

All in the Family: American Jewish Attachments to Israel

Chaim I. Waxman

(RUTGERS UNIVERSITY)

No other ethnic group in American history has so extensive an involvement with a foreign nation; no other nation relies upon a body of private individuals who are neither residents nor citizens of their land to underwrite a major portion of their budget. American Jews buy Israel bonds, give generously to the United Jewish Appeal, lobby governmental representatives to pursue a pro-Israel policy, travel extensively to Israel (where they are greeted by "Welcome Home" signs), respond immediately to every crisis in that part of the world, and yet maintain passionately that they are Americans first and Jews afterward. It is a curious, puzzling, and yet totally logical arrangement.¹

In this article, that "totally logical arrangement" will be analyzed by means of an examination of American Jewish support for Israel on the institutional, individual and denominational levels. A second focus is the issue of whether this support has undergone any significant change since the late 1970s, and whether it is likely to erode in the near or long-term future. Finally, attention will be paid to the *familial* aspect of American Jewish-Israeli relations—that which is symbolized by the "Welcome Home" signs noted by Melvin Urofsky. As will be discussed, the nature of the American Jewish attachment to Israel is, in large measure, a consequence of the group self-definition of American Jews as well as of their status in U.S. society.

Viewed from the perspective of the institutional structure of American Jewry, Israel undoubtedly plays a central role in American Jewish life. In the *American Jewish Year Book's* annual listing of "National Jewish Organizations," for example, more than eighty organizations specifically devoted to Zionist and pro-Israel activities are listed, and for many others, objectives and activities such as "promotes Israel's welfare," "support for the State of Israel" and "promotes understanding of Israel" appear with impressive frequency. There is, moreover, the fact that fifty-five of the largest and most active of these national Jewish organizations are affiliated with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, for which Zionist and pro-Israel activity is the major emphasis. The Conference of Presidents shares an address with the U.S. headquarters of the Jewish Agency and World

Zionist Organization, and virtually all of its chairmen have had long records of extensive previous activity on behalf of Israel.

There is no substantive evidence of any erosion of support for Israel among the leadership of the American Jewish community. A 1989 survey conducted by Steven M. Cohen that included “key professionals and top lay leaders from some of the most influential organizations in American Jewish life”² as well as a small number of academics who are involved with Israel found that 99 percent of the respondents had been to Israel at least once and 84 percent had been there three times or more. Moreover, 78 percent identified themselves as “Zionists,” and 54 percent had “seriously considered living in Israel.” When asked, “How close do you feel to Israel?” 78 percent responded “very close” and 19 percent “fairly close.” Only 2 percent stated that they feel “fairly distant” and none stated “very distant.”³

Not only do most Jewish leaders feel close to Israel and identify with Zionism in the American sense of that term—that is, pro-Israelism⁴—they also appear to subscribe to the Zionist tenet of the centrality of Israel. Thus, in response to the statement “Jewish life in America is more authentically and positively Jewish than Jewish life in Israel,” 81 percent of Cohen’s sample disagreed and only 10 percent agreed.⁵

The ways in which Jewish organizations have been strongly involved in defense activity for Israel have been amply documented.⁶ Israel has also become increasingly central in the realm of American Jewish education. If, in 1968, Alvin Schiff found that Israel was taught as a separate subject in 48 percent of all Jewish schools, including all-day, weekday afternoon and one-day-a-week schools under Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, communal and secular auspices,⁷ Barry Chazan found by 1974 that 63 percent of the school curricula listed Israel as a separate subject, with “a general increase of attention paid to Israel in all subject-areas as compared with 1968.”⁸

Indeed, Israel has become so central to American Jewish institutional life that some observers tend to confuse symbols with substance. Yakir Eventov and Cvi Rotem, for example, offered a sweeping panoramic view in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* of the extent to which Israel has become central within the American Jewish community since the Six-Day War, arguing not only that “American Jews showed themselves more willing and ready to be identified as Jews, to affiliate with Jewish organizations and institutions, and to send their children to Jewish schools,” but that Israel now occupied “an important place in synagogue activities, sermons, and various religious celebrations,” including Israel Independence Day. They continued,

The Israel flag is frequently displayed in synagogues and community centers. In many synagogues, prayers for the welfare of the State of Israel and world Jewry are recited on Sabbaths and holidays following that for the welfare of the United States. . . . Hebrew songs and Israel folk dances have become American Jewish popular culture: at weddings, [bar mitzvah ceremonies], and on many college campuses.⁹

In short, the traditional Yiddish-based East European Jewish culture has been largely supplanted by the forms and symbols of modern Israel.

