

SOME BACKGROUND BEFORE VIEWING

Unetaneh Tokef/ונתנה תוקף

The story of Yom Kippur on Kibbutz Beth Hashita

What happens to a small close-knit community when 11 of its members are buried in one day? What forms of mourning and meaning are available to this community, when religion is foresworn? And when the 11 young men all died fighting for Israel in the Yom Kippur war, how should their secular kibbutz now relate to Yom Kippur?

This moving documentary follows the trauma of Kibbutz Beth Hashita, and how composer Yair Rosenblum contributes through his music a way for the kibbutz to find an authentic Jewish Israeli voice for their pain.

In 1973 The Yom Kippur War traumatized all of Israeli society, but no more so than Kibbutz Beth Hashita, a small secular kibbutz in the north of Israel. Eleven members of Beth Hashita fell in battle. From then on the kibbutz was forced to search for the ritual and forms of remembrance that were authentic to a secular community. In 1990, Israeli composer Yair Rosenblum came to live on Kibbutz Beth Hashita. He was moved by their ceremonies and wanted to contribute. He composed a new melody to the liturgical poem *Unetaneh Tokef*, which was a traditional part of the High Holiday service. This powerful and far-reaching melody became one of the central focuses of the holiday.

This documentary reviews the process that Rosenblum underwent when composing the new melody, and delves into the questions and memories that kibbutz members carry with them.

Unetaneh Tokef explores the role of ritual, tradition, and creativity in coming to terms with loss and the vagaries of the human condition. At the same time the film gives us a poignant glimpse into the nature of an Israeli community driven and wounded by love of the land, of the community, and of the State of Israel in a time of war.



Unetaneh Tokef: The Prayer & Its Origins

"We acclaim this day's pure sanctity, its awesome power. This day, Lord, Your dominion is deeply felt. Compassion and truth, its foundations, are perceived. In truth do You judge and prosecute, discern motives and bear witness, record and seal, count and measure, remembering all that we have forgotten. You open the Book of Remembrance and it speaks for itself, for every man has signed it with his deeds.

The great shofar is sounded. A still, small voice is heard. This day even angels are alarmed, seized with fear and trembling as they declare: "The day of judgment is here!" For even the hosts of heaven are judged. This day all who walk the earth pass before You as a flock of sheep. And like a shepherd who gathers his flock, bringing them under his staff, You bring everything that lives before You for review. You determine the life and decree the destiny of every creature.

On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed:

How many shall leave this world and how many shall be born into it, who shall live and who shall die, who shall live out the limit of his days and who shall not, who shall perish by fire and who by water, who by sword and who by beast, who by hunger and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who by strangling and who by stoning, who shall rest and who shall wander, who shall be at peace and who shall be tormented, who shall be poor and who shall be rich, who shall be humbled and who shall be exalted.

BUT PENITENCE, PRAYER AND GOOD DEEDS CAN ANNUL THE SEVERITY OF THE DECREE.

(Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: A Prayer Book For The Days of Awe. ed: Rabbi Jules Harlow. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly 1972, pp. 241 & 243)



Origins

Rabbi Yitzchak Ben Moshe of Vienna relates the legend in his book *Or Zarua*: The bishop of Mainz insisted that his friend and advisor, Rabbi Amnon, convert to Christianity. In order to buy time, Rabbi Amnon asked for three days of grace to meditate upon the question. Upon returning home he was distraught at having given the impression that he even considered betraying his G-d.

Rabbi Amnon spent three days in solitude, fasting and praying to be forgiven for his sin, and did not return to the bishop. Finally the bishop had him brought and demanded an answer. Rabbi Amnon replied that his tongue should be cut out for the sin of saying he would consider the matter. Furious, the bishop said that the sin was not in what he said, but in his legs for not coming as he had promised. He ordered that Rabbi Amnon's feet be chopped off, joint by joint. They did the same to his hands. After each amputation Rabbi Amnon was asked if he would convert, and each time he refused. Then the bishop ordered that he be carried home, a maimed and mutilated cripple, together with the amputated parts.

When Rosh Hashanah arrived a few days later, Rabbi Amnon asked to be carried to the Ark. Before the congregation recited *kedushah*, he asked to be allowed to sanctify G-d's name in the synagogue as he had in the bishop's palace. He recited *Unetaneh Tokef*, and then died.

Three days later, Rabbi Amnon appeared in a dream to Rabbi Klonimos ben Meshullam, a great Talmudic and Kabbalistic scholar of Mainz, and taught him the text of *Unetaneh Tokef*, and asked him to send it to all parts of Jewry to be inserted into the Rosh Hashanah liturgy. Rabbi Amnon's wish was carried out, and the prayer became an integral part of the Rosh Hashanah service. Some time later it was included in the Yom Kippur service in most communities.

(*Artscroll Yom Kippur Machzor*, Ashkenazi version).

Reference to the Cairo Geniza points to the existence of copies of the *Unetaneh Tokef* texts dating from before Rabbi Amnon's time. Research suggests that *Unetaneh Tokef* is an ancient prayer whose source lies in the land of Israel. However, it is clear that the *piyyut* came to popular attention once it came to represent the martyrdom of Rabbi Amnon.



Rabbi Amnon's act of *kiddush hashem* – apocryphal or not – acted as an inspiration for Jews who endured the First Crusade some 70 years later. In the spirit of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, many Jews chose martyrdom instead of conversion. Only later, during the time of the Inquisition, did Maimonides create the *Epistle on Martyrdom*, which stated that Jews should agree to convert as long as they were not asked to disregard one of the core commandments in public¹.

Why Unetaneh Tokef?

Why of all prayers was this one singled out by the members of Beth Hashita? According to Bini Talmi of *HaMidrasa* at Oranim Academic College of Education, The trauma of the war made Beth Hashita as a community, search for a deeper way to commemorate Yom Kippur. Yair Rosenblum gave them this opportunity by recreating and reinvigorating its meaning to include the experience of loss (which achieved expression after the war), the themes from Judaism found in the lyrics (which synthesize the ideas of a gathering of people before G-d, dying while sanctifying G-d's name, and the receiving of judgment), and the melody (which contained elements of prayer).

