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JEWISH-ISRAELI IDENTITY AMONG ISRAEL'S FUTURE TEACHERS

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Four Models of Religious Identification: Secular, Traditional, National Religious, Ultra-Orthodox / Self-Perception: Israeli or Jew? / The Perspective of Time: Attitudes toward Jewish History and the Prominence of the Holocaust / Attitudes toward Jewish Communities and Jews Outside Israel / Problems of Identity Confronting Secular Israelis / Some Reflections

An unprecedented study of the components of Jewish-Israeli identity was conducted in 1990 among 564 students at Israeli seminaries and teachers colleges where the future generation of teachers is being trained to teach at schools linked to the various streams in Israel's educational system, including the State, State-Religious, and ultra-Orthodox streams (see Note). The study focused particularly upon attitudes toward the Jewish people in Israel and the diaspora; the Holocaust and its repercussions on identity; attitudes toward the State of Israel and Zionism; and attitudes toward the Jewish religion. While the results of this survey strictly apply only to those studying to be teachers, there is every reason to assume that they mirror the perceptions, views, and attitudes of Israeli society as a whole or at least its more formally educated elements.

Four Models of Religious Identification

The identity of a citizen of Israel is neither

purely Israeli nor purely Jewish. It is, rather, a synthesis of Jewish and Israeli components, varying by sub-group or sub-identity. The variable of religious identification emerged as the most significant factor affecting Jewish-Israeli identity, with an influence greater than that of any other variable, such as country of origin.

Our findings revealed four distinct models of Jewish-Israeli identity:

1. Non-Religious (secular).
2. Traditionalist (religious tradition-oriented) — individuals belonging to these first two groups attend seminaries of the State sector.
3. National Religious (State Religious sector).
4. Ultra-Orthodox (Independent sector).

Non-Religious (Secular) Identity

Those in this group comprise the majority in the State sector. Individuals falling in this group see themselves more Israeli than Jewish, although to a lesser extent than in the past. Members of the

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secular group are tied by very strong bonds to the Israeli components of Jewish-Israeli identity — the State of Israel and its land. On the other hand, their ties to the Jewish components — both the Jewish people and religion — are far less powerful and meaningful, and are at times even marked by reservations. The Israeli component in their identity is in a state of decline, a condition that reflects the difficulties of being Israeli, perhaps even the existence of a crisis or rupture in Israeli identity. The historical events they perceive as most meaningful are the Holocaust — the dominant factor in their Jewish identity, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the wars in Israel's modern history.

Traditionalist Identity

Members of this group view their Jewishness and their Israeliness both as highly meaningful. The group's bonds to the State of Israel and its land are very strong. They also perceive their ties to the Jewish people and the Jewish religion as being very meaningful. Members of this group usually come from families with a greater degree of religious observance than their own. In many respects this seems to be a transitional group, moving from a greater degree of religious observance to a lesser one. Movement in the opposite direction, from no religious observance toward observance of one degree or another, does not produce a traditionalist identity. A prominent component of this group are Jews of Mediterranean descent. The historical events perceived as meaningful are the same as in the secular group, with the addition, in a far less meaningful form, of events related to ancient Jewish history.

National Religious Identity

Judaism as well as Jewishness stand out as the dominant components of this group's identity. The national religion, which is joined to the Jewish people by inextricable ties, is at its core. The attitude of group members towards both the Land and State of Israel is also very intense and their Israeliness is perceived as highly meaningful.

Events considered to be of major importance are the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the giving of the Torah. On issues such as Zionism, Israeliness and the State of Israel, their approach is similar to that of the traditionalists, and in certain respects is even more nationalist and Zionist than the secular group's approach. When particular aspects of

their religious attitudes were examined (attitudes toward existing religious trends; the role of religion in affairs of state and in the life of individuals; religion's task of preserving the Jewish people, etc.), a very similar approach was revealed to that of the ultra-Orthodox.