American Jews, however, are not as interested or knowledgeable about it as is frequently assumed. On the contrary, as Steven Cohen has found in a number of

surveys of American Jewish attitudes toward Israel, most of them are quite ignorant not only of Hebrew but of basic aspects of Israeli society and culture. For example, while two-thirds of the respondents in his 1986 national sample were aware that “most major Jewish religious holidays are also legal national holidays in Israel,” only one-third were aware of such elementary facts as that Menahem Begin and Shimon Peres are not from the same political party, that Conservative and Reform rabbis cannot officiate at weddings in Israel, and that Arab Israeli and Jewish Israeli children do not generally go to the same schools.¹⁰

Such ignorance notwithstanding, individual support for Israel remains consistently high within the American Jewish community, as shown in the extensive analysis of surveys by Eytan Gilboa, an Israeli political scientist.¹¹ This attachment is strong enough to have weathered severe challenges such as the Israeli war in Lebanon and outright Israeli rejection of various U.S.-sponsored Middle East peace proposals. Gilboa has found no indications that there is likely to be any decrease in the intensity of the American Jewish attachment to Israel in the foreseeable future.¹²

In Cohen’s 1986 survey of American Jews, approximately 85 percent of the respondents declared themselves supporters of Israel. On the basis of this survey, Cohen proposed an “attachment index” of American Jewry comprised of three different groups: (1) those who are intensely involved with or attached to Israel, constituting about one-quarter to one-third of the American Jewish population; (2) those who care deeply about Israel but do not have strong personal ties with either Israel or Israelis, constituting one-third of the population; (3) a remaining third, most of whom are probably pro-Israel but do not express the kind of deep concerns of those in the first two groups.¹³

More specific findings in this “attachment index” concerned age. Cohen found the lowest level of attachment among those aged thirty to thirty-nine years—which did not correlate with age differences in religious belief and practice—and the highest level of attachment among those aged sixty-five and above. Cohen offered no explanation for this finding, although it may derive in part from the relationship between intermarriage and attachment to Israel, about which there is conflicting evidence.¹⁴

Significantly, Cohen finds a very strong relationship between denomination and level of attachment to Israel. Specifically, the extent of Orthodox Jews’ attachments to Israel—however measured—greatly exceeds those among other denominations. At the same time, Conservative Jews consistently score higher than do Reform or nondenominational Jews. Moreover, differences between Orthodox and non-Orthodox are sharpest with respect to the most demanding measures of involvement with Israel, be it receptivity to aliyah rather than pro-Israel feelings, having closer ties with individual Israelis or having fluency in Hebrew rather than just a rudimentary knowledge.¹⁵

In addition, when Cohen compared his 1986 findings with those of his earlier 1983 study, he found that the Orthodox had become more intensely attached between 1983 and 1986, that there was virtually no change in the percentage of Conservative Jews who were highly attached (despite an increase in the percentage of those with low levels of attachment), and that among Reform Jews there was a decline in the percentage of those who were highly attached and a concomitant sharp

rise in the percentage of those with only low levels of attachment. In sum, while Orthodox attachments, which were intense initially, intensified even more during those years, the attachments of the Reform Jews and some of the Conservatives, both of which are larger groups than the Orthodox, weakened somewhat.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the vast majority of America's Jews remained staunch supporters of Israel.

In a 1989 update of his survey of American Jews, Cohen found no evidence of any significant weakening of American Jewish attachments to Israel as a result of the Palestinian Arab *intifada*. On the contrary, the responses to most of his questions indicate the rather firm stability of American Jewish pro-Israelism, with some responses even showing an intensification of attachment from 1983 to 1989.¹⁷ It should be pointed out, however, that Cohen did find evidence that younger Jews—those under thirty-five years of age—are less pro-Israel than older Jews. The reason for this pattern is as yet unclear.¹⁸

One other post-*intifada* survey is that of the *Los Angeles Times* of March–April 1988, based on a national sample of American Jews. When asked to indicate the quality most important to their Jewish identity, half of the respondents answered “social equality” and the other half were equally divided between various other options—among them “support for Israel,” which was cited by a full 17 percent of the respondents as the *most important* aspect of their Jewish identity. It seems reasonable to assume that many of the other respondents considered such support to be part of their Jewish identity as well, even if not its most important part.¹⁹ Indeed, 85 percent of those sampled, as contrasted with only 27 percent of non-Jewish Americans, favor strong U.S. support for Israel.²⁰