רותי פלד, "ונתנה תוקף", יום כיפור בבית-השיטה בין שימור לשינוי

Further Reading:

<http://www.koach.org/kocfall2000friedman.htm>

<http://dorsheitzedek.org/divrei/5762/5762-utaneh-tokef.htm>

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Rosh_Hashana/Overview_Rosh_Hashanah_Community/RH_Services/RH_Liturgical_themes_531/Unetaneh_1142.htm

<http://www.netivot-shalom.org.il/parshaeng/rosh5764.php>

http://www.tbhbe.org/Sermon_YK_Day.pdf

<http://www.koach.org/documents/bookoflife.doc>

http://swfs.org/59_DK_yk.htm

The 'engagement envelope' - suggested activities

Prior to the screening

- Make sure the screen is large enough for all to see comfortably, in particular bear in mind where people's heads may block the view of the subtitles to those sitting behind them.
- Check that the loudspeakers work, and that the sound can be heard clearly.

Two clarifications:

1. An initial clarification might be to ascertain how each of your participants marks Yom Kippur, and the emotional weight and meaning they attach to the day.
2. What does the Yom Kippur war mean to everyone? In addition to hearing from your participants, in your style, in a format appropriate to your participants, we would suggest offering them a brief history of the Yom Kippur war.

After the screening

You might wish to combine the screening of the film, with a collective meal. For this option, we have provided the following discussion-guide in the form of a place-mat. Set the tables with these place mats, so that the discussions can take place around and during the meal in an informal yet directed fashion.

If this is not logistically possible, and you would prefer to have more centralized and facilitated discussion, then immediately after the film take a short break. Tea, coffee, bathroom – time for the emotions of the film to begin to settle.

We would suggest opening the session with a general 'emotional debriefing' kind of question: what did this movie make you feel? Did you empathize with any person in particular?



Two pieces of information might be useful before moving on with your group.

- First, it may be correct to say that the marked 'secularity' of the younger generation of the kibbutz, has become far less entrenched in the years since the making of the film. You may wish to refer to the section **Jewish Renaissance in Israel** for examples.
- Second, your participants should know that since Rosenblum's composition of *Unetane Tokef*, many synagogues throughout Israel sing this tune on Yom Kippur. It has made the 'wall' between secular and religious in Israel seem surprisingly permeable.

Then move to focus in on some of the following thoughts:

- For Beth Hashita, and indeed for much of Israel, Yom Kippur raises questions of life and death – both personally and collectively. Is this how Yom Kippur touches you? Or is your experience of Yom Kippur more to do with the divine? Or a moral stock-taking?
 - In the Hall of Remembrance the voice of Amia Leiblich says that "On Beth Hashita, there are 4 generations each with its own face. For all of them remembrance is the cornerstone of collective memory." How is remembering the dead a cornerstone of the collective identity of your community? Fields, pools, orchards, are named after the fallen of Beth Hashita. Do you think this is a healthy form of remembrance, giving meaning to place, or do you think it is unhealthy, coloring all living things with death?
 - The induction of the children of the kibbutz into a community ravaged by war deaths is shown throughout the film. Is this impressive to you, or disturbing, or both?
 - Remembering the Yom Kippur war has become an inescapable part of Yom Kippur for Israelis. Do the services at your synagogue for Yom Kippur make any mention of the Yom Kippur War? Should they? Why, or why not?
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Kibbutz Beth Hashita & Its Yom Kippur Observance

Background on the Kibbutz

Kibbutz Beth Hashita was founded on December 4, 1928 by members of the *Chugim* Pioneer-Youth Movement. The name "Beth Hashita" means "Home of the Acacia Tree." The kibbutz is located at the foot of Mount Gilboa in the Jezreel Valley in Northern Israel. Kibbutz Beth Hashita has 600 members, and around 400 children.

The location was first mentioned in the book of Judges. When Gideon was fighting a battle against the Midianites and the Amalekites, he rallied his troops, and they blew trumpets in order to instill fear in the enemy. The plan was successful, and the enemy retreated all the way to Beth Hashita: "For when the three hundred horns were sounded, the LORD turned every man's sword against his fellow, throughout the camp, and the entire host fled as far as Beth-shittah and on to Zererah-as far as the outskirts of Abel-meholah near Tabbath." (Judges 7:22, Sacred Writing: Judaism The Tanakh ed: Jaroslav Pelikan. United States of America: The Jewish Publication Society. 1985, 391)

Kibbutz Beth Hashita developed simultaneously with the State itself to become a thriving and productive kibbutz. Its innovations helped transform Israel at the beginning of the 20th century from an area of barren land to a state with a rich and productive agricultural industry, and one of the leaders in the development and advancement of agricultural and industrial technology. (<http://www.bethashita.org.il/kibbutz.htm>).

Beth Hashita As A Reflection of Trends in the Kibbutz Movement

Like most of the kibbutzim in Israel, Beth Hashita is secular. It is secular by definition because the members do not consider themselves religious, nor do they observe the holidays and other aspects of Judaism in the same way an Orthodox kibbutz would. Beth Hashita is one of the leading centers of cultural Judaism and well-known for their cultural activities both throughout the Kibbutz Movement and in Israeli society in general.

Similar to other kibbutzim, Beth Hashita has been forced into the process of privatization. This shift tends to make kibbutzim more capitalist and moves them toward an individualist mentality rather than a communal cooperative one.