Ultra-Orthodox Identity

Members of this group consider themselves solely as Jews. The attitude of group members with respect to their Israeliness may be one of reservation, suppression, denial, or repudiation. Their religious identity is the essence and meaning of their Jewish identity and the source of their highly meaningful bond to the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. The group's attitude towards Zionism as a political-ideological movement is reserved and often negative. Group members also subject the State of Israel to ample criticism. Events in Jewish history that are considered meaningful are the Holocaust and the giving of the Torah, followed by additional events in ancient national-religious history.

Table 1 illustrates the differences in self-perception between the secular and religious sectors, with those in State Religious schools identifying overwhelmingly as firstly Jewish, while those in the secular system are almost evenly split between primarily Jewish or Israeli identities. We should remember that "secular" here refers to those from state non-religious schools, which in fact include many who identify themselves as "traditional" as well as "secular." Table 2 reveals the differences between those with non-religious, traditional, and religious identities over a six-point continuum from Israeli to Jewish.

The Perspective of Time: Attitudes toward Jewish History and the Prominence of the Holocaust

Attitudes toward the Jewish people are also expressed in attitudes toward Jewish history. In the past there were complaints about the indifference of young Israelis toward Jewish history. Tendencies have existed in different secularist circles in Israeli society demanding a disconnection from Jewish history in the diaspora (e.g., the Canaanite movement of the 1950s).

Respondents from the four major identity groups were asked to name three historical events which affected the destiny of the Jewish people, as well as three historical events which affected themselves or their own destiny in particular. The results are detailed in Table 3.

Table 1
**HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE YOURSELF?
 FIRSTLY ISRAELI OR FIRSTLY A JEW**
 (in percentages)*

	Firstly a Jew	Firstly Israeli
State	47.84	52.16
State Religious	99.06	0.94

* The directors of the ultra-Orthodox sector asked us to eliminate this series of questions from their questionnaires.

Table 2
ISRAELI-JEW CONTINUUM

	Israeli			Jew		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Non-Religious	14.35	24.47	26.58	23.63	8.02	2.95
Traditional	2.60	6.49	18.18	35.06	15.58	22.08
Religious	0.85	0.85	3.42	34.19	21.37	39.32

The young secular Israelis answered both parts of the question with reference only to events in recent Jewish history, particularly in the twentieth century. Moreover, the events named most often in both categories were identical: the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and Israel's wars.

It should be noted that these events are all connected with Jewish national history, in many respects with Zionist history, and perhaps also with Israeli history. The Holocaust is of course a different kind of event in this context. Yet we found that many of the young Israelis examined it largely from a Zionist and Israeli — rather than a Jewish — point of view, and still less from a universal point of view.

Table 3 also shows that, with one exception, the Holocaust is the event most frequently mentioned in all three sectors as having influenced the destiny of the Jewish people and the participants' personal destiny. The one exception to this pattern was that among the students in the State Religious sector, the establishment of the State of Israel was mentioned most frequently as a historical event which affected their personal destiny. Practically every participant in the secular

sector mentioned the Holocaust or — much less frequently — the Second World War. Indeed, the Holocaust has now become the most conspicuous event in Jewish history among all three sectors, even more than the establishment of the state. For the secular and the ultra-Orthodox, the Holocaust has also become the historical event which most affects the students personally, despite the passage of time which might have been expected to produce a reverse trend. The target population for this study belongs to the second and third generations since the Holocaust.

Prominent in the perspective of time of the young religious Israeli (unlike that of the young secular Israeli) are historical events from the early history of the Jewish people: the Exodus from Egypt, the receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, Jewish dispersion, the destruction of the Temple, etc. Yet these events are hardly mentioned in the secular sector. Other than the fact that this is a longer perspective of time, we have also to be aware that these events are connected to the National Religious identification of the Jewish entity. These are events that formulated Jewish existence in the past and, according to the religious attitude, also in the present.

Table 3
**HISTORICAL EVENTS WHICH INFLUENCED THE DESTINY
 OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND YOUR PERSONAL DESTINY***

Event	Jewish Destiny				Personal Destiny			
	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total
<i>State Secular</i>								
The Holocaust	54.4	27.6	8.7	90.7	41.6	13.8	8.2	63.6
Establishment of the State of Israel	5.1	33.3	30.4	68.8	22.2	23.6	9.6	55.4
Receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai	2.3	0.6	1.6	4.5	0.3	-	0.5	0.8
The Jewish dispersion in Exile	4.8	1.4	1.6	7.8	0.6	-	-	0.6
The destruction of the Temple	7.9	2.9	3.8	14.6	-	-	-	-
Events in the history of Zionism	4.2	6.6	9.9	20.7	5.6	5.8	8.2	19.6
World War II	6.2	3.7	1.3	11.2	2.6	2.2	0.5	5.3
The War of Independence	1.4	8.9	4.8	15.1	2.6	4.7	1.9	9.2
The Six-Day War	0.3	2.3	12.8	15.4	3.9	8.4	9.1	21.4
The Yom Kippur War	-	0.6	4.2	4.8	2.9	6.9	7.7	17.5
The Lebanese War	-	0.6	4.2	4.8	6.1	14.5	13.0	33.6
The Wars of Israel	0.3	1.7	3.2	5.2	0.6	6.5	5.8	12.9
The intifada	-	0.3	1.9	2.2	2.3	4.0	12.5	18.8
The peace agreement	0.6	0.6	4.8	6.0	1.6	3.6	12.0	17.2
<i>State Religious</i>								
The Holocaust	19.5	34.4	28.2	82.1	17.7	27.4	6.0	51.1
Establishment of the State of Israel	1.6	16.8	44.7	63.1	19.5	21.7	34.5	75.7
Receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai	23.4	12.0	0.8	36.2	25.7	6.6	7.1	39.4
The Exodus from Egypt	31.3	2.4	4.4	38.1	4.4	-	-	4.4
The destruction of the Temple	14.1	6.5	3.5	24.1	3.5	3.8	3.6	10.9
Events in the history of Zionism	2.3	1.6	4.1	8.0	7.1	9.4	8.3	24.8
The Six-Day War	-	3.2	2.4	5.6	1.8	9.4	7.1	18.3
<i>Ultra-Orthodox</i>								
The Holocaust	18.0	14.5	32.7	65.2	44.7	7.7	20.0	72.4
Establishment of the State of Israel	0.0	3.2	9.1	12.3	4.3	10.3	6.7	21.3
The Jewish dispersion	7.8	6.5	9.1	23.4	4.3	10.3	3.3	17.9
Receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai	28.1	16.1	5.5	49.7	21.3	10.3	16.7	48.3
The Exodus from Egypt	15.6	8.1	7.3	31.0	-	5.1	6.7	11.8
The destruction of the Temple	6.2	29.0	7.3	42.5	4.3	7.2	-	11.5
The Expulsion from Spain	6.2	9.7	7.3	23.2	-	5.1	3.3	8.4

* The participants were asked to choose three events in response to each question. The order in which the choices were listed is also significant. Accordingly, the events chosen were expressed in percentages, in the order in which they had been entered.

Table 4
ATTITUDES TOWARD JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE DIASPORA

Jewish Community in	Affinity			Lack of Affinity		
	State Secular	State Religious	Ultra-Orthodox	State Secular	State Religious	Ultra-Orthodox
U.S.A.	36.2	47.3	65.1	63.7	52.7	34.9
Ex-USSR	38.8	58.0	57.8	66.4	42.0	42.2
Western Europe	26.9	32.6	60.0	73.1	67.4	40.0
Arab countries	25.5	42.8	44.3	74.5	57.2	55.7
Ethiopia	25.8	37.7	27.4	74.3	62.4	72.6

Attitudes toward Jewish Communities and Jews Outside Israel

In order to gauge attitudes toward Jews in other Jewish communities outside of Israel, students were asked about their affinity to Jewish communities abroad. Table 4 details the results by educational stream. Answers of "very great affinity" and "great affinity" were defined as an attitude of affinity. "Little affinity" and "lack of affinity" were defined as a lack of affinity.