As is the case with the community-at-large, there are also denominational variations in the level of Zionist attachment of American Jewish institutional leaders. These variations are clearly evident in a 1989 survey of rabbis and communal workers conducted by Cohen and Gerald Bubis. One of the statements in that survey, “It is easier to lead a fuller Jewish life in Israel than in the U.S.,” met with a 10 percent positive response and a 73 percent negative response among American Jews in general. Among Orthodox rabbis, however, approximately 70 percent agreed with the statement, as did 60 percent of the Orthodox communal workers. Among Conservative rabbis and communal workers, the figures were 50 percent and 33 percent, respectively. But less than 20 percent of Reform rabbis and communal workers agreed.²¹ This last finding corroborates the results of a recent study of Reform Jewry's national leadership. When participants in this study were presented with a similar statement (“A Jew can live a more authentic Jewish life in Israel than in America”), 81 percent disagreed and only 10 percent agreed. And in response to the statement “Israel is the center of contemporary Jewish life,” 74 percent disagreed and 11 percent agreed.²²

Beyond the quantitative data, there is a good deal of history regarding the form and depth of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewish attachment to the Jewish homeland. Interesting changes, moreover, have occurred over the years in the way each of these movements relates to Israel.

In contrast to East European Orthodoxy, which was characterized in the prestate era by its anti-Zionism, American Orthodoxy was always highly supportive of the

establishment of the Jewish state. Mizrachi, the religious Zionist movement, was one of the major forces in American Orthodoxy, more influential by far than the non-Zionist Agudath Israel.²³ During the interwar period, Yeshiva Torah Veda'ath, one of the first higher yeshivahs in the United States, was strongly Zionist.²⁴ And as late as 1949, *Hapardes* (the oldest extant Torah journal in the United States) contained regular reports on religious Zionist developments, both within Mizrachi and beyond it. Among the features in the April 1949 issue, for example, was a detailed report on an address delivered by Rabbi David Lifshitz to the annual convention of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada (*Agudath Harabanim*), in which strong sentiments of religious Zionism were expressed.²⁵

Today, much of that picture has changed dramatically. American Orthodox Judaism is now heavily influenced by Agudath Israel. Religious Zionism, when not loudly condemned, is rarely mentioned in the aforementioned Torah journal; the leadership of Agudath Harabanim is wholly of the Agudath Israel persuasion; and the *yeshivishe velt*, the "world of the yeshivah," is virtually synonymous with the world of non-Zionism. This is a result, in large measure, of the post-Second World War immigration to America of the survivors of East European Orthodoxy—including those of the scholarly elite who headed the higher yeshivahs in Russia, Lithuania and Poland, as well as a number of Hasidic grand rabbis and their followers, most of whom came from Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland.²⁶ Establishing a network of day schools and yeshivahs in America that socialized a new generation in accordance with their non-Zionist version of Orthodoxy, these new arrivals soon took over the ideological leadership of the Agudath Israel of America and provided it with a following from within the rank and file of yeshivah students and hasidim. By the 1950s, Agudath Israel had grown to be one of the largest and most influential organizations of American Orthodoxy, whereas Mizrachi's leadership had stagnated and its membership and significance had declined markedly.

Not only within "the world of the yeshivah,"²⁷ but within much of American Orthodoxy in general, the ideology of religious Zionism is now much less frequently espoused. Indeed, when ArtScroll, a highly successful publisher of traditional Judaica that caters to the Orthodox public, put out a new edition of the traditional prayer book, it omitted the prayer for the welfare of the state of Israel. Although the organization of Modern Orthodox rabbis, the Rabbinical Council of America, issued its own special edition of the ArtScroll siddur that included this prayer, it appears that the regular edition has become the standard one for the Orthodox public in the United States.²⁸ Likewise, there seems to have been a decline in the *religious* celebration of Israel Independence Day within Orthodox congregations across the United States.

