



## Shalom Hartman Institute

### Rethinking the Partnership Between Israel and World Jewry

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# Israel at 60: Rethinking the Partnership Between Israel and World Jewry

By Donniel Hartman

"Next Year in Jerusalem;" "If I forget you Jerusalem;" "And to Jerusalem Your city may You return in compassion;" May our eyes behold Your return to Zion."

For nearly 2,000 years these words gave expression to the Jewish people's longing for redemption and their dream to return to their homeland in Israel. With the rebirth of the State, its founders expected, and with good cause, that all Jews would move to Israel. This movement in the Zionist lexicon was called *aliyah* (literally: ascent), rising from an inferior existence in the Diaspora to begin a new life in Israel - a life of greater opportunities and broader horizons made possible by the newfound reality of Jewish statehood. In the eyes of the State's founders, Israel was to be not merely the center of Jewish life, but its exclusive location. The Zionist narrative did not leave any place for a vibrant and ongoing Jewish community living outside of Israel that would constitute a permanent and parallel center for Jewish life. In the Zionist narrative, within a few years of the rebirth of the State, Diaspora Jewish life, for all intents and purposes, was to come to an end.

Sixty years on, it seems the founding fathers both under- and overestimated the potential of the fledgling Jewish state. Israel of 2008 is stronger, abler and more successful than the '48 generation could have imagined. The same, however, can be said of world Jewry. Rather than diminish and gradually disappear, Jewish communities around the world have grown and prospered. What has changed – and over the last two decades even diminished and become ever increasingly tenuous - is their relationship to Israel. As the Holocaust has become more of a historical event rather than an existential reality, and the threat or experience of anti-Semitism has decreased, the role of Israel as a "safe haven," a shelter of last resort for world Jewry, has become less compelling. In fact, as will be discussed below, much of world Jewry is more "worried" about the future viability of Israel than its own safety.

In addition, together with its vitality and viability, world Jewry is increasingly reticent to see Israel as its leader in shaping its Jewish spiritual, intellectual and collective agendas. Even World Jewry's philanthropic enterprises, once so central in confirming Israel's centrality, are in general being directed inward, as the major percentage of *zedaka* dollars are being funneled to local needs. When the United Jewish Communities - the main fundraising arm of American Jewry - created four allocation pillars, it tellingly placed Israel in its "overseas allocation" pillar rather than the Jewish "renewal" pillar. For American Jewry, Israel is an overseas allocation and not a local need, contributing to its Jewish identity and life.

World Jewry has built a vibrant, dynamic Jewish life independent of Israel. In the past, when Jews sang "Next year in Jerusalem" it was with the sincere intention of one day - whether in the near or distant future - making *aliyah*.

Nowadays, the song is often little more than an empty incantation, an expression of solidarity perhaps, but not of actual yearning. Israel and world Jewry are entering a new stage, a stage in which each celebrates its own vitality and independence. Unfortunately, though, the stronger Israel and world Jewry get, the weaker the connection between them becomes. Today, as we stand at the advent of Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> year, the ties that bind us are being significantly challenged.

This is particularly true of the younger generations, who do not regard Israel as in any way germane to their Jewish identity (see Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman, "Beyond Distancing: Young Adult American Jews and Their Alienation from Israel"). Israelis, on the other hand, do not recognize the power and autonomy of Jewish life outside Israel. The two communities are currently growing farther and farther apart, with the schism threatening the very fabric of Jewish peoplehood.

We can choose, as we have done so far, to ignore the burgeoning challenge, and hope that some new wave of anti-Semitism or war in the Middle East will emerge to revive our sense of solidarity and collective commitment; or we can address and begin to eliminate the causes of the growing rift. This essay attempts to do just that.

The present reality, I would posit, is not an aberration, but a result of years of systematic failure on behalf of Israeli and world Jewry to establish foundations for a sustainable relationship. The crux of any healthy, loving relationship is that each party sees the other as the other sees itself. Such a foundation is fundamentally lacking in the Israel-world Jewry dynamic. Rather than adopt the other's self-perception, each community has imposed on the other a patently incongruous image, borne more of its own needs and preconceived notions. Israel and world Jewry, in essence, do not see one another. If we are to salvage our status as one people, we must put an end to this mutual misperception. It is time to rethink and radically alter the relationship between Israel and world Jewry.

### **The Silent Witness: World Jewry in the Eyes of Israel**

Let us begin with the Israeli view of world Jewry. For the greater part of Israeli society, Judaism is defined chiefly through categories of sovereignty and land and life in Israel and civic participation in the Jewish state as primary expressions of their Jewish identity. For most secular Israelis, living in Israel is not a substitute for Judaism, but a new way of leading a meaningful Jewish life; dwelling in the land, dealing with the totality of moral challenges uniquely generated by Jewish sovereignty, speaking Hebrew, serving in the army, consuming Israeli culture, and celebrating the Jewish calendar (the national calendar of Israel) all infuse secular Jewish identity with new significance.