This tendency has been criticized as one of the reasons for the weakening and decline of The Kibbutz Movement as a whole. As one kibbutz member was told by a socialist thinker: "You're going to the kibbutz – that's very well for you, personally. But do you think that a drop of pure water can sterilize the huge wound of mankind? A kibbutz is nothing but another monastery." (Leiblich, 249)

While some people feel that the tendency towards privatization has led to a cultural decline in most kibbutzim, Kibbutz Beth Hashita has not lost its characteristic focus on culture and holidays. Amia Libliech (the interviewer and narrator of the film), in her book *Kibbutz Makom* emphasizes the important role cultural activities play in life on the kibbutz.

Kibbutz Beth Hashita continues this tradition today and has emerged as one of the centers of the new revival of cultural secular Judaism, whose aim is to connect secular Jews to the Jewish People by honoring the holidays as elements of the Jewish culture and Jewish Peoplehood. The emphasis is placed on observance as a part of Jewish cultural heritage rather than religious observances. As a leader in this field, Beth Hashita created the Inter-Kibbutz Institute of Jewish Holidays. The aim of this institute is to present: "comprehensive documentation of Jewish ceremony, festivals, and holidays, as celebrated and observed by the Secular Kibbutz Movement. The Archives utilize written and visual presentations to illustrate the evolution of traditional holiday celebration on Kibbutzim in Israel...explore the significance of celebrations in the Land of Israel, and how Jewish Festivals are tied to the Land itself."

The Community and the Individual: Ways of Remembering

The Kibbutz has always placed an emphasis on remembrance and commemoration of their members and residents who were killed in battle. The re-composition of *Unetaneh Tokef* is one example of the creative and respectful ways in which the kibbutz honors memories of those who have fallen in Israel's wars.

People who lost family members during the Yom Kippur war were not informed immediately. The war unfolded too quickly and every minute was crucial, so soldiers could not be spared to tell families that their loved ones were killed. Soldiers were buried temporarily in the field and only later sent to their families for burial. The kibbutz had to grapple with the communal trauma of receiving 11 bodies at the same time while still recognizing individual suffering and grief. They chose to hold one funeral for all the soldiers, during which each individual soldier received personal attention and individual eulogies.



Such attempts to balance communalism with individualism continue today as kibbutzim struggle to construct ways to maintain the communal identity that characterizes the kibbutz, in the face of contemporary rising individualism.

Other ways in which they have demonstrated this is in the Memorial Room. The Memorial Room is where the names of all the members and residents who have fallen in all of Israel's wars and terror attacks are inscribed. They also commemorate individual soldiers such as Mark Hochstein, an immigrant from their sister community in Rockville, Maryland, who made aliyah to the kibbutz and was killed in the Lebanon War. For each individual there is a drawer with photos, poems, documents brought by family members, relatives and friends from the kibbutz. This room is meticulously maintained by the kibbutz.

Yom Kippur on the Kibbutz

Before the Yom Kippur War, the day was an opportunity for people on the kibbutz to take stock both physically and emotionally, personally and communally. The aspect of Yizkor (remembering the departed) was dominant as kibbutz members were the generation of the Holocaust. After the War in 1973, the observance of Yom Kippur on Beth Hashita became both more personal and also more accutely communal. The concept of remembrance now touched so many more lives than it had before the communal trauma created by the Yom Kippur War. Beth Hashita is unique in its observance of the holiday, but it provides a good model for other secular ceremonial models (יום הכיפורים בקיבוץ בית השיטה" יום כיפור בבית-השיטה בין שימור לשינוי (מיריק גרזי, 8).

Yom Kippur observance on Beth Hashita begins in the afternoon with a final meal attended by some of the kibbutz members. Then there is a ceremony which takes on the role of Kol Nidre. All those in attendance wear white. People tell stories and read passages they have written, which they feel capture the meaning of Yom Kippur for them. For several years after the war, these stories focused primarily on remembering those who fell. Now, however, people write about a variety of different meanings (יום כיפורים בקיבוץ בית השיטה" יום כיפור בבית-השיטה בין שימור לשינוי מיריק גרזי, 9). This emotional ceremony comes to a dramatic close with the rendition of *Unetaneh Tokef*.

The following morning kibbutz members gather again to study texts and songs that relate to the themes of Yom Kippur such as the book of Jonah, different verses from the Yom Kippur ceremony, and songs and poems written after the Yom Kippur war. Since 1931, the kibbutz had been using the symbolic opportunity that the holiday presented of taking stock, to actually have an annual gathering where they would assess issues facing the kibbutz.

In the afternoon of Yom Kippur, there is a large communal gathering on the kibbutz taking communal stock of the positives and negatives in their lives. שורי מיינרט "מתי וכיצד החלה בבית השיטה המסורת לקיים בראש השנה וביום (אסיפות שנתיות? יום כיפור בבית-השיטה בין שימור לשינוי 52. The kibbutz gathering was called to make important decisions related to the kibbutz and do a communal, yet spiritual accounting of souls. The day finishes with a closing dinner. None of the days activities occur in a synagogue. They all take place in the dining room or other public meeting place. "יום כיפורים בקיבוץ בית השיטה" יום כיפור בבית-השיטה בין שימור לשינוי מיריק גרזי, 9)

This process of creating a secular connection to the religious holidays is ongoing. It is an endeavor that is still in its developmental stages and is forever changing, expanding and evolving. At its heart it is a yearning to strengthen and enrich the connection between secular and religious Jews and all of them to the Jewish People itself יום כיפורים בקיבוץ בית השיטה" יום כיפור בבית-השיטה בין שימור לשינוי מיריק גרזי, 14).

The observance of Yom Kippur and the addition of the modern version of Unetaneh Tokef had a tremendous impact on the kibbutz and continues to be an emotional aspect of Yom Kippur observance for members of Kibbutz Beth Hashita.

Further Reading:

Lieblich, Amia. Kibbutz Makom: Report from an Israeli Kibbutz. Trans: Gideon E. Schwarz. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981

<http://www.kibbutz.org.il/eng/welcome.htm>

<http://www.ic.org/icsa/kibbutz.html>

www.littman.co.uk/cat.near.html

www.littman.co.uk/cat.near-2.html

<http://www.partner.org.il/afula/news-0209-arch.html>

<http://www.neiu/~ncaftori/bh.htm> and [/bh/Carolyn-n-dad.jpg](http://www.neiu/~ncaftori/bh/Carolyn-n-dad.jpg) (experience of a girl who lived in Beth Hashita, and a photo)



Yair Rosenblum: Composer of the New Melody of *Unetaneh Tokef*

Yair Rosenblum composed over 1,200 songs in his career, though he is best known for composing songs that touched on the 'zeitgeist' of the Israeli psyche. From *Givat HaTachmoshet*, Ammunition Hill, which became the 'anthem' for the Six Day War, to *Shir LaShalom*, Song for Peace, that became immortalised as the final song that Prime Minister Rabin sang at a rally immediately prior to his assassination. *Unetaneh Tokef* is no less significant.

Rosenblum's version of *Unetaneh Tokef* combines vocal and instrumental motifs from the Ashkenazi and Sephardi cantorial styles, "adding just the right measure of tension, turning it into a lovely and brilliant musical creation that gives rise among its listeners to the sense of trembling, mystery and exaltation of a genuine prayer of the heart"². The revised version of *Unetaneh Tokef* was composed while Rosenblum resided in Beth Hashita between 1990-1992. He dedicated the composition to the memory of his father who had passed on a few years earlier.

Rosenblum's version raised the *piyyut* to the level of a truly popular prayer and a widely known song in Israel. In recent years, as the holidays of the Hebrew month of *Tishrei* approach, Yair Rosenblum's *Unetaneh Tokef* is played on the radio and now occupies a respectable place among Israel's national songs. It has also found its way into the liturgy of traditional synagogues, many of whom use the melody for their Yom Kippur services.

In 1994, Rosenblum was diagnosed with cancer and he passed away Tuesday, August 27, 1996 in Holon at the age 52. He died only 10 days before his life's work was to be recognized and honored by the Association of Musicians and Songwriters in Israel. He was buried in Kibbutz Einat.

The Yom Kippur War and its significance

The Yom Kippur War took place from October 6 to October 24, 1973. The battle was mainly between Israel and Syria and Egypt with minor troops coming from Iraq and Jordan. Its most intense battles were fought in the Sinai Desert in the south, and the Golan Heights mountain range in the north. The commanders on the Israeli side were Moshe Dayan, David Elazar, Ariel Sharon, and Shmuel Gonen. The Commanders on the Arab side were Saad El Shazly and Ahmad Ismail Ali. The war had a tremendous effect on Israel and the region, catalysing the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty and causing a political, social, and economic upheaval within Israel.

Yom Kippur War erased from the collective psyche of Israeli society the mentality, created by the victory during the Six-Day War in 1967 and its aftermath, that Israel was invincible. The near defeat of the Yom Kippur returned to Israeli society a large dose of modesty. Israel became more aware of the existential threat the Arab nations posed to the survival of the State. The non-Jewish world refers to the war as the "October War" or the "Ramadan War", thereby ignoring the significance of the attack occurring on the most important day in the Jewish calendar. The Arab forces attacked during the month of Ramadan, which added to Israel's surprise, since Ramadan is Islam's holy month and most Muslims fast during the day. By calling it the "Yom Kippur War", Jews both emphasize the significance of the holiness of that day, shattered by the Arab nations, and also highlight the message shared by the war and the fast day on which it began. Both the war and Yom Kippur bring us to a reckoning with the human condition: how fragile is human life, whether and when it might be important to sacrifice one's life for an ideal, what is our role in the universe, and questions about the existence of God.

The War

In early October 1973, Israeli officials noticed that Egypt and Syria were starting to move their armies. Both countries positioned troops and tanks on the armistice lines, which had been agreed upon as a border after the Six-Day War. It seemed that they were preparing for a coordinated attack (<http://www.jafi.org.il/education/actual/ykippur/4.html>). On October 6th, Yom Kippur, the Chief of Staff David Elazar asked Prime Minister Golda Meir for permission to initiate a defensive air strike. Golda Meir refused. This decision was responsible for Israel's near defeat in the war. Avigdor Kahalani, who was serving in the army at the time, and in 1996 became the Minister of Public Security, wrote in his memoirs *A Warrior's Way*.



"On Israel's side, the major objective was to maintain calm. This was our undoing. Elections were only a few weeks away and the government was afraid to do anything that would upset the electorate or undermine its support such as calling up the reserves. Had that been done, the first days of the war would have been totally different (Kalahani, 163)." Another reason Meir refused may have been because she was concerned how yet another preemptive strike would look to the world after Israel's preemptive strike during the Six-Day War. Launching a preemptive strike, however, would have saved thousands of lives.

Within the first days following the Arab attack, the Syrians succeeded in conquering Mt. Hermon, a strategic site of great importance in the Golan Heights on the Syrian border. This Syrian accomplishment had severe consequences for Israel and led to tremendous loss of life. It was not until October 22nd that the IDF succeeded in recapturing Mt. Hermon, a major turning point in the war. A ceasefire was signed that very day, and the war on the northern front ended. In total Syria lost almost 5,000 men.

Although the ceasefire agreement - known as UN resolution 338 - was signed by all three parties, the Egyptians violated it and continued to fight. This decision was not to their benefit, as the next day the Israeli army surrounded their entire Third Company. The war ended October 24, 1973 and was followed with an official ceasefire agreement between Egypt and Israel on November 11, 1973. Despite the fact that the war was only 18 days long, both sides incurred extremely heavy losses. Israel lost 2,500 men, in addition to the hundreds of prisoners of war and thousands of injured. Egypt lost more than 15,000 men.

Implications of the War

The international implications of the war affected Israel, the region, and *realpolitik* in the world. The war was a diplomatic disaster for Israel because all of the African countries with whom Israel had enjoyed good relations, broke off diplomatic ties to express solidarity with Egypt. Israel ceased to have connections with the majority of the African continent. Israel was blamed for the world oil crisis despite the fact that it was the Arab oil-producing nations and OPEC who were behind the rise in oil prices.

The Cold War was at its height, and the world was divided between allies of the Soviet Union and those of the United States. The USSR and its allies tended to support the Arab countries, while the US and its allies supported Israel. The increased isolation of Israel contributed to its increased economic dependence on the US. This had implications internationally and internally.



The tight alliance between Israel and the US caused a major shift in the Israeli economy. It had previously followed a more socialist method, but following the war it became a more open market and capitalist economy, thus changing the entire structure of the Israeli economic sphere. On the plus side, Israel's role as one of the major US client states was ultimately a contributing factor for Egypt to move toward peace with Israel.

Paradoxically, the war was also a major catalyst towards peace. Arab nations had regained their pride, and so could feel more confident going to the negotiating table. It was this shift that enabled Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to pursue and sign a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. On November 19th, 1977 he made the first visit to Jerusalem by an Arab head of state, and addressed the *Knesset*. This was the first time that the "land for peace" theory took on practical usage: it has become the template for all discussions, negotiations, dealings and peace treaties with the Arab nations surrounding Israel.

The political scene in Israel became far more active and participatory after the war. The Israeli public was infuriated by its leaders' negligence leading up to the Yom Kippur War. For the first time there were public outcries and major demonstrations against the government. As a result of rampant public anger, the Agranat Commission was created to look into the lack of preparation and initiative by Israeli officials. This commission fell under tremendous criticism because it investigated only the military mistakes, rather than those committed in the political arena as well. The dissatisfaction of the public in regards to the first days of the war led to the downfall of Prime Minister Golda Meir's government: she was replaced by Yitzhak Rabin – also from Labor. Even this did not quell the public's anger, and in the 1977 elections, the left-leaning Labor government fell from power for the first time since the state had been created. The right-leaning Likud party under the leadership of Menachem Begin took control. Under Begin's leadership the nation was able to sign a peace agreement with Egypt.

After the war in 1973 there was a societal shift toward political action by the youth. "The trauma experienced by the young generation after the Yom Kippur War not only affected their confidence in the establishment. They grew to believe that they themselves had to act to prevent another such war or one more serious, because the traditional leadership was incapable of taking such action (<http://www.jafi.org.il/education/actual/ykippur/4-1a.html>)." Political and social movements began to sprout up. Peace Movements included *Shalom Achshav* (Peace Now) and *Neve-Shalom/Wahat-al Salam* (Oasis of Peace, a village where Arabs and Jews live together).



Social movements included *Gesher* (Bridge, a group who works on creating a dialogue between religious Jews and secular Jews) and The Israeli Black Panthers, whose goals were to give poor Mizrahi Jews a chance at parity with the wealthier classes, who tended to be Ashkenazi Jews. The political right-wing movement of Gush Emunim was also strengthened during this period, and more settlements began to appear in the West Bank and Gaza. Gaza had not been handed back with Sinai to Egypt, thus people felt secure enough with its future to settle there, especially those coming from settlements in the Sinai like Yamit, which had been evacuated as a concession to Egypt.

The social implications of the war changed the face and nature of Israeli society as there was a significant drop in hero worship and respect for the army. This paved the way for movements supporting pacifism and refusal to serve in the army, which had previously been almost non-existent. Another trend that followed the war in 1973, adding to the decline of hero worship, was the growing prevalence of TV. As in American society where the advent of TV had tremendous repercussions on politics so did it in Israel. In America, the public's response to the televised 1960 debates between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, affected the way people voted for president (People watching TV saw a smooth, handsome, calm JFK and decided that he had won. Those who listened to the debate on the radio, however, were certain that Nixon had won. They only heard the answers and ideas, and they did not see the nervous, sweaty, non-photogenic Richard Nixon). The televising of the 1973 war in Israel caused a similar change in Israeli society. The public could now judge their leaders based on visuals rather than just audio. Leaders such as Moshe Dayan or Golda Meir who had previously been glorified were suddenly seen as mere mortals, and fallible indeed.



Meir Ronnen for the Jerusalem Report commented on this phenomenon: "This form of military hero worship and popular folklore vanished after October 1973. The generals, the supermen of 1948, 1956, and 1967 who had revived Jewish pride worldwide, were for the first time perceived as being all too human, all too fallible and, at times, all too flappable — even unheroic. In October 1973... the unforgettable appearance of defense minister Moshe Dayan on television, then screened austere in black and white. Haggard and sweating profusely, Dayan looked nothing like his usual, forceful self... Dayan was later to complain that he was sweating because he had been seated directly beneath hastily installed lighting. But it was obvious to all of us that he was badly rattled, a shadow of his former self. The damage to Israeli morale was enormous."

(<http://info.jpost.com/C003/Supplements/30YK/new.04.html>)



The damage to the Israeli morale from this war had many long term implications socially, economically, and politically. Socially, Israeli society had been dealt a tremendous reality check. The populace became acutely aware of the existential threat the Arabs still posed and they were propelled back to the search for peace. The trauma caused by the war, which touched almost every Israeli household, was immeasurable. The loss of so many young lives was shocking and extremely painful. Israelis were shaken to their core as the illusion of indestructibility came crashing down on them. Economically, the society shifted from being a socialist based economy to becoming a capitalist one. The face of Israeli society changed profoundly, and especially the Kibbutz Movement. Politically, the loss of status for Israeli war heroes and the loss of respect of leaders gave rise to new political movements. These new entities created numerous options for openly criticizing and opposing government policy. The most significant result was the downfall of the Labor party and the rise of the Likud party. This new government initiated a push for peace and a new post-modern era for Israeli society was ushered in.