Such developments, however, do not indicate a decline in support for Israel within American Orthodoxy. Rather, there seems to have been a *transformation* in the role of Israel within American Orthodoxy, although its precise nature is not yet quite clear. It may be that there is a decline in the tendency to define the state of Israel within the context of modern (albeit religious) Zionism and an increasing tendency to define Israel traditionally, as Eretz Israel—a trend that has also manifested itself within Israel, especially since the Begin era.²⁹ Alternatively, the transformation may be characterized as the secularization of Israel. Perhaps because

Israel has become so modernized, American Orthodox Jews increasingly relate to it as a modern secular society to which, nevertheless, strong allegiances are attached because it is a state in which Jews are sovereign.³⁰

In all, religious Zionist ideology that defines Israel in religious terms has lost influence, so much so that today most American Orthodox Jews no longer overtly conceive of Israel in ritualistic-religious terms. They remain strongly attached to Israel as the state of the Jewish people and therefore deserving of high communal priority, but the state per se is not part of the specifically religious realm.³¹ In any event, even the traditional Orthodox can now openly express their attachments to Eretz Israel and the people of Israel without being tainted by secular Zionism.

Founded in the nineteenth century by moderate traditionalists, Conservative Judaism appealed to large numbers of young immigrants and, later, children of immigrants from Eastern Europe who found Orthodoxy too confining and inhibiting and Reform too lacking in tradition.³² Given their strong ethnic self-definition and the fact that many of them were familiar with Zionist groups in Eastern Europe (even if they themselves had not been members), it was natural for many Conservative Jews to join the American Zionist movement that was beginning to take form. Here, too, they opted for the mainstream. Mizrahi was for the religious Zionists and Poale Zion was for the socialists, but for the majority of recently arrived immigrants who were ethnic rather than ideological Zionists, the much less ideologically sophisticated General Zionism, embodied first in the Federation of American Zionists and later in the Zionist Organization of America, was the logical choice.

These tendencies were reinforced by the fact that the leaders of Conservative Judaism were virtually all self-proclaimed Zionists who defined Zionism as an integral part of Judaism. As Moshe Davis aptly put it,

Zionism was an integral part of the program of thought and action which the Historical School developed in the closing decades of the past century and which it transmitted to the Conservative Movement. Conservative Judaism and Zionism developed separately, but their interaction was constant. As a result, both were stimulated conceptually and organizationally.³³

Given the deep interconnections between Conservative Judaism and American Zionism and the explicit definition of Zionism as integral to Judaism, it is not surprising that Conservative Judaism came to be seen as the most Zionist branch of American Judaism.³⁴ The depth of Conservative Jewry's Zionist commitment was apparent in its staunch support of the Zionist movement as well as the state of Israel.

Officially, it would appear that this commitment to Zionism and Israel remains unattenuated. Indeed, in *Emet Ve-Emunah*, its recent statement of principles, the movement's leadership extensively reiterates its deep—albeit not unequivocal—commitment to Zionism and Israel:

This zealous attachment to *Eretz Yisrael* has persisted throughout our long history as a transnational people in which we transcended borders and lived in virtually every land. Wherever we were permitted, we viewed ourselves as natives or citizens of the country of our residence and were loyal to our host nation. Our religion has been land-centered but never land-bound; it has been a portable religion so that despite our long exile

(*Galut*) from our spiritual homeland, we have been able to survive creatively and spiritually in the *refutzot* (Diaspora). . . . We staunchly support the Zionist ideal. . . . The Conservative movement is a member of the World Zionist Organization. We have undertaken major efforts in Israel. . . . Increasing numbers of Conservative rabbis and laypersons have gone on *aliyah*, and we cherish and encourage *aliyah* to Israel as a value, goal, and *mitzvah*. . . . Both the State of Israel and Diapora Jewry have roles to fill; each can and must aid and enrich the other in every possible way; each needs the other. It is our fervent hope that Zion will indeed be the center of Torah and Jerusalem a beacon lighting the way for the Jewish people and humanity.³⁵

The fact that the statement does not endorse the classical Zionist notion of the centrality of Israel is neither surprising nor a deviation. Neither Conservative Judaism nor American Zionism has ever sincerely supported it.³⁶ What is more noteworthy is the fact that the statement goes on both to decry existing conditions in Israel and to distance the Conservative movement from Israeli government policies. For example, it emphasizes that “the Conservative movement has not always agreed with Israel’s positions on domestic and foreign affairs.”³⁷ If such statements are seen as representative of the movement as a whole, a certain subtle shift has in fact taken place among Conservative Jewry.³⁸