Israeli Jewish identity, which we call Israeli identity (as distinct from Israeli citizenship which includes as well Arab citizens...) confronts all facets of life through the sovereign and obligatory framework of a country with its own specific territory...The homeland, the national language and the obligating framework are the

constitutional components of the national identity of every person. Therefore I cannot point to any Israeli who is assimilating, just like there is no Frenchman in France who is an assimilated Frenchman (A. B. Yehoshua, *Homeland Grasp*, p., 63)

For religious Zionists, the land of Israel is not merely a place where Jewish national aspirations reach their fruition, but rather the land is the sole place where Israel and Judaism can live and thrive. In the words of one of the ideological founders of religious Zionism, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook:

The land of Israel is not something external, an external possession of the nation, serving merely as a means to the end of forming the collective and sustaining its material and even spiritual existence. The land of Israel is an independent reality, bound by a life force with the nation and internally entangled with its existence...Authentic Israelite creativity, in thought, life and action are only possible for Israel within the land of Israel...It is impossible for an individual from Israel to be committed and loyal to his beliefs, reflections, ideas and imagination outside of Israel to the degree that he is loyal to them within the land of Israel. (Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot*, "Eretz Yisrael," section 1 & 3.)

Governed by this "Isracentric" ideology, Israelis cannot begin to understand - to say nothing of respect - Diaspora Jewish life.

Using a metaphorical articulation one might say as follows: Zionism is the name for the drug which is meant to cure the form of "disease" called Diaspora. (A. B. Yehoshua, *Homeland Grasp*, p., 47)

For me, Jewish values are not contained in an adorned spice box, to be opened on the Sabbath or holidays, and to enjoy their fragrance, but are a reality of daily life with tens of challenges. (Ibid., p., 63)

For this reason, the scope of (Judaism's) application within life (in Israel) is immeasurably more full, broad and meaningful than the Judaism of an American Jew, for whom the critical decisions affecting his life are determined within the context of his American nationality or citizenship. (Ibid.)

While sometimes jealous of their economic standing and opportunities, for decades, the only category Israelis had for world Jewry was "those who had not yet made *aliyah*". As *aliyah* is no longer on the agenda for most of world Jewry, and even Israel has stopped sending *aliyah* emissaries to Jewish communities not at risk, Israelis had to devise a new category through which to relate to Jews living outside Israel. The basic category functionally adopted was that of "witness": the primary purpose of world Jewry is to confirm the centrality of Israel to contemporary Jewish life. A telling example of this role finds expression is the way Israelis understand the importance of Birthright Israel-Taglit, the program that offers young Jewish adults a free trip to Israel. The founders and funders of Birthright see it as a vehicle for reconnecting young Jews to their Jewish identities. However, in advertisements aimed at the Israeli audience encouraging them to be welcoming and hospitable to

Birthright students, the selling point of the program to Israelis is that it is creating thousands of ambassadors for Israel on North American campuses. It is not the assistance that it provides to North American Jewish life, nor its importance in enhancing Jewish survival, but rather Birthright's role in furthering the viability of the State of Israel that is of sole concern and interest.

This role of witness-bearing comes, as does everything else in Judaism, with its own set of symbols and rituals. The most significant ones are the expectation that Israel's needs be placed at the top of the world Jewish communities' *tzedakah* priorities, and during political elections, that they choose their candidate primarily on the basis of his or her attitude toward Israel. Within this context, Israelis, in return, engage in a parallel ritual of welcoming Diaspora delegates who are witness bearers with open arms, granting them unprecedented access to the highest echelons of the country's leadership. Jews arriving in Israel on various contribution missions are treated with the all the ceremony of state officials, their presence seen as unequivocal testimony to Israel's importance. The loneliness of living in the heart of a hostile Middle East, and the sense of failure at the state's inability to attract all Jews to its midst, have left Israelis feeling insecure, anxious for Diaspora Jewry to reaffirm their predominance over the Jewish world.

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The role many Israelis have assigned world Jewry is one which no Diaspora Jew can afford to play. If Jewish life around the world is to survive, it is only to the extent that Diaspora Jews resist the role of a silent witness of a life lived by others, and assert themselves as full and active players of a game whose rules they shape and in whose outcome they are invested. Pivotal and as expansive as it is, Israel does not hold the monopoly over Jewish life. North American Jewry has over the past two decades experienced a renaissance of Jewish vitality and activity, despite the looming challenge of assimilation. The term "Diaspora," in this sense, no longer seems fitting; the Jews of North America are not strangers in exile, but equal citizens who feel fully at home and have adorned their home with a full and vibrant Jewish life. They do not, nor should they consider themselves Jewishly inferior to their Israeli brethren.

If Israelis persist in blinding themselves to this fact, if they continue to regard world Jewry as no more than a silent witness to their centrality, they will remain forever alienated from the Jews of the world. And, as world Jewry grows less and less inclined to play second fiddle, its relationship with Israel will decline and ultimately disintegrate.