The attitude of lack of affinity usually becomes stronger as we pass from the ultra-Orthodox sector to the State Religious sector and to the State secular sector. Within the State secular sector the lack of affinity to the Jewish communities in the diaspora is stronger among the non-religious (secular) students in comparison with the traditionalists. We have found similar attitudes — a lack of affinity — in studies we conducted among high school students in the State sector.

Two factors influence the feeling of affinity of young Israelis toward diaspora Jews: readiness to immigrate to Israel; and religiosity or non-religiosity. The students from both State sectors feel closer to Jews in the diaspora who are ready to immigrate because of this very fact. But the attitude of the students from the State secular sector toward religious or non-religious Jews abroad — without knowing their attitude toward immigration (*aliya*) — is far less close.

If we take into consideration that the great majority of Jews who live in the diaspora have no desire or intention to immigrate to Israel, then we have to ask ourselves what framework of relationships will be created in the future between the young Israeli who

lives in Israel and the young Jew who lives in the diaspora.

Also very interesting are attitudes toward Jews who are defined as assimilated. A lack of affinity toward these Jews is very prominent in all three sectors and is very similar to the lack of proximity they expressed toward non-Jews.

In the past the non-religious Zionist movements thought it their duty and their task to maintain ties with assimilated Jews and to try to reach out to them. It seems that they managed to transmit to the second and third generations only their reservations about assimilated Jews and not the ties and the understanding that the older generation felt for them.

On other questions we found that a very great majority believe that large-scale assimilation is likely to take place in the Jewish community in the U.S.A. (85 percent among the State secular students, 90 percent among the ultra-Orthodox students and 97 percent among the State Religious students). There is no doubt that assimilation (and anti-Semitism) are considered as the most serious dangers to the Jews of the diaspora. To a large extent they perceive the Jews who live in the diaspora — or in Exile, as many define it — as assimilated Jews, practically or potentially. On the whole they believe that only immigration to Israel can save them as Jews, spiritually and sometimes even physically.

The attitudes of religious students are also influenced by the degree of religiosity of the Jews who live abroad. They feel much more closely attached to religious Jews.

Problems of Identity Confronting Secular Israelis

The main ideological difficulties exist among the secular group, which is the largest in Israeli society. The questions of identity confronting non-religious young Israelis, which in certain cases turn into problems of identity, are more complex and intricate than the ones facing their peers in the religious groups.

The Jewish-Israeli identity, as fostered by large sections of the non-religious education system, often lacks the consistency, clarity, and completeness required for a harmonious, comprehensive framework. Stress develops mainly around two focal points: the relationship between the Jewish religion and the Jewish nation and its influence on Jewish identity; and the relationship between Jewishness and Israeliness.

On the other hand, the world of both the ultra-Orthodox and National Religious groups is shaped and nurtured by their religious outlook. This philosophy, provided it does not waver or collapse, equips the religious youth with consistent and complementing answers that create an all-encompassing wholeness, thus allowing future teachers who are religious to clearly and self-confidently define their own identity. Being Jewish takes on both a national and religious meaning for religious youth (with the ultra-Orthodox sector excluded on matters concerning the State of Israel and Israeliness), creating a profound and meaningful attitude toward religion as well as toward the people, country, and State of Israel. The issue of Israeliness does not present difficulties today for National Religious youth, who perceive their Israeli identity to be extremely strong and meaningful.

It is also true, however, that the dominance of Orthodoxy in the religious sector results in an intentional avoidance of questions of pluralism in modern Jewish existence. Religious education does not address the changing forms of Jewish observance that are especially prominent in the diaspora. Sometimes religious education does not even properly address the reality of Jewish sovereign existence in the State of Israel. But the major weakness found within much of the National Religious sector in the last decades, in our opinion, involves the influence of a Zionist-messianic ideology. In addition, much of the ultra-Orthodox sector has sought to avoid the Israeli component of their identity and does not accept Zionism as the basis for the existence of the State of Israel.

In our opinion, the main vulnerable points in the Jewish identity and education of non-religious youth are their national Jewish identity and their attitudes toward the Jewish people in the past and present times.

The Jewish component of this non-religious identity is incomplete and fragmented, a condition manifested by their attitude toward Jewish history of all ages, toward the Holocaust, and particularly toward the Jewish people in Israel and the diaspora in the post-Holocaust period. Group members do not consider themselves in a deep, meaningful sense as part of the Jewish people. They relate to the term "Jewish People" (*Am Yisrael*) mainly in the restrictive sense of Jews residing in Israel.

According to the findings of the study, the chief weakness of the State education sector is inherent in the fact that there is hardly any effort to foster an attitude toward Jewry that is open, understanding, mindful of existing complexities, and not oblivious of the existence of others. This state of affairs is also a result of a waning of the trend of tolerant secular nationalism in Israeli education. Such a process has taken place despite the fact that advocates of this trend have for many years been participating in the shaping of Israel's education system.

The study reveals that the Israeli components of identity have been reduced in strength in opposition to the increased strength of the Jewish components. The question remains whether today's young Israeli feels more Jewish only because he or she feels less Israeli, or because his or her Jewishness has been enhanced.

There is no doubt that a meaningful shift has occurred in the attitude of Israeli youth toward the Holocaust, as significantly manifested in this study. The Holocaust has become a major factor, at times the uppermost factor, of Jewish identity. However, the meaningful shift in attitudes toward the Holocaust — such as a sense of empathy for the victims and a feeling of pride with regard to their conduct — does not involve a shift in attitude with regard to other periods in the history of the Jewish diaspora, nor is there any change in attitude toward Jews living in the diaspora.

The fact that the Holocaust has become such a significant factor in Jewish-Israeli identity raises substantive questions both with regard to identity and from an educational point of view: Is it possible in the long term to foster an identity on the basis of elements which are fundamentally negative? Does the development of one's identity not require greater balance and the inclusion of positive Jewish elements?

Some Reflections

It appears that the main shortcomings of non-religious institutions are more a matter of what is made part of the Jewish and Zionist education they impart

rather than what is left out of it. As the findings of this study seem to corroborate, this fault stems from the fact that we are doing little to cultivate an open and understanding attitude toward Jewry.

It is necessary to bring about a meaningful change and devote intellectual and educational efforts to this factor. A suggested field of instruction, "Contemporary Judaism," which can otherwise be defined as "the Jewish world today, in Israel and the diaspora," should be developed to broaden knowledge and understanding and bring about a shift in existing attitudes. This field of instruction would center on the Jewish people in Israel and the diaspora, on what unites them and what makes them unique, on their similarities and divergences. It would assist young people and young teachers in examining issues that are material to their Jewishness and Israeliness over a broader perspective of time and space.

I would propose a comprehensive and balanced approach to Jewish-Israeli identity: Judaism involves both religion and nationality. The reality of numerous forms of Jewish existence in Israel and the diaspora must be accepted and in this respect pluralism is a historical fact. The spiritual and ideological tensions produced by this complex reality can prove fruitful provided that in the struggle between the variety of trends, approaches, traditions, views and life-styles, the groups will accept each other's legitimate existence and keep an open-minded attitude toward the different and the odd.

* * *

Note

The sample used in this study included 360 students (64 percent) who were training to teach in the State secular schools, 132 (23 percent) in the State Religious schools, and 72 (13 percent) in the ultra-Orthodox independent school system. These percentages correspond quite closely with the actual proportions of these groups in the overall student population at Israeli teacher training colleges. A large majority of the students were women, aged 21-26. A related study of identity conducted in 1994 (and not yet completed) among high school students and student teachers appears to give very similar findings.

* * *

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