Of the three major branches of American Judaism, it is unquestionably Reform Judaism that has made the most radical strides in coming to terms with Zionism and Israel, from Classical Reform’s early antipathy to Zionism to the movement’s acceptance of Israel’s statehood on the eve of its creation.³⁹ It is true that some outposts of Classical Reform opposition remained into the 1950s (as Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum found in the “David Einhorn Temple” in “Lakeville”), but even there most of the community professed a sense of attachment and concern for the Jewish state.⁴⁰

By the end of the 1960s, it was already hard to imagine that only a relatively short time earlier there had been such strong opposition to Zionism and Israel within the movement. In 1897, the Reform rabbinic body, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), had issued a declaration stating “that we totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish state. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel’s mission.”⁴¹ In 1917, in response to the Balfour Declaration, the CCAR had demurred, “We do not subscribe to the phrase in the declaration which says, ‘Palestine is to be a national home-land for the Jewish people.’ . . . We are opposed to the idea that Palestine should be considered the home-land of the Jews.”⁴² But fifty years later, in June 1967, the CCAR declared its “solidarity with the State and the people of Israel. Their triumphs are our triumphs. Their ordeal is our ordeal. Their fate is our fate.”⁴³

An extensive study of the Reform movement reported that by 1970, 82 percent of Reform adults and 67 percent of Reform youth found it either essential or desirable to support Israel, and more than 40 percent of both groups found it either essential or desirable to support Zionism.⁴⁴ And by the 1980s it was found that 81.6 percent of Reform Jews living in communities in which Jews are at least half of the population, and 67.2 percent of those living in communities with only some or a few Jews,

agreed with the statement that "the existence of Israel is essential for the continuation of American Jewish life."⁴⁵

Despite all the data pointing to continuing solid American Jewish support for Israel, there is also evidence that American Jews strongly defend the propriety of publicly voiced criticism of Israel and Israeli government policies. The Conservative movement's statement of principles is one striking example. And on the individual denominational level, Bubis and Cohen found wide agreement with the statement "Jews who are severely critical of Israel should nevertheless be allowed to speak in synagogues and Jewish Community Centers" in their 1989 survey. Among the Orthodox, 42 percent of the rabbis and communal workers agreed; among the Conservative, 62 percent of the rabbis and 63 percent of the communal workers agreed; and among the Reform, 82 percent of the rabbis and 74 percent of the communal workers agreed.⁴⁶ Cohen also found widespread criticism of Israel among American Jewish leaders on a number of specific issues, including Israel's stance toward the P.L.O., the settlements on the West Bank and the issue of "Who is a Jew?"⁴⁷ For example, a clear majority (59 percent) stated that the Arabs on the West Bank are being treated unfairly, and "as many as 77 percent affirmed that they have privately criticized 'Israel's handling of the Palestinian uprising.'"⁴⁸

Tempting as it might be, it would be an oversimplification to attribute the increasingly critical stance of American Jewry solely to the change in the Israeli government since the fall of the Labor Alignment coalition in 1977. It is true that American Jews are much more comfortable with the Labor party than they are with the Likud. The political liberalism of American Jews is well-documented,⁴⁹ and thus it is understandable that the democratic socialism of the Labor party is much more appealing than the nationalism of Likud. In addition, when the Labor Alignment was in power, it strongly discouraged public criticism by diaspora Jewish leaders of Israeli policy. Since the accession of the Likud to government leadership, however, some key Labor Alignment figures have reversed their stance, asserting an *obligation* on the part of American Jewry to be publicly critical of the Israeli government when they disagree with its policies and bemoaning the fact that such criticism is not more pronounced. Nonetheless, changes in the American Jewish stance toward criticism of Israel do not appear to be tied exclusively to political trends within Israel or the changing attitudes of some Israeli leaders toward the public expression of criticism of Israeli policies. Rather, they seem to be primarily the consequences of a basic change in the self-definition of American Jews.

Until the late 1960s to early 1970s, Jews in the United States were defined by American society as a religious group; they defined themselves in this way as well. Since then, however, American Jews have increasingly defined themselves as an ethnic group. As a result, American Jewish attachment to Israel has found new and much more public expression.⁵⁰ Whereas the connection with Israel was defined in religious terms when U.S. Jewry defined itself primarily as a religious group—as Charles Liebman observed, Israel was part of their religious behavior⁵¹—there is now an increasing tendency to assert the extended kinship character of the Jewish people. Israel within this context now has an overt extended familial dimension

because American Jews increasingly define their relationship with Israel as one of *mishpahah*, or family, with all of the emotions and obligations implicit in that term.⁵²

An understanding of the extended familial nature of the American Jewish attachment to Israel helps in explaining a number of otherwise anomalous aspects of that relationship—for instance, the fact that American Jews seem to hold to political positions regarding Israel that are somewhat different from those concerning other countries. The reason for this is that American Jews do not relate to Israel solely in political terms but rather in extended familial, ethnic terms. Even though they refer to it as the “state of Israel,” it is not solely or even fundamentally the state as a political entity to which American Jews are so attached. True, the political autonomy of Israel is a matter of enormous importance, but the real significance of Israel is much deeper: it is also the *land* of Israel, Eretz Israel, and it is this aspect of Israel that has so much meaning.⁵³

Liebman has argued that Israel has importance for American Jews as a “*heim*,” the Yiddish word for “home,” with all of the nostalgia that surrounds that concept. (The meaning of *heim* may actually be captured more accurately if it is translated “the old home.”)⁵⁴ Thus, American Jews who subscribe to the basic tenets of political liberalism do not apply the same rules to Israel. Being perceived more as a “home,” what Christopher Lasch termed a “haven in a heartless world,”⁵⁵ Israel is not subject to all of the same rules that apply to political entities, but rather to what may be termed “family rules.” Just as the family does not always necessarily operate according to the rules of democratic procedure or in accordance with rational or legal-rational rules—being instead the place where “they’ll always take you in”—so do many American (and other) Jews relate to Israel as a nonpolitical entity. Israeli leaders, moreover, frequently reinforce this perception of Israel when they speak, for example, of the obligations that world Jewry has to Israel.⁵⁶

The extended familial character of Israel may also explain the strong reaction by so many American Jews (even those who otherwise had little to do with Israeli domestic politics) to attempts made in 1988 to amend the Law of Return so that it would define as Jews only those born of a Jewish mother or those who had converted according to halakhic procedure. Asked why they were so taken aback by the Law of Return issue, members of a group of UJA leaders in Westchester, New York, responded that they wanted to be sure that Israel would be open to their children and grandchildren, should they need it. In other words, they wanted to make sure that Israel would take *them* in, that it would remain a haven, a home, not only for them but for their children and grandchildren as well.⁵⁷

Similarly, the notion of Israel as home helps to clarify what at first blush may seem a puzzling contradiction in American Jewish attitudes. As previously noted, most American Jews—despite their strong support for Israel—do not view it as the most important factor in their Jewish identity. Nor are most familiar with spoken Hebrew or the most basic facts of Israeli society. But such a contradiction fits in precisely with the nature of a nostalgic home. As Charles Liebman put it,

Now, the characteristic of the *heim* . . . is that one doesn’t live there. It is the parents’ home, or in the case of Israel the surrogate parents’ or surrogate grandparents’ home. One visits it on occasion, one sends money . . . and one wants very much to feel that

life goes on there as it always has. . . . This is the Jew who is quite certain he would be completely at home in Israel, though he knows very little about the country and makes no special effort to learn anything.⁵⁸

Liebman attributes this nostalgic longing for the *heim* primarily to poor, elderly American Jews. It can be argued, however, that a large segment of American Jewry is in fact “homeless” in the United States, in the ethnic as opposed to material sense of the word, such that their pro-Israel sentiment is rooted in a sense of extended familism and nostalgia for “the home.”⁵⁹

What is the basis for this suggestion that U.S. Jews—who, according to some, are “at home” as never before⁶⁰—may actually be “not quite at home”?⁶¹ One manifestation is the contrast between how non-Jewish and Jewish Americans view antisemitism and the condition of Jews in the United States today. Despite a wide variety of studies showing a steady decrease in antisemitic attitudes in American society since the end of the Second World War⁶² and other studies indicating that the structural barriers to Jewish participation in the society are crumbling,⁶³ America’s Jews are still uneasy. Paradoxical as it may appear, American Jewish concern about antisemitism is in fact intensifying. Whereas in 1983, about 50 percent of American Jews in Steven Cohen’s survey disagreed with the statement “Virtually all positions of influence in America are open to Jews,” by 1989, 66 percent disagreed with it. And whereas in 1983, about 50 percent disagreed with the statement “Anti-Semitism in America is currently not a serious problem for American Jews,” by 1989, 73 percent disagreed.⁶⁴ Apparently, there is a relationship, perhaps even a correlation, between concern with antisemitism and attachment to Israel.

Beyond their anxieties concerning antisemitism and the subsequent focus on Israel as a haven for themselves, American Jews have a number of functional bases for their support of the Jewish state. As outlined below, Israel’s functions include far more than “mere” physical (or psychological) sanctuary for U.S. Jewry:

Haven for Jews worldwide. Israel has traditionally had meaning for American Jews as a haven for downtrodden Jews around the world. Indeed, this is the most common American Jewish conception of Zionism—that there should be a Jewish state so that there will be a refuge for Jews who are persecuted in their native countries—and it is probably subscribed to by the overwhelming majority of American Jews. However, they don’t all subscribe to it for the same reason. For some, this commitment derives from a strong sense of commitment to fellow Jews and a belief that a sovereign Israel is the best guarantee for the safety and well-being of persecuted Jews. For others, the commitment may derive from other, somewhat less noble sources, such as resolving a sense of guilt for not doing more. Insisting on Israel as a haven may be a convenient way of avoiding the direct confrontation with the problems of the persecuted and downtrodden. Directing such “Jewish problems” to Israel is, in this context, not very different than those American Jewish parents who were ready to ship their problem teenagers off to Israel in the hope that this would “cure” them. Israel, in these instances, is like an “easy fix.” What will happen to the Israel commitments of those who come to learn that there rarely are easy fixes—and Israel, in any event, is not one of them—remains to be seen.

Legitimation for the American Jewish organizational structure. As indicated previously, Israel is central to that structure. In fact, many American Jewish organi-

zations now need Israel to legitimate their own existence. Although these organizations may have been established for the purpose of enhancing and strengthening Israel, today Israel is vital for their continued viability. This is another manifestation of the classical process of organizational goal displacement, wherein the original goal for which an organization was created is displaced, once the organization comes into existence, with the goal of maintaining the organization itself.⁶⁵

Outlet for the expression of Jewish identity. For the majority of America's Jews, including the religiously nonaffiliated and those who are religiously affiliated but for whom religion is very compartmentalized, Israel provides an outlet for the expression of Jewish identity within the ethnic sphere. By reading about Israel, by participating in organizational activities involving Israel, by donating time and money and by being involved with Israel in a variety of other ways, American Jews are able to express their Jewish identity without necessarily participating in formal religious activities. For many of those who also identify religiously, Israel serves as the tangible location and manifestation of much that is found in Jewish history, folklore and prayer, and thus provides those with a much deeper sense of meaning.

Source of ego strength. When Israel is strong in positive ways, American Jews feel good about being Jewish. In particular, Israel as the hero disproves the negative stereotypes about weak, cowardly Jews. This was probably most obvious immediately after the Six-Day War and after the Israeli rescue in Entebbe. For example, shortly after the Six-Day War, journalist Robert Silverberg recounted his thoughts and emotions:

How splendidly "we" had fought, I told myself; how fine it was that "we" had once again foiled the Arabs. *We!* I, no Zionist, hardly even a Jew except by birth, was amused by an audacity in identifying myself with the Israeli warriors.⁶⁶

Silverberg goes on to quote a Brooklyn College graduate student, who put it succinctly: "I really do feel prouder today. There is new meaning in being Jewish."⁶⁷

It should be noted that one consequence of this kind of identity and identification is that it is contingent on Israel's being viewed as the hero. If, however, Israel ceases to be viewed by Americans as hero—as has already widely occurred—and American Jews no longer identify with Israel's policies, then both American Jewish support for Israel and the Jewish identity of many of America's Jews will invariably weaken. This is probably as much a challenge for Jewish communal leaders, especially rabbis and Jewish educators, as it is for Israel.

Outlet for status-inconsistency frustrations. Many American Jews find themselves in an incongruous situation—that of attaining high educational, occupational and income status without necessarily acquiring an equal measure of social prestige. Although the existence of a Jewish state cannot, of course, change the status of U.S. Jews as a sometimes unloved minority, it may serve as an outlet for some of the resulting frustration.

An extreme example is the support many Jews have given to controversial figures such as the late Meir Kahane. It may be that through their support of Kahane's "Kach" movement some Jews are able to retain their own sense of self-esteem and self-worth in the face of daily rejection on the part of both the dominant U.S. culture and those of other minorities in the United States.⁶⁸ A much more benign example

is the way in which Israel serves as a parallel social and political structure for Jews, otherwise successful, who are lacking in American political clout. Through membership and activity in national Jewish organizations, these people have a chance to meet and socialize with prominent Israeli figures, either in the context of organization "study missions" to Israel or in meetings arranged with visiting Israeli statesmen.⁶⁹

Israel, in short, may represent the ultimate dream of being fully "at home"—even though the home is not necessarily one that is culturally familiar to most American Jews. Culturally, they are far more at home in the United States. But their "at-homeness" can never really be complete. U.S. Jews are too much aware of their minority status, not that of a deprived minority, it is true, but a minority nonetheless. And with this perception, perhaps by definition, they can never be completely at home. It is only in Israel that Jews, even many American Jews, can feel that they are no longer minority group members but part of a dominant extended family.⁷⁰

With this, of course, comes the freedom to be critical of family affairs. As American Jewry increasingly defines itself as an ethnic group and relates to Israel ethnically, its criticism is apt to become ever more vocal. (As long as Israel was predominantly part of the American Jewish religion, it had a sacred character, and criticism amounted almost to sacrilege. But now that the relationship has moved from the religious to the familial-ethnic sphere, American Jews are more likely to strike a new balance between their profound sense of attachment to Israel and their opposition to some of its policies.)

Notes

1. Melvin I. Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, N.Y.: 1975), 1.

2. Steven M. Cohen, *Israel-Diaspora Relations: A Survey of American Jewish Leaders* (Ramat-Aviv: 1990), 14.

3. *Ibid.*, 26–28.

4. Chaim I. Waxman, *American Aliya: Portrait of an Innovative Migration Movement* (Detroit: 1989), 105–118.

5. S. Cohen, *Israel-Diaspora Relations*, 28. If it were based solely on this statement, Cohen's interpretation of the responses to this question as a measure of Zionism would be somewhat questionable. Those who responded negatively may not have been affirming the centrality of Israel. Perhaps they merely do not subscribe to the "centrality" of America; that is, they may hold Israel and America as of equal importance. This would be in line with the findings of a study of Reform Jewry's national leadership in which an almost identical percentage disagreed with the statement "It is easier to lead a fuller Jewish life in Israel than in the U.S." (See p. 137). However, in light of the responses of Cohen's sample to other Israel-related questions, his interpretation does seem appropriate for the majority.

6. See, e.g., Daniel J. Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry* (Philadelphia: 1976), 288; Jonathan S. Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington: 1986), 76–80.

7. Alvin I. Schiff, "Israel in American Jewish Schools: A Study of Curriculum Realities," *Jewish Education* 38, no. 4 (Oct. 1968), 6–24.

8. Barry Chazan, "Israel in American Jewish Schools Revisited," *Jewish Education* 47, no. 2 (Summer 1979), 10.

9. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 16 (Jerusalem: 1971), 1147.
10. Steven M. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions: The 1986 Survey of American Jewish Attitudes Toward Israel and Israelis* (New York: 1987), 36–39.
11. Eytan Gilboa, "Israel in the Mind of American Jews: Public Opinion Trends and Analysis," *Research Report*, no. 4 (London: 1986), 17.
12. *Ibid.*, 18.
13. S. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions*, 6–8.
14. *Ibid.*, 8–10. For a review of the evidence and a discussion of its implications, see Chaim I. Waxman, "Is the Cup Half-Full or Half-Empty: Perspectives on the Future of the American Jewish Community," in *American Pluralism and the Jewish Community*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (New Brunswick, N.J.: 1990), 71–85. One aspect of the overall debate about intermarriage is the strength of the ties to Israel of converts and those in mixed marriages. With respect to converts, the available empirical evidence is conflicting. In his 1978 study of Reform converts, Steven Huberman found that 52 percent of those aged twenty to twenty-nine and 32 percent of those aged forty and older disagreed with the statement "It is my duty to support the State of Israel" and do not feel any strong association with the country. They feel no more strongly about Israel than they do for any other humanitarian cause, because their identification as Jews is religious, not ethnic (Steven Huberman, *New Jews: The Dynamics of Religious Conversion* [Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1978], 141–144).
- However, a more recent study of 407 converts by Brenda Foster and Joseph Tabachnick found strong support for Israel among them. They found that 71 percent feel that support for Israel is important; 70 percent include visiting Israel as important, and two-thirds plan to visit Israel at least once (F. Brenda Foster and Joