelis have garnered a place for Jews among the nations, and a spot on the cable TV listings to prove it. So the question asserts itself: okay – now what? Jews are not used to being okay. And, of course, we still aren’t. Israel demands security in its peace negotiations because it still lacks security, and perhaps always will. American Jews therefore don’t have to confront the total realization of the Zionist dream, which awaits peace, and so are spared the full impact of its challenge to the opposing path that they have chosen for themselves. For the moment, anyway, even New York seems more secure than Tel Aviv. And the choice is not, as Herzl put it, between assimilation and anti-Semitism on the one hand, and coming “home” to normalcy on the other. America offers Jews, at least in potential, a life of pleasant distinctiveness, not too much or too little apartness, access to transcendent meaning and a proud history, with minimal cost of overt hostility, amidst unparalleled acceptance and achievement. Does Israel’s achievement of a comparable and very similar daily life - the same patterns of romance and career, the same worries of child-rearing and traffic fatalities, the same complaints about the media and the politicians - make Israel more or less attractive to American Jews, more or less of a challenge to their own commitments, more or less a spur to the reexamination of their relation to the Jewish people and to Judaism? Time will tell. One suspects that individual reactions will in this area, more than in others, continue to differ markedly.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSION

We have spoken of Israel as being “mythic” for Diaspora Jews, by which we meant that its attraction, such as it is, lies largely in its distance, in the seeming divide between Israel and the reality of Jewish life in the Diaspora. Israel is intense, provocative and bothersome: Jewish life in the Diaspora, at least at the moment, provides a degree of Jewish sub-identity, individually measured and chosen.

We have suggested that many Diaspora Jews do not want to get too close and that they have their reasons. The ethos of Israel, as a society still not really safe, and perhaps still caught up in a syndrome of “the victim,” can appear jarring. Universal culture, though plentiful in Israel, can be had elsewhere; the specifically Jewish culture of the country, public and disturbingly religious, as often creates identity crises as solves them.

Israel, then, is best kept at arm’s length, seen through mythic spectacles which color matters so that one sees “something Jewish out there” but what one sees is not real enough to challenge or disrupt a comfortable reality, and there is nothing one has to do with it.
The major issue facing the Jewish educator who wishes to deal with Israel in Jewish education shapes up as the following: Are we going to cultivate and perpetuate distance and nourish a sense of the exotic about Israel, or shall we nourish possibilities and opportunities for true familiarity and encounter? And if the latter, how can encounter happen between those who seem so different? Are we to manufacture and package counterfeit myths that hold reality at a distance or invite learners to address a larger-than-everyday-life reality?

Actually, there may be no choice. Myths are important, in education and life as a whole, when they help us see general and larger-than-life truths. But when myths are a tapestry of scenes from unreal worlds, they become an escape from reality. And that kind of myth, which we are calling “counterfeit,” has been fading for several generations. There are no more remote scenes and places for the mythic imagination to dwell upon, just as there are no more inaccessible and magnificent kings and queens who are totally different and can remove us from ourselves. The Messianic age, which could feasibly still be anticipated for excellent inherently religious reasons, is now often existentially irrelevant to Jews who see it as a fairy tale: they now see the world, or at least their world, as sufficiently satisfactory - if not “the best of all possible worlds,” at least good enough.

Counterfeit myths therefore recede and become outlandish and finally, uninteresting. There are several advantages to this state of affairs. First, when people confront a reality that was “sold” to them as mythical, such as the actual life of Israel, they often ask: Why does reality intrude, to ruin the myth? Then they become angry, disillusioned, turned off, and they keep away. But where myths no longer place rose-colored glasses on the eyes of the beholder, it often turns out that the reality is vastly more interesting and challenging than any mythic one. What makes sense for the world of myth easily becomes dream-like, reflecting only what is (authentically or sentimentally) within; whereas reality is comparably wider, filled with human potentialities of all kinds, blatantly problematic.

We can take this one step further and say that some myths seem to sabotage any possibility of genuine religious faith and activity. Such myths bespeak remoteness, and dream worlds, and idols. Religion, on the other hand, is about real responsibility and about God who imposes it, right now and right here. “It [God’s commandment] is not in heaven or across the sea,” teaches the Torah, “but in your heart and mouth to do it.” What religion demands
arises out of concrete social and hence moral situations, and what it anticipates stems from a moral relationship with a reality always tainted, always in need of repair (tikkun). Specifically, the Messiah continues to be real for those who see this world as not the best of all possible ones, who refuse to escape responsibility by confusing the homes and streets of suburbia with the world in which they live.

In fact, given the high degree of education and culture among modern Western Jews, one might well wonder why any educator would wish to cultivate counterfeit myths in contemporary Jewry or bemoan their demise. One plausible explanation, and it is difficult to think of any other, is that mythic memories are confused with culture and myth itself is confused with religion. Given that mind-set, Israel becomes a remote place where that strangely unreal thing called Jewish culture is on exhibit, and religion as an exotic museum-like piece makes Jewish myth (still!) come alive.

If our analysis is sound, then educators are well advised to teach about Israel as it is, and what that can mean for Jews throughout the world.

But why should educators do so? Why is this important?

Jews from the Diaspora are not used to thinking of themselves as members of a Jewish nation among the nations. In lands of freedom and opportunity, they have learned to see themselves not only as equal citizens but as full-fledged members of former host societies in which they are no longer guests.

In Israel it is different, hence sometimes disturbing and embarrassing, but offering great opportunities borne of responsibility. This difference enables us to gain another perspective, to see another dimension of Jewish life. Among the Nations It is told of David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, that he once debated in Jerusalem a well-known American rabbi about the mutual relations that American Jewry and Israeli Jewry should cultivate. When Ben Gurion demanded that American (and all Diaspora) Jews recognize Israel’s primacy, the rabbi disagreed: “Remember, Mr. Ben Gurion,” he said, “we are the two greatest Jewish communities in the world, we should be equal partners.” To which Ben Gurion retorted: “At the moment (in the nineteen fifties) we are less numerous than you. But bear in mind that while you are a community within the American people, we are the American people of this place.”

Learning about Israel, for Jews and for non-Jews, is learning about the Jews as a nation. Yet those who are learning, as it were, from the outside, do so because they are Jews and this nation somehow belongs to them and claims
kinship with them. How can that be?

The heart of the matter, we suggest, is that this nation living in Israel will never be as normal as others. It will always have a people beyond its borders. It will be a national homeland for Jews, but even Israeli Jews will never be defined only by territory, while those who live elsewhere will hopefully be well acquainted with the land which is, in some undefinable sense, also theirs.

Strangely, the project of normalization that distinguished almost all truly modern Jews in the last several centuries, in which they invested heavily and achieved greatly, has not succeeded and probably, never will. As long as Jewish life that is historically recognizable persists, the Jewish people will not be a religion among religions or a nation among nations. Whenever, in difficult or exhilarating moments, we shall hear them saying “we” the reference may be to political events in Europe, or to the discovery of oil in the Negev: to a shared anxiety or a common stroke of luck. Jews who pray, whether in Dimona or Alaska, that God “bless His people Israel with peace” will sometimes be thinking of a political process underway between the State of Israel and its neighbors, or, with equal plausibility and fervor, of the civic well-being of Jews, threatened or achieved, in the former Soviet Union or elsewhere. Or perhaps they will be referring to the inner peace that may, at happy historical moments, characterize Jews when there is no causeless strife among them.

The secret of their survival, of the inner richness and complexity of their inner life, will never be restricted to that peculiar peoplehood of the House of Israel, world-wide, but it will always be related to it.

There is a mystery about Jewish life. At the center of it is the living people of Israel and its God, and the gifts and demands called Torah. The Land of Israel is also somewhere near the center of the mystery, and the mystery cannot be truly understood without being “on the inside” of what the state of Israel is about. For those who learn about it and experience it, the mystery is thickly felt, like its summer sun pouring out of a cloudless blue sky. But as they become familiar with the land, knowing its people, its problems and hopes, they come to realize that this mystery is not a fairy tale.
“Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today. They are entitled to be taken seriously...They should be allowed to grow into whoever they were meant to be.” - Janusz Korczak

The children, youth and young adults of the early 21st century often get a bad rap. Often accused of being concerned only with themselves, the children born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s have disparagingly been referred to as Generation Me. This broad categorization of a generation is a gross generalization and one which doesn’t tell the full story. When looking specifically at the so-called Jewish Generation Me, a more complete picture shows that although some characteristics are constant with the broad stereotype, there are many more characteristics which we as a Jewish community need to embrace.