### **An Endangered Fairy-Tale Land: Israel in the Eyes of World Jewry**

However misguided Israelis are in their understanding of the Jews of the world, the latter's view of the former is equally inaccurate. If Israel belittles world Jewry beyond consideration, world Jewry often aggrandizes Israel beyond reason. Israel is perceived as a Jewish fairy tale land, a place of fantasy and wonder. Contrary to the movie "Enchanted," in which fairy-tale heroes fall out of their magical kingdom into the real world of Manhattan, Israel is where too many Jews go to replace the real world of the Diaspora with a magical Jewish utopia. Israel is a place of brief visits, of short-lived

“highs,” of instant inspiration: a tourist resort. A place where disenchanting, assimilated, and alienated young Jews suddenly discover their Jewish roots and identity. And, just as tourists, in order to enhance their experience, block out the flaws and failings of their chosen vacation spot, so do many Jews when coming to Israel.

This idealized approach is extended to the people, too. Despite the criticism of manners and culture, World Jewry still engages in a mythologization of Israelis, in particular in those areas where they are distinct from the archetype Diaspora Jew. They extol the valor and military prowess of their past, and the technological and scientific achievements of the present. Military bases are still a must for any successful mission. Unlike tour guides in other countries who are communicators of information, the successful Israeli tour guide is the personification of the myth; a larger than life individual, a military hero who simultaneously crossed the Suez Canal and redeemed the Golan Heights in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, even though the battles were hundreds of miles apart. An individual who in his or her own persona embodies the essence of the sabra - tough on the outside but gentle on the inside. Even when increasingly frustrated by them, world Jews shy away from addressing Israelis' shortcomings. Their fairy-tale view can accommodate only that which serves to boost their Jewish pride. For world Jewry, in this context, Israel is primarily a “*nachas* generator.”

No long-lasting relationship, however, can be built on the detached idealization of a tourist. Fairy-tale Israel is not - and cannot be - the real Israel, just as mythical Israelis are not the real Israelis. Both the place and people are far more complex than much of world Jewry would like to acknowledge, abounding in failures as well as successes. If Israel is anything, it is the embracing of the real world with all of its complexities and difficulties and taking responsibility to respond to them. It is a country laboring within reality, not one embracing a fantasy.

This need for Israel to provide a perpetual Jewish, spiritual and national high, also leads to significant disenchantment, for no one can meet these expectations. As the recent war in Lebanon showed us, we are not gentle Rambos capable of dispatching with ease all who stand in our way. As the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians plays out on the front pages of the world's newspapers, not all conflicts are as successful and morally simple as the Entebbe operation. The real Israel will not always be a source for pride and comfort.

As an extension of this type of relationship with Israel, one often hears articulated in North America the position that views Israel's primary challenge in terms of public relations. The Israel which is to serve as the locus of Jewish pride is obviously undermined by bad press and criticism by others. Consequently, opinions are offered as to the ideal Prime Minister solely on the basis of his or her appearance on this or that talk show. While public relations is a critical factor of any country's strength and vitality, the central challenges of a real country functioning in the real world is policy and not public relations,

and the ideal leader one whose policies can positively affect the country's direction and not one who passes the television screen test.

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Alongside this fairy-tale land image, however, lies an other extreme, whereby, for much of world Jewry, Israel is not only a fairy-tale, but simultaneously an endangered reality - a place perpetually facing extinction and whose survival is dependant on world Jewry's financial and political support. Right beneath the surface of Israel's military and economic might lies the image of a frail and small people courageously trying to survive in an ocean of hostility constantly threatening to overrun them. This somewhat paradoxical view aptly reflects world Jewry's complex and often inconsistent attitude toward Israel. The Jewish state is simultaneously seen as tremendously strong and terribly weak, invincible and in mortal danger.

The image of an endangered Israel evokes a different but no less significant excitement as that of the fairy-tale land Israel, as it casts world Jewry in the role of savior. It is here that world Jewry feel their deepest connection and sense of partnership with the State for it is here that they do not come as tourists but as allies who stand by Israel in times of need. What makes this view of Israel even more exciting is that it affords world Jewry the opportunity of being in partnership with those who in their eyes are of heroic proportions (as in the fairy-tale land narrative), whose military prowess is a source of pride and envy. To stand side by side on the front lines in the battle of Israel's survival, is a deeply meaningful and inspiring role. While the Israeli may confront the terrorist, the Diaspora Jew is confronting Congress. One wields a gun and the other a pen or ballot, but both are equally necessary and play a decisive role in the battle for the survival of the State.

Without in any way denigrating the role of world Jewry in both the forming and sustaining of Israel, the relationship with Israel as an endangered reality has given birth to a significant challenge. In order to sustain the relationship and excitement which it engenders, Israel must constantly generate crisis situations for it is only within crisis that world Jewry can transcend the role of tourist to that of partner. Nowhere does world Jewry feel more connected to the Jewish state as when it is called upon to fund ambulances and bomb shelters, support wounded soldiers, terror victims and provide relief to cities under siege.

I recall a consultation held a number of years ago between the professional heads of a prominent North American fundraising organization and a number of Israelis who were leading communicators of Israel to world Jewry. The consultation was centered on the following question: "While we have seen a significant rise in fundraising as a result of the recent intifada, our market research has projected a dramatic decline in the years to come. Do you have any recommendations as to what Israeli crisis we can sell our community next?"

Though the question came from individuals who have spent a lifetime caring for Israel, I found myself feeling antagonized and deeply distressed. I saw the future of any meaningful relationship between Israel and world Jewry being

sacrificed on the altar of a short-term fundraising strategy. Israel is neither a fairy-tale, nor is it endangered - militarily or economically. Its power and self-sufficiency are evident to all. While there are still significant challenges, Israel has effectively won the war for its survival, and the majority of its citizens are no longer living in a reality of existential threat. By the above I do not mean to belittle the ongoing political and military challenges facing Israel, nor am I arguing that the Middle East has become Scandinavia. We continue to have enemies – and they can harm us. However, Israel, in no small part with the help of world Jewry, has managed to reach a tipping point in the regional power balance and today our power dominates those who surround us. By way of a personal example, I experienced this tipping point when my son went into the army. Twenty five years earlier, during the First Lebanon War, I fought as a young tank commander of an M48 Patton - a Cold War-era U.S. tank which Israel had refitted with a bigger gun and upgraded electronics. As we entered Lebanon that summer, we were briefed that the Syrian forces we were about to encounter had recently equipped themselves with the cutting-edge T-72 Soviet tank. We were told there might be a “slight problem”, as we had no shell that could penetrate the T-72. I wondered what exactly we were supposed to do. Did our commanders expect us to smile and wave at the Syrians? They said that if we were able to hit the tank, it might be possible for one of our munitions (our least accurate one, in fact) to disable the T-72’s electronic system, but that it could not penetrate the tank’s armor. I pictured the scene from the movie “Cast a Giant Shadow”, in which the nascent Israeli Air Force had to fight the opposing army with seltzer bottles. Twenty five years later, my son too joined the ranks of the Israeli tank force. Today, however, he is equipped with the Merkava Mark IV-B, the fourth generation of Israeli-manufactured tanks - the most advanced tank in the world. The Syrian army is still using the T-72. And, incidentally, the Merkava can destroy a T-72 at a distance of more than two miles while traveling at full speed, at night.

While terror and missiles can harm us, for the most part they do not pose an existential threat, and where they do, Israel's has and continues to develop military responses, which beyond a missile defense shield includes an enormous nuclear missile second strike capability. The latter has created a balance of fear, which alone has provided an important safety net for the country for decades.

Now, even if one disagrees with the above military analysis, what is irrefutable is that neither the Iranian missile threat, nor for that matter, the kassam rockets falling everyday on Sderot, cannot serve as legitimate grounds for an emergency campaign to raise funds for Israel’s defense. The growth of Israel’s economic might has enabled it to deal with the economic consequences of the conflict in its current parameters. Israel does not need world Jewry to build army bases for our soldiers, shelters for our citizens, or purchase ambulances for our wounded. Israel not only has the resources, but ever increasingly, its economic elite also have the wherewithal and the will to contribute their share to issues of social and economic injustice and poverty, as well as to the economic and infrastructure short falls which are no longer covered by the national social safety-net. In fact, the vast majority of crisis support offered by world Jewry are directed to areas that Israelis can and are willing to contribute



to. The leadership role of world Jewry in these areas generates passivity both on the part of the government and local philanthropists who wait to see what is left for them to do. Crisis centered fundraising to an endangered Israel may lead to short term campaign successes, but it is not addressing the real needs of the country. This is becoming clearer to many Jews in the United States who are flocking to AIPAC, the leading Israel lobby, and other political action committees, rather than to the UJC and Federations. As advertised by AIPAC, its Annual Policy Conference in Washington is "Three of the most important days affecting Israel's future." If the relationship with Israel is primarily in terms of support to an endangered reality, then people are realizing that the primary area in which Israel still needs help is in obtaining ongoing political support; funding for bomb shelters and ambulances, and financial support for Sderot and terror victims, can and ought to be found within Israel itself.

We have witnessed, and thank God we have witnessed, a dramatic increase in power. We have witnessed major economic growth and technological achievement. We Israelis, while experiencing danger do not experience a reality in which our very existence as an independent State is endangered. If this is the dominant image of Israel, then world Jewry is either not seeing the real Israel or is partnering in an area where Israel has now attained independence and self-sufficiency. Moreover, given daily reports and detailed footage of Israel's military force, in particular in relation to that of the Palestinians, the weak and frail Israel is an image which cannot be sustained. Anyone who tries, for fundraising purposes, to market Israel as an endangered reality, is marketing not only a lie, but a product that in the long run will not sustain itself and ever increasing numbers of North American Jews, particularly the younger generation, will not buy. It is therefore, not an accident that UJC, for example, which often adopts this strategy, is raising its money from an ever decreasing pool of donors.

As long as world Jewry regards Israel through the dual lens of an "endangered fairytale", and Israel regards world Jewry as a "silent witness", the rift between the two communities will continue to deepen, to the point of inevitable rupture. To preserve our unity as a people, it is imperative that we begin to see one another differently. We need to replace our incongruous images with truer, more pertinent narratives.

### **Telling a Different Story**

Eradicating existing narratives for the sake of new ones is never quick or easy. It is a process, however, which we cannot afford to delay. Anything short of constructing new narratives for Israel and world Jewry will merely perpetuate the shaky foundations of our current relationship. What, then, are the different stories we must now learn how to tell?

For Israelis, a new narrative of world Jewry must begin with a radical redefinition of their own Jewish identity. The contemporary Israeli narrative, grounded as it is almost exclusively in categories of sovereignty and land, leave no room or role for the Jews of the world. If they are to understand world Jewry, Israelis have to expand their own narrative to include the larger 3000-year narrative of the Jewish tradition. At present, Jewish ideas, values and

beliefs may find expression within the Israeli milieu, but are not central to it. Israelis must strive to rediscover the Jewish foundations of their identity.

To do so, the Israeli public needs to realize that the Zionist revolution against much of its Jewish roots and past, may have been necessary during the rebuilding of the Jewish homeland, but has ceased to serve its interests. At any rate, the revolution need not be seen as directed against Judaism at large, but against a particular type of Judaism, one tainted by 2000 years of Diaspora life. As long as Israelis continue to distance the Zionist mission from its Jewish roots, they are not only robbing themselves of their past, but are making it impossible for any Jew outside Israel to be part of a collective identity with them, and to join with them in a common sense of peoplehood.

It is time the Jews of Israel undertake an educational endeavor to reclaim their place in Jewish history, a place which many of them - particularly secular Israelis - have relinquished. In addition, the centrality of the land, which has often bordered on idolatry, must be tempered. Though undeniably a core value, the land of Israel must be seen as a means and not as an end. Only when free from the tyranny of the land, will Israelis in general, and religious Zionists in particular, be able to engage in broader Jewish concerns - concerns which may be shared with Jews outside Israel as well.

Let me be clear: I am not calling for the removal of land and sovereignty from the Israeli narrative. For Zionist Israelis, these categories have become essential aspects of contemporary Judaism. What I am calling for is the recognition that alone, land and sovereignty are insufficient; they must assume their rightful place within the larger Jewish narrative, accompanied by the values, teachings and traditions which have constituted Jewish life throughout its history.

The above change cannot be achieved by decree, but through a slow process of education and reprioritization of values. Such a process will not be without its challenges. Israelis, particularly those outside the Orthodox streams, have no access to an effective, meaningful Jewish education. One cannot receive a quality Jewish education in the Israeli public school system even if one wants one. Ironically, the only place in the Jewish world where a non-Orthodox Jew cannot buy a Jewish education, at least after elementary school, is the State of Israel. This critical void is in many ways the result of an ethos based on land and sovereignty. If living in Israel, speaking Hebrew and serving in the army are enough to determine one's Jewish identity, then a comprehensive Jewish education becomes superfluous. Israel has thus created a public school system which leaves close to 80% of Israeli society permanently alienated from their heritage. To construct a new Israeli narrative which will allow for a worldwide Jewish identity, the first step must be the establishment of Jewish educational opportunities in Israel.

Once this educational revolution is underway, and the Israeli narrative is instituted on the foundations of the Jewish tradition, Israelis may begin to see the Jews of the world as they see themselves - as active participants in a vibrant, valuable Jewish life (even if that life is not experience through

concepts of land and sovereignty). More importantly, Israelis will be able to avail themselves of the unique contribution of world Jewry to contemporary Judaism. While the Zionist aspiration was for all Jews to make *aliyah*, the reality is that Judaism has benefited immensely from the innovative thought of world Jewry. Living in the midst of a larger western culture, the Jews of the world have come to assimilate certain sensibilities which Israeli Judaism would do well to emulate. One such sensibility, desperately lacking in Israel today, is religious pluralism. It is in the context of Diaspora Jewish life that different Jewish denominations have flourished, giving rise to tremendous diversity in the areas of ethics, spirituality, *halakhah*, ritual and synagogue life. While Jews outside Israel have a variety of ways to express their identity, Israelis are still governed by an all-or-nothing binary which leaves too many Israelis completely divorced from Jewish life. The profusion of religious options available to world Jewry would make Judaism not only more accessible to non-Orthodox Israelis, but more palatable to their diverse ideological dispositions.

Issues of democracy, human rights and gender equality - all staples of world Jewry's ideology - would also prove to be extremely advantageous to Israeli Judaism. And, the benefits of sovereignty notwithstanding, Israel ought to strive to preserve the moral sensitivities developed over 2000 years of living as a minority culture, sensitivities which still figure strongly in contemporary world Judaism. The notion of *Tikkun Olam*, for example, extending the responsibility of the Jewish people from their own community to the world at large, is the classic product of Judaism as a minority culture.

Jews around the world have built a Judaism which is not subordinate to Israeli Judaism, and they are not spectators in someone else's game. On the contrary, the Jewish narrative is infinitely richer precisely because the Jewish people have lived both within their own national setting and in the midst of the larger western culture. Hence, by coming to appreciate the ideas and values of Jewish life outside Israel, Israelis will regenerate and enrich the meaning of Jewish life *inside* Israel, as well.

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World Jewry's narrative of Israel, too, is in need of restructuring. Israel is not merely a beneficiary of overseas allocations for Jews in need, and its place in the Jewish narrative cannot be subsumed under the value of *tzedakah*. World Jews must stop seeing Israel as a nation on the verge of extinction, with themselves in the role of savior. Just as Israelis must discard their one-dimensional image of a "silent witness" and learn to see world Jewry for what it really is, so must world Jews rid themselves of the notion of an "endangered fairy-tale land" and come to see Israel in all its depth and vitality. In this case as well, the new narrative will prove advantageous to both sides, for there is much world Jewry stands to gain from observing the unique reality of the State of Israel.

The uniqueness of Israeli Judaism has to it many facets, facets which can and - I believe - *must* affect the way Jews around the world understand their

Jewish identity. First, the State of Israel redefines the notion of Jewish peoplehood in the broadest possible terms, transcending the traditional barriers of denominationalism. Before the establishment of the state, Jews had always identified with narrow denominational affiliations, bitterly divided over ideological, religious and political issues, with only anti-Semitism to hold them together. Israel has introduced the concept of a large, all-encompassing collective, united not through a common enemy, but by a sense of solidarity and mutual purpose and concern. I am not, of course, claiming that all Israelis have internalized this message or fully understand its implications. Nevertheless, Israel symbolizes the Jews' commitment to living as a people - sharing one identity, one heritage and one fate. Without it, worldwide Jewish communality would be severely impaired.

Second, as long as Jews existed as a minority culture under foreign sovereignty, they were forced to live vicariously through the political policies of others. While this certainly enriched their political sensibilities, it also left Judaism on the sidelines of public life, relegated to the realm of ritual and the synagogue. As taught by David Hartman since the 1970's, the birth of the State of Israel provided Judaism with an unprecedented opportunity of permeating and actively shaping all aspects of society. Whether in areas of political theory or economic policy, religious practice or ethical conduct, human rights or environmental care, hospitals or army bases, classrooms or courthouses - Israel is where Jewish values meet the road. It is where Judaism, for the first time in 2000 years, is faced with the responsibility of molding a living political reality. (See David Hartman, *Conflicting Visions*, p. 43-44. See as well A. B. Yehoshua, *Homeland Grasp*, p., 63)

Israel, in other words, is the Jewish people's experiment in society-building, in which Jewish ideas and values encounter the Modern world. The challenges are new and difficult, and there are bound to be failures. Yet even if we flounder, eliciting the criticism of both the Jewish and non-Jewish world, we are able to examine the shortcomings of our tradition and mend it where necessary. Though trying at times, this process presents a golden opportunity for Judaism to rid itself of the vestiges of ancient morality which have accompanied it since its inception. Modernity serves as a moral barometer, in which the principles of democracy, human rights, equality and egalitarianism have become morally binding. The Israeli attempt at society-building has generated a new discussion on the place of these principles in the Jewish tradition, challenging the latter to enter Modernity's marketplace of ideas as a full and equal contender.

Third, Israel has rejuvenated the role of culture and language in cultivating Jewish identity. Identity cannot be founded on faith and ethics alone; it must rest on the full range of human experience. A cerebral Judaism of religious principles and moral judgments creates a partial human being and an impoverished human life. Judaism can only thrive to the extent that it comprises an array of ideas, values and practices, allowing for a complex, well-rounded identity. Culture and language, in this sense, are an essential component which Israelis (particularly secular Israelis) have reinstated into our collective identity.

Fourth, Israel has brought the physical back into the Jewish narrative. Land and nature, agriculture and warfare, nutrition and the human body have all resumed their rightful place in Israeli Jewish life. Through Israel, Judaism is no longer confined to the realm of the theoretical and the abstract, but includes such physical activities as the cultivation of the land, the provision of one's own nourishment, and the art of soldering and self-defense. While they still prize education and knowledge, Israeli Jews have taught us that the Rabbinic dictum, "the study of Torah surpasses them all," (Mishnah Peah 1:1), ought not to define contemporary Jewish life.

All of the above, though inextricably linked to the reality of the State of Israel, are not the exclusive property of Israelis, but can, and indeed have begun to shape Jewish life worldwide. They do not point to the completeness of Israeli Jewishness over the partiality of Diaspora Jewry, à la A.B. Yehoshua, but rather to the spiritual, intellectual and moral leadership Israel can provide to world Jewry. To benefit from the many innovations of Israeli Judaism, however, world Jewry must stop regarding Israel exclusively as an "endangered fairytale," stop locating Israel under the rubric of oversee allocations, and start seeing it as a spiritual and intellectual resource, as a local need, as a partner in its renaissance and renewal.

### **Israel as Paradigm**

To this end, I would like to propose that the new Israeli narrative be one of "paradigm". Israel must be viewed as the Jewish people's attempt to establish a paradigmatic social reality. The Jewish state is not simply about bringing Judaism into the general marketplace and building a society like all others, but about creating a society of excellence, of moral greatness and outstanding merit.

Throughout history, we Jews have always seen ourselves as a paradigm. Living among the nations, we have always walked alone, not merely in the sense of being a perpetual outsider, but in the sense of not allowing the moral principles of those around to direct - or excuse - our behavior. We walked alone, looking to highest standards of our tradition as our guide. This is what I mean by "paradigm". This is what Balaam meant when he grudgingly blessed Israel as "a people that dwells apart, not reckoned amongst the nations" (Numbers 23:9). Though to some extent this blessing became a curse (one which modern emancipation ultimately removed), we must remain "not reckoned amongst the nations" even as a sovereign state, living in accordance with our own, exceptionally high standards.

Israel is striving to become a paradigm society, a place which - while in the Middle East - is not *of* the Middle East, a place of higher moral ground, where democracy, justice, equality, and kindness are the normative standard. You might say that by this I am inadvertently returning to the incongruous image of "fairytale". Let me be clear: by "paradigm" I do not mean that we have achieved the abovementioned goals. As one who has moved to Israel and has come to love and identify with this country, I do not look at Israel through

rose-colored glasses; I look at Israel with rosy expectations. I do not define Israel as a “*nachas generator*” or an *a priori* success. I define it as that which must become a success.

One of the more beautiful verses in our tradition is God’s edict to the Jewish people: “You shall be holy for I the Lord God am holy” (Leviticus 19:1). The verse, significantly, is prescriptive rather than descriptive; not “you *are* holy” but “you *shall be* holy”. The Bible never associates the election of the Jewish people with unqualified excellence. Quite to the contrary: far more than a gift of God’s grace, chosenness is a responsibility, a challenge to be met, a command to become worthy and virtuous. The verse goes on to tell us how this may be done: “For I the Lord your God am holy”. Our tradition sees God as *our* paradigm, as the model we must emulate. Despite the monotheistic tendency to see God as radically different from anything human, the Jew’s sense of self has always been predicated on the notion of *imitatio Dei* - man’s ability to imitate God. We must aim to become Godlike, even if we can never fully attain that goal. God’s attributes become models for the way we ought to behave. A Jew is one who has the *chutzpa* to aspire to live up to the highest possible standards.

The Israeli people, in this context, truly embody this Jewish *chutzpa*. Israelis are noted not only for the excellence of their achievements, but for the excellence of their aspirations. We Israelis want to see ourselves as something larger than life. We love it when Jewish tourists perceive Israel as a Jewish fairy-tale land, with us as fairytale heroes. We want to see ourselves as you, world Jewry, want to see us. You want to see us as the great and brave warriors. You want to see us as people who are strong and moral and valiant and successful. We too want to see ourselves this way.

This mutual desire, however, is dangerously deluding. With our own idealized self-image reflected in your eyes, we may come to believe we have actually fulfilled our aspirations. That is, and in a way must always be, far from the truth. Israel is a country in formation, an experiment not yet completed. It is an endeavor which requires serious people, inspired thinking and hard work if our achievements are ever to approximate our aspirations.

Here world Jewry has a vital role to play. Israel is neither a fairy-tale nor is it endangered. It is a place of great dreams that have yet to be realized. We have dried the swamps. We have vanquished our enemies. We have spent 60 years ensuring our survival. Our mission for the next 60 years is to fashion the state of Israel into a paradigm society, a place where we can fulfill the edict “you shall be holy for I the Lord God am holy”.

### **A New Partnership**

The fundamental challenge now facing world Jews as well as Israelis, is to recognize Israel as a work-in-progress and join in the effort. The Israeli experiment in society-building does not need starry-eyed tourists or benevolent benefactors; it needs mature partners. The task is momentous and the Israeli public, however adroit, cannot do it on its own. In fact, looking back

over the past 60 years, it is difficult to find one feat of Israeli society accomplished by Israelis alone. World Jewry has stood behind every success, every moment of triumph, helping to influence the vision, and assist with its know-how and financial resources.

Israel has needed world Jewry for the past 60 years and now, as it strives toward its ultimate goal of becoming a model state, it need them more than ever. Jews from around the world must come to the partnership armed with the Jewish ideas and values they have honed over the years in their countries of origin. And on their basis, choose the challenge they believe to be most central to achieving the status of paradigm - whether it be social and economic justice, general and Jewish education, minority rights, gender equality or religious pluralism, to name but a few examples - and become an active partner in addressing and resolving it. They must find the Israelis open to their input and dealing with the specific challenge and become their partners and supporters, both intellectually and financially. They must join the institutions engaging the issue and help rethink existing objectives and policies.

As partners, when engaging in philanthropic support, increased efforts must be expended on venture philanthropy. By venture philanthropy, I do not mean start up funding. This is in fact one of the more destructive modes of support as most NGO's have no way to generate income, or to replace the founding gift with new ones. As a result, it often leaves worthy causes with no long term viability as their "partners" hop every three years from one cause or institutions to the next under the guise of maximizing the effectiveness of their gifts. In building a paradigm state, Israel is in need of partners who are invested for the long haul, and not day traders. Anyone looking for short term successes lacks the vision and seriousness to be involved in truly reshaping Israel. Rather, by venture philanthropy, I mean focusing one's support on those areas where one believes Israel needs strengthening and which Israelis have not yet gotten behind. I mean taking a leadership position and supporting one's own vision of what is critical for the future of the State, even though in doing so one may be initially alone, in particular when it comes to Israeli co-funding. This funding will come over time as the idea and cause begins to infiltrate into the Israeli public discourse. The role of the venture partner is to innovate and forge new horizons which grew out of the experiences and ideology from which he or she was nourished.

On a general note, while critical of UJC crisis center fundraising, I believe the organization and those like it have a vital role to play in this new partnership. Many of the challenges of building the paradigm state require centralized organizations with political and financial clout. Furthermore, our challenges are significant and we are in need of organizations which are capable of generating collaborative, collective, world-wide marshalling and channeling of our efforts. Individuals alone will often lack the direction and wherewithal to make a difference. UJC can lead the way in building this new partnership if it so chooses. Whether it will choose this role and becomes a leader in visioning a new Israel or instead chooses to continue short term fundraising strategies,

is I believe, one of the central questions facing the future of the organization and in fact the future of the partnership between Israel and world-Jewry.

In their new role, World Jewry must be prepared for a certain degree of disappointment and frustration. Not all Israelis will welcome them with open arms. Many will prefer that they continue to play the part of the silent witness. Others will hail their willingness to help, but will try to limit their participation to financial support alone. World Jewry, however, must not despair. As David Hartman has often said, Israel is too important to leave to the Israelis. They must find those Israelis who are looking for a true partnership and who understand the significance of world Jewry's role, and value their expertise; the skeptics will be converted in time. As with everything in Israel, it will require perseverance and vision, strength of character and courage of conviction. Israel is a country which does not readily hand out respect. One has to earn it, and the fact that one does not live here or serve in the army will make it all the more difficult. Difficulty, however, ought never to be a deterrent. As our rabbis state in the Talmud, the most precious gifts in life - including the land of Israel - are only given to us through some measure of suffering (Tractate Berakhot 5a).

The Israeli experiment in society-building is, essentially, a joint venture, and the Jews of the world have a place at the table, if they should choose to sit and earn it. It may have to be earned through persistence, through argument - but it is there nonetheless. The biggest problem, however, is not Israeli reluctance; it is the fact that world Jewry has largely chosen to sit at the wrong table. It has chosen a table that suits its needs and satisfies its good intentions, but it is not where the Israelis are sitting. If we are to succeed in creating a paradigm society, we must find a way of bringing our two tables together.

### **Disagreement as a Sign of Love**

One of the fundamental rules of this partnership is that it must be founded on mutual respect, an open sharing of ideas and most importantly, a freedom to disagree. The role of world-Jewry is not to serve as cheerleaders of Israel and its policies, regardless of their beliefs and concerns. This will just perpetuate the spectator type relationship of the past which is corroding the relationship between Israel and world Jewry. Quite to the contrary, as partners, we are invested in each other and in building together a paradigm Jewish state. As such, loyalty, care and commitment are not to be judged merely by the vociferousness of one's support, but often by the depth of one's vision and aspirations for Israel, a fact that will invariably lead to disagreement and criticism.

This criticism is to be neither feared nor avoided. As taught in the book of Leviticus, the stifling of criticism is antithetical to Judaism's notion of true friendship. "Do not hate your brother in your heart. You must admonish your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 19:17-18). A sign of true love and friendship is when you care enough about somebody to correct them. You care enough



about somebody to tell them you think they are doing something wrong. The perpetual declaration of "amen," at the end of the day, is both a symptom and source of indifference. Under the commandment of "*tohekha*" - the commandment to rebuke somebody who you feel is doing something wrong - Jewish tradition is trying to foster a level of care among friends that has no tolerance for this type of indifference.

In our new partnership, we must do the same. We must bring to an end the notion that a friend is one who is not merely with you through thick and thin, but is one who also agrees with you regardless of whether he believes you are right or wrong. All too often in the Jewish community today, we require our friends to be exclusively "yes-sayers" - individuals who will declare "amen" regardless of what we do. This is appropriate behavior for spectators not partners. Furthermore, such a policy robs Israel from benefiting from the thought and experiences accumulated by world Jewry. Under the rules of the new relationship, we must recognize the depth and vitality of the Jewish ideas and values that have all accumulated, and cherish the opportunity afforded us to learn from each other. We will achieve the status of Israel as paradigm only to the extent that we are willing to listen to the innovative ideas and constructive criticism of all the partners at the table.

At the same time, Israelis and world Jews cannot lose sight of the disparate realities in which they each live. We can learn a lot from each other; we can enrich one another's lives; we can build new narratives in which each plays a significant role. Yet we will still remain fundamentally different. Thus, when we engage in our new partnership, it must be with a great deal of humility on either side. Israelis must drop the A. B. Yehoshua type of arrogance with which they all too often treat Diaspora Jewish life. It is not Israel's job to speak of the superiority of their Jewish life and the deficiency of World Jewry's, nor is their job to induce them to make *aliyah* (unless, of course, they so desire). When Israelis travel to Jewish communities abroad, they must do so not merely as emissaries, but as people who have something to learn.

Similarly, world Jews must realize that, as long as they do not live in Israel, they can never be full and equal partners. While their participation and criticism is invaluable, it is only those who live in Israel, whose children serve in the army who ultimately have the right to vote and determine the country's direction. World Jewry can influence, educate and contribute, but the final decision in matters of policy must always belong to the Israelis.

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The process of becoming one people, with a collective identity and common sense of peoplehood, will begin when each community learns to see the other as the other sees itself. It will continue and thrive when mutual perception turns into mutual respect. And it will culminate when the unique beauty and distinctive sensibilities of each community are forged into a coherent, meaningful whole: a shared vision of who we are and of where we want to go - together.