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Jewish Renaissance in Israel: a contemporary movement

The Creation of Secular Jewish Identity and Culture

Israel is a young country and therefore it is still forming its culture. The creation of a secular Jewish culture is one example of attempting to combine the "old" with the "new" in the modern state of Israel. Ancient Jewish traditions take on new meaning; contemporary literature refers to classic texts. The new Israeli Jewish tradition incorporates a rich texture of different elements because it encompasses the fact that now – for the first time in thousands of years - Jews have a State, with a Jewish majority and sovereignty. The dilemmas and challenges, which face the evolving society are great. In the ancient words of Rabbi Tarfon: "The day is short, the task is great..." (*Pirkei Avot*, Ethics of the Fathers 2:20) Israelis want to construct an Israeli-Jewish culture, which will appeal to Israeli Jews who define themselves as "secular."

The rationale behind this paper is to present a glimpse into the new and rapidly changing back-to-the-roots movement in Israel. Because it is still very much in the process of evolving, the best way to try to understand it is by looking at a range of historical, religious and sociological trends occurring currently in Israel which are resulting in a new movement that we will call "Israeli Jewish Renaissance."

"The main element of Jewish life in the 19th century was the disintegration of the clear, unequivocal Jewish framework of their past existence, based on a religious way of life. At the same time, they began to look for alternative frameworks for Jewish identity and lifestyle."

(*Judaism as Culture, Study Papers*, Posen Foundation, 2003, 5)

Mainstream Zionist ideology, which emphasized returning to the land and building a Jewish homeland for the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael, was an attempt to build a new Jew. The pioneers wanted to create a new Jewish prototype, who would not be like the stereotypical *galut* (Diaspora or Exile) Jew, whose life was based on learning and who was seen as weak and frail, not known for physical strength or activity. The new Jew would be connected to the land, which by virtue of its role in Jewish civilization as the land of the Bible, would automatically create an enhanced sense of Jewish self. The new Jews would be strong and self-sufficient, able to support and defend themselves. This new Jew was completely unlike the Eastern European stereotype *luftmentsche*, whose head was in the clouds and who was dependent upon non-Jews for basic worldly needs as well as protection.



This *galut* Jew was heavily criticized by the writers of the Jewish Enlightenment Movement in Eastern Europe such as Mendele Mocher Sfarim and Leo Pinsker. The early Zionist movement was based upon the principle of *Shlilat Hagalut*, (Negation or Eradication of the Exile). Achad Ha-am wrote of creating a national home not only for the Jews, but for Judaism as well, a place where a new kind of Jewish culture could be created and where the Torah and other religious aspects would be studied and respected as part of Jewish Civilization rather than solely religious concepts.

Jewish Secular Nationalism

The new Jew would be secular, not religious and yet still be devoted to the concept of the Jewish nation. This new culture was to be built upon the elements of Jewish culture and tradition which fit this new ideology. It would emphasize the connection to the glorious days of the Bible and Jewish sovereignty. It would erase the 2000 years of Exile and its traditions. The Hebrew language would again become a living language of the Jewish people, not only the holy tongue. There would be new ways of celebrating the holidays. The geographical focus would be on the new all-Jewish Hebrew-speaking city of Tel Aviv.

Creative new customs, based on old traditions, were born. Chaim Nachman Bialik began the tradition of an *Oneg Shabbat* (literally "the pleasure of Shabbat" and refers to the festive atmosphere on Friday night after the Shabbat meal). This *Oneg Shabbat* included songs and poetry reading, not the traditional prayer services of the synagogue. Baruch Agadati began the tradition of the *Ad Lo Yada* parade for Purim instead of reading the Megilla in the synagogue (*Ad Lo Yada* is Hebrew for 'until one does not know'. One of the mitzvot on Purim is to become so drunk that one does not know the difference between Mordechai, the hero and Haman, the villain. Agadati took the name and created a parade through the streets and a whole carnival atmosphere around the holiday).

In the kibbutzim and moshavim, the agricultural aspects of the holidays were emphasized. Shavuot became *Chag Habikurim* (Festival of the First Fruits) instead of *Chag Matan Torah* (Day of Giving the Torah) and Passover, *Chag Aviv* and *Chag Herut* (the Holiday of Spring Time and Freedom) rather than *Chag Matzot and Yetziyat Mitzraim* (the Holiday of *Matza* and the Exodus from Egypt). A new Haggadah was written, emphasizing these elements and not the glory of G-d who 'took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm'. Secular Bar-Mitzvah ceremonies were celebrated with *Mitzvoth* (Good Deeds) to be fulfilled toward the community and country, but did not include reading from the Torah in the synagogue or putting on *tefillin*.



All of these new cultural endeavors were based on elements of tradition and adapted to fit with the new ideology taking shape for celebrating in *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) and not in the Diaspora. The Bible and the Second Temple were emphasized as the epicenter of this movement, so that emphasis could be taken away from traditions that had been introduced into the religion and culture during the 2000 years of exile. Archeological studies flourished as Jews found concrete evidence of their roots in the *Altneuland* (Theodore Herzl's concept of the old-new land and also the title of his book where he discusses his vision for the new land). *Chazal* (*Chachameinu Zichronam Levracha* literally: The Sages of Blessed Memory), the Talmud, prayers and the synagogue were negated as being part of the 2000 years of exile, and excluded from the new culture.

The people involved in this Cultural Revolution were both the leaders and the masses, who had come from a traditional religious background. Many of them had been educated in *yeshiva* (religious Jewish school) frameworks, and therefore they knew the essence of what they were negating and eliminating. Their children, however, grew up not knowing the past or the traditional texts or classical ways of celebrations. They knew only what their parents had chosen to include and adapt.

The Secular Jewish Culture Post-Establishment of the State

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, two government decisions were important in the development of the secular Israeli-Jewish culture. There were three recognized streams of educational institutions for Kindergarten through 12th grade: the secular government schools, the religious government schools and the independent *Charedi* (Ultra-Orthodox/*Hasidic*) schools. Each family had to identify with one of the three identities: secular, religious or *Charedi*. In the secular schools, no religion, no prayers and no Talmud were taught. Jewish studies included the Bible, Jewish history, geography and archaeology of the Land of Israel, and the holidays in the contexts described above. The religious stream was Modern-Orthodox and that curriculum included religious and secular studies with a Zionist and Orthodox outlook. The *Charedi* schools functioned like the traditional Eastern-European *yeshiva*.

The second decision was to give jurisdiction over all personal life-cycle events to the religious institutions and the courts. This decision followed the old Turkish Millet system for both Jews and Non-Jews. In the Jewish sphere, the Orthodox were recognized with two chief Rabbis, *Ashkenazi* (of Eastern-European Origin or literally German origin) and *Sefardi* (Literally the descendents of Jews exiled from Spain in 1492, but grew to include Jews from the Arab-speaking lands as well).



These rabbis were recognized as the ultimate authority on all religious matters such as marriage, divorce, burial and conversion. This decision, in addition to the establishment of religious political parties eager to push for more Jewish observance and religious legislation, led to the alienation of secular Jews from the Jewish religion and tradition, of which they had little real knowledge because of the adaptations and omissions that their parents and grandparents had instituted as part of their attempt to create a “new” Jewish identity.

"As a result, most non-Orthodox Israelis rejected ownership and participation in matters relating to on-going Jewish creation. At the same time, Orthodox institutions in Israel assumed a proprietary role in Judaism, and this has become entrenched in political, economic and social arrangements that bestow legitimacy upon this situation. " (Panim for Jewish Renaissance in Israel, www.panim.org.il)

In spite of the fact that they label themselves “secular,” many secular Israelis maintain significant aspects of Jewish tradition. In a recent survey by the Posen Foundation among Israeli Jews, 68% replied that they maintain Jewish tradition. 50% of those surveyed consider themselves secular. 92% said they were proud of being Jewish and that being Jewish means being part of the Jewish people and part of a cultural and historical heritage. Those who are secular and who tend to observe tradition evidently do not view religiousness as an essential condition for being 'good Jews'. It therefore follows that among the secular population, observing tradition is mainly a reflection of the cultural heritage aspect of Judaism. (Judaism as Culture-Study Papers, Posen Foundation, 2003, 13)

In the aftermath of the Six-Day War, a small group of young intellectuals, mostly kibbutz members, who had fought in the war, wrote the book The Seventh Day. The book was edited by Avraham Shapira in 1968 and includes dialogues, discussions, reflections and thoughts about war, life, death, Zionism, Judaism and the meaning of fighting for their country and people. They formed the Shdemot Group and began to study "the Jewish bookshelf throughout the generations." They found relevance and personal meaning in the literature of the Sages and religious leaders throughout 2000 years of exile. This group was instrumental in founding the Center for the Study of Jewish Thought in Oranim Teachers College, which became a center for secular study of Jewish Sources.

The Shdemot Group itself remained small and did not have much direct influence. Many of their students, however, have continued and are now active in various initiatives of Jewish secular learning.

Among them is *HaMidrasha* (The Educational Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Israel) in Oranim Academic College of Education and BINA (Hebrew for "understanding" and an acronym from the Chaim Nachman Bialik quotation "*Beth Yotzer Neshamat Ha'uma*" – 'Self-sufficiency is the soul of the nation' - the Center for Jewish Identity and Israeli Culture).

Modern Initiatives of the Secular Jewish Renaissance

During the last decade or so, a growing number of initiatives among diverse sectors of the population reflect a deep desire for secular Jewish Renaissance and a return to the investigation of religion as held by the founders of Zionism. The impetus seemed to follow the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin by a religious Jew. The dichotomy between religious and non-religious was sharp indeed. Many secular Jews "knew" that Judaism did not lead to political assassination, but realized how little they really understood about the sources of Judaism and Jewish religion in general. Many Orthodox Jews realized that they must establish a meaningful dialogue with secular Jews and together with them encourage all to find a way to create a Jewish-Israeli culture. The goal was to create forms of expressions acceptable to all which would include the traditions, literature, customs and thought of the past, from Biblical times to the present, including the wealth of 2000 years of Diaspora.

Today hundreds of Jews from all sectors of Israeli society participate in workshops, learning communities and study centers with a new modern and "Israeli-Jewish" flavor. These secular *Batei Midrash* (a name drawn from the traditional study groups in the synagogue literally meaning House of Interpretations) are all dealing with questions of tradition and change. They all are trying to find ways to make Judaism and Jewishness relevant to young Israelis so that they will feel included. The vision is to encourage Jews from all walks of life – regardless of how they define themselves – to want to learn more, and strengthen their identification with Jewish thought and practice. The Batei Midrash may differ in methods and emphases, but most involve study and discussion groups. Some include Orthodox and non-Orthodox participants, who study and discuss together in order to learn from each other and to create a dialogue. Many involve social action as part of their Jewish agenda.

PANIM (literally meaning Faces) for Jewish Renaissance in Israel is an umbrella organization, which "challenges the stereotypes of 'secular' and 'religious' Israelis. Together with almost 100 partner organizations, *Panim* presents attractive alternatives that emphasize a pluralistic Judaism and attaches little importance to labels and denominations.



A more vibrant pluralistic Judaism will help build a more tolerant and unified Israeli society while respecting and encouraging diversity." (www.panim.org.il This website also includes the names of partner organizations and batei midrash.)

Panim and *BINA* are the main organizers of the *Hakhel* Jewish Learning Festival that takes place during Sukkoth. For the past five years over 3000 participants from a wide range of Jewish identities, affiliations and ages converge for a day and night of lectures, workshops, films, concerts and networking on themes of Jewish identity and Israeli Culture. The name *Hakhel* - Assemble is taken from the passage in Deuteronomy 21:12 "Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and the stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear and they may learn..." (Pentateuch and Haftorahs, ed: Rabbi Dr. L.H. Hertz. London: Soncino Press, 1956) The great diversity of workshops and media attract a varied and diverse group of participants and make this learning festival a veritable Jewish-Israeli cultural happening. www.Hakhel.org.il

In recent years, there is a growing tendency, not only to study, but to create and renew customs and ceremonies in order to infuse them with personal meaning. Secular Jewish weddings, baby-naming ceremonies, neighborhood and community *Kabbalat Shabbat* (welcoming of the Sabbath, traditional prayers in synagogue) are but a few of the ways in which secular Israeli Jews are attempting to add Jewishness to their non-religious lives.

An interesting issue which has surfaced is the connection of these secular organizations and learning institutions with the non-Orthodox religious streams in Israel such as the Masorati Movement (Conservative Judaism) and the Progressive (Reform) Movement. Since all involved are striving for pluralistic Judaism in Israel, there is a great deal of cooperation and synergy. Very few secular Israelis, however, actually join these movements. Some explain the reluctance of Israelis to join the movements because they are linked with a synagogue, and that automatically makes them religious, thus creating a hypothetical obstacle for Israelis who cannot see themselves inside a religious institution. Others say that the reason Israelis hesitate to join these movements is because of their Anglo-Saxon nature and origin which Israelis feel are foreign and lacking in authentic Israeli essence.

Contemporary arts have also begun to flourish while drawing on traditional sources. Funding from the Lottery, and from the Avichai Foundation, has led to a string of high quality films, TV dramas, and plays being written that talk to the sources and the relevance of Jewish practice.



The tradition of piyutim has also returned to popular culture. The highly sophisticated and interactive website www.piyut.org.il has become an inspiration for piyut aficionados and writers alike. Meir Banai has recently released a highly successful album of traditional piyutim set to modern music, and other artists such as Eti Ankri and Ehud Banai are also set to release their own piyutim albums.

Yom Kippur and the Secular Israeli

Yom Kippur has always posed a problem to the secular Israeli identity. This is the one day which traditionally affords the least option for secular Zionist interpretations because it has nothing to do with the Land of Israel and return to the land. There are various secular responses to Yom Kippur observance: some secular Jews decided that this day had nothing to do with them and therefore they ignored it entirely. Some chose to fast and some chose not to fast. Some go to synagogue and some do not. In the 1920's, in a few radical kibbutzim and moshavim, there was a real rebellion and Yom Kippur became a regular work day. In most kibbutzim and moshavim, there was an attempt to take some of the values of Yom Kippur and find a meaningful way of integrating them into a secular outlook. Taking stock of one's personal and communal actions during the year has been a particularly important theme emphasized in some kibbutzim and moshavim. Asking forgiveness for wrongdoings of your friends, neighbors and colleagues, or remembering those who have passed away are other important themes of the day. For other holidays, there were more attempts at creative ways of celebration and commemoration. Yom Kippur was and still poses a challenge to the secular Jew in Israel.



Every year, the Israeli media is replete with reminders of the Yom Kippur War of 1973. The war became an existential war, with thousands of dead and wounded. It forced both secular and religious Israelis to grapple with the concepts of life and death. This created a true opportunity for secular Zionists to re-engage with the meaning of Yom Kippur and to afford it a distinctly Israeli touch. Even after 33 years, this trauma of near-destruction still affects the commemoration of Yom Kippur for the general population in Israel.

By law, all stores are closed on Yom Kippur. There is no public transportation or public media (ie: papers, radio, TV broadcasting). Yom Kippur has become Bicycle Day, for secular Jews take advantage of the empty streets and highways throughout the country to cycle about the land.



With the existence of youtube, videos and DVDs, secular Jews who want to watch TV may do so. At the same time, many secular Jews in Israel are involved in the new movement to create personal meaning, and they fast, read traditional or modern texts, go to the synagogue to hear the shofar, or practice other variations of traditional Yom Kippur observance. Others are searching for innovative, creative and personally meaningful ways to connect with the holiday.

The Organization of Community Centers (*Chevrat HaMatnasim*) throughout the country has been called upon to create an initiative which would appeal to an audience who does not feel comfortable going to a synagogue for the traditional prayers. Together with *Beyachad* (Together), an educational organization dedicated to creating partnerships to unite Israel's diverse society, the Community Centers have created a new model for Yom Kippur. Educators from *Beyachad*, usually young modern Orthodox men and women, engage in a dialogue with the community and together create a Yom Kippur observance suited to the needs of the specific community. Some communities want a shortened prayer service, others prefer a discussion, and still others expect a combination of both. In 2005, *Beyachad* and the Community Centers organized Yom Kippur with over 40 communities in the cities, towns, kibbutzim and moshavim of Israel. Hundreds of people from all walks of life participated. The initiatives for Jewish Renaissance among secular Jews in Israel is not only for study, but also part of the earnest struggle to find meaningful, relevant ways of observance. (www.byachad.org.il)



Something important and exciting is happening in Israel. Secular Israelis are looking for new relevant meaning in Judaism. They are eager for pluralism and reject the black and white dichotomy of religious and secular. They are eager to take an active part in the renaissance, which will help them to strengthen their Israeli identity as Jews. Yair Tzaban, in his article "An Unabashed Secular Jew", writes: "Secularism is both a cultural-intellectual worldview and a socio-cultural standpoint. True, it is the antithesis of the religious establishment's practice of enforcing its beliefs, values and compulsory norms on the whole of society. However, in positioning itself as the antithesis to religious coercion, it represents, not an emptiness, but rather a constantly self-renewing fullness of intellectual and social life (Yair Tzaban. "An Unabashed Secular Jew," Contemplate: The International Journal of Cultural Jewish Thought, Issue 2, 2003, 6)."



There is still much to be done in this constantly evolving and changing world of recreating and construction of meaning, but its existence and acknowledgement is a significant step toward the formation of an authentic Israeli-Jewish culture.

Further Reading:

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