A better understanding of the Jewish Generation Me also represents a great opportunity for many educators who have long espoused a learner-centered approach to education. Many proponents of a learner-centered approach to education would perhaps agree with Generation Me’s demands, inasmuch as all good education should, first and foremost, relate to the individual learner. Literally the I is at the center of the experience – what may be called an I-Centered approach to Jewish education.

An I-Centered approach to Jewish education is deliberately infused with double meaning. Not only is it true that all good education should be learner-centered, but it is also valuable for us as Jewish educators to embrace the notion that Israel education can transform Jewish Generation Me into a population of strongly identified Jews.

We will pose three questions that move us to a better understanding of why and how an I-Centered approach to education is necessary for today’s Jewish Generation Me.

- What is an I-Centered Education?
What are some of the features of today’s Jewish Generation Me?

How does an I-Centered Education transform Jewish Generation Me into a population with strong Jewish identities who see Israel as core to whom they are and who they will become?

**What is an I-Centered Education?**

An I-Centered approach to education, as it relates to child-centered learning, is not new. It is a philosophical approach to education that builds upon the works of many who have long argued that the most meaningful and enduring education is that by which the learner experiences something for her/himself. From Romantic philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau to the modern pragmatist John Dewey, who stated that “education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself,” theorists have long stressed the importance of experiential learner-based education. This does not mean that experience alone is enough for education to take place. For experiences to become educative we need to reflect upon them in order that they become the building blocks by which we grow and are ultimately transformed. Therefore in an experiential learning model, even in an I-Centered approach to Generation Me, a teacher is not only present, but central in facilitating the learning experience and reflecting upon these experiences so that the learners can grow.

Not without its critics, this child-centered approach to education argues that the learner, rather than the content, should be the primary focus of all learning experiences. The educator’s role is very different to the teachers in a traditional educational environment, who deposit knowledge and content into their students waiting minds. As Jewish educators we can learn tremendously from Janusz Korczak, who believed strongly that such educators could only exist if they held their learners with the respect that they were entitled to. For Korczak, learners were not empty vessels, but valued partners in any human interaction. For proponents of experiential and child-centered learning, the relationships between educator and learner are critical, because it is upon these layers of trust and respect that learning can take place.
Ultimately, when talking about an I-Centered approach to Jewish education we are talking about the development of strong relationships. When Martin Buber writes about the I-Thou (Ich-Du) relationship, he stresses the mutual, holistic existence of two beings. In the student-teacher relationship, this mutual respect is paramount. In terms of one’s relationship with Israel, we must also consider how to transform the relationship between the learner and Israel from an I-It (Ich-Es) relationship, where Israel and the learner encounter one another as objects but do not really meet, into an I-Thou relationship where both the learner and Israel deeply connect with one another.

**What are Some of the Features of Today’s Jewish Generation Me?**

As educators we need to understand both the content of Israel and the many I’s who learn within the experiences we facilitate. What characteristics encapsulate today’s generation of Jewish children, youth and young adults? And most importantly, how can we, by better understanding who these learners are, create and facilitate learning experiences that touch every I? These characteristics are also important because not only do they enable us to better understand a key segment of our population but because they also give us a better understanding of some of the characteristics that will define the Jewish community in the future.

**Six Core Characteristics of Jewish Generation Me**

1. **They Care.** This generation of youth has often been categorized as narcissistic, self-absorbed and largely disinterested in their collective being; however, the search for identity which all people experience also involves a process of collective self-discovery. As part of the quest to better understand who they are and how they fit into this world, young Jews are asking questions about their history, people, religion and culture.

2. **Multiple Selves.** As much as being Jewish is important, it is only one piece of who the youth of today are. In many cases their Jewish identity is no more or less important than any other of their identities.
What makes this generation different is the relative ease with which they can move between their various identities depending on the specific context and who they surround themselves with. We need to ensure that the experiences we offer our youth speak to all aspects of who they are and not just their isolated Jewish component. This has long been referred to as a holistic approach to education.

3. **Safe and Secure.** Most young Jews in America feel safe, secure and proud of their heritage. Despite what their parents or grandparents might tell them, Jewish youth today do not feel any existential threat to the survival of the Jewish people. For them, the Holocaust is an important episode in history, the State of Israel has always and will always be there, and threats from Iran or media reports of anti-Semitism in France are just that – media reports among the many in a continuous 24-7 news cycle. This should not be interpreted as naïve or ignorant, because they also know more and have greater access to information than any generation in history. In many ways, Jewish youth today are evidence of the fulfillment of the American dream: they have arrived and do not perceive themselves as being distinct from any other ethno-religious American group.

4. **Creative Generation.** Today’s youth have the capacity to express themselves and share their talents with more people than ever before. In a Web 2.0 world, best symbolized by Wikipedia, all information has value, and anyone delivering that information is a resource (especially if it is constructed by the masses). Today’s youth have grown up in this reality and they expect and demand to be fully involved in both the creation and implementation of anything that is important to them. A Jewish text and a traditional authority are valuable only after their respect has been earned – something that can only be established when learners are given the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with them. Likewise, rituals are only
as meaningful as the sovereign selves who help construct and develop them. This rejection of tradition has been interpreted by some as disrespectful – but instead needs to be re-framed within the passion and dedication of those many young Jews who strive to be interpreters and creators and not merely passive recipients of a tradition.

5. **Universal Judaism.** Whereas being Jewish once was seen as important because it was “good for the Jews,” for today’s youth being Jewish is often seen as important insomuch as it can affect the world. The trend towards Jewish social action and tikkun olam is not a fad, but is representative of a belief that enables Jewish youth to contribute to making the world a better place through a Jewish lens. This also means that one can be Jewish in very positive ways within non-Jewish frameworks and with non-Jewish contemporaries – facts that mainstream Jewish organizations are reluctant to accept.

6. **Challenging Jews.** On the whole Jewish youth are intelligent and must be treated that way at every level of interaction. They deserve our respect as learners and as human beings. In all spheres of life, today’s youth are taught to question and to be critical – and Jewish life, and specifically Jewish education, must adapt accordingly.

**An I-Centered Education for Jewish Generation Me**
In an ever-changing world, Israel education should be based around what we currently know about Jewish children, youth and young adults. This means that contemporary Israel education must reflect both how our learners learn and who they are as part of Generation Me. In this sense it truly is a double meaning I-Centered education.

1. **Connected Israel:** A connection with Israel is seen as part of a young person’s journey to discover who they are and where they belong in the world. For them it will often be the connection with people and places that resonate most because
they fulfill a psychological need to build an attachment and understanding of one’s heritage and one’s people.

2. **Attractive Israel:** Israel must be presented in a way that is attractive, dynamic and engaging given that it is competing in a marketplace of opportunities designed to attract the attention of discerning consumers.

3. **Sophisticated Israel:** As learners mature they must be presented a sophisticated and nuanced Israel, because it is through understanding these complexities that they will struggle and develop their own personal relationship with Israel.

4. **Global Israel:** Israel must be presented in a way that speaks to youth and young adults who see themselves both as Members of the Tribe and Global Citizens. In this regard educators must strive to relate to both the uniqueness of Israel as well as its role as a normal country among the other nations of the world.

5. **Diverse Israel:** Israel must be presented in a myriad of ways because what is meaningful for one person is not so for all. This diversity must reflect both varied pedagogic techniques as well as the diversity of lenses through which Israel can be presented, including but not restricted to technology, arts and culture, sports, politics, environment, social action, pop culture, technology, health, science, and business.

6. **Action-Oriented Israel:** Israel education should inspire learners to do. It should empower them to create projects, develop personal relationships, want to visit Israel, and get to know Israel better. Most importantly, good Israel education will succeed when Jewish learners include Israel as part of their own personal narrative.

An I-Centered approach to Israel education and engagement allows us to embrace the totality of Jewish Generation Me. On one hand, this approach should allow us to cater to the individual needs and desires of all of our individual learners. For the student who loves art, sports, technology, the environment, social justice issues etc., Israel offers a
landscape which can embrace all of these and many more niche interest areas that can be attractive and meaningful to individuals. And on the other hand, an I-Centered approach also offers the opportunity to those aspects of Jewish Generation Me which speak to their collective purpose and responsibility.

At the end of the day there are two questions that guide the actions of most youth and young adults – who am I and where do I fit in this world? An I-Centered approach to Israel engagement offers answers to both of these questions.
Presenters

Dr. Alex Pomson

Dr. Alex Pomson is Director of Research and Evaluation for Rosov Consulting, based in San Francisco. He was founding head of Jewish studies at the King Solomon High School in London, and Koschitzky family professor of Jewish teacher education at York University, Toronto. He holds a PhD from the Institute of Education, University of London. He is lead investigator of a longitudinal study for the Canadian Government to research the transitions from Jewish elementary school to high school, and he is co-investigator of a parallel seven-year study of the journey through high school of Jewish families in the UK.

Dr Pomson was born in the UK, emigrated to Canada, and is now an Israeli citizen.

Yonatan Ariel, Executive Director, Makom

Yonatan lectures widely in the fields of Contemporary Jewry, Educational Policy-Making and Experiential Education. He has taught in public school and in adult and travel settings. Yonatan studied history and education at universities and is a graduate of both the Institute for Youth Leaders and of the Jerusalem Fellows. He has held senior policy-making positions at the Mandel Leadership Institute, the UK’s United Jewish Israel Appeal, Melitz and the Israel Experience.

Yonatan was born and bred in the UK, made aliya in 1983 and has since spent a total of seven years on shlichut.

Robbie Gringras, Director of Arts and Media, Makom

Robbie is a British-born Israeli, graduate of Oxford University and Mandel Jerusalem Fellows. In the theatre he has performed on London’s West End and throughout the world in his own original plays. Since immigrating to Israel in 1996 he has taught at theatre schools country-wide, and directed several plays. His solo shows have been performed in Israel, UK, Australia, USA, Canada, Russia, and Mexico in English, Hebrew, and Spanish. He has taught and published widely on the arts in Jewish and Israel education.
**Sarah Tuttle-Singer, Social Media Editor, Times of Israel**

Sarah Tuttle-Singer is an LA expat (reluctantly) growing roots in Israel these past three years, where she lives with her two kids in a small village with a bomb-ass view of rolling fields and endless sky.

Sarah is a Contributing Editor at Kveller, the New Media Editor at The Times of Israel, and has written for several sites including TOI, Scary Mommy, XoJane, Jezebel, and Ladies Home Journal.

Sarah is dangerous when bored.

**Dyonna Ginsberg, Director of Service Learning, Jewish Agency for Israel**

Upon completing her B.A. in political science at Columbia University, Dyonna made Aliyah in 2002 and obtained an M.A. in Jewish Education from Hebrew University. She was Executive Director of Bema’aglei Tzedek (“Circles of Justice”), an Israeli NGO that aspires to create a more just Israeli society inspired by Jewish values, one of the founders of Siach, a global network of Jewish social justice and environmental professionals, sits on the board of US-based Uri L’Tzedek, and was awarded the World Council of Jewish Communal Service’s Ted Comet Exemplar Award for Outstanding Leadership in Strengthening the Jewish People in 2008.

**Simon Klarfeld, Young Judea, Executive Director**

Simon is a native of London, England, where he chaired the Zionist Youth Council of Great Britain. As a young adult, he lived in Russia, directing activities on behalf of the Soviet Jewry movement there. Klarfeld professionally served as director of the Soviet Jewry movement in both England and Northern California, vice president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, interim vice president of Birthright Israel North America, and founding director of Genesis at Brandeis – a summer program for high school students. Most recently he was executive director of Hillel at Columbia University and Barnard College.
Dr. Zohar Raviv, International VP of Education for Taglit-Birthright Israel

Zohar served as Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies at Oberlin College and as the Hebrew University Florence Melton Scholar to North America. Zohar is a graduate of Bar-Ilan University (B.A, Land of Israel Studies), Brandeis University (joint M.A, Judaic Studies and Jewish Education), and received his PhD in Jewish Thought from the University of Michigan in 2007.

Zohar lives in Israel, and spent 13 years in North America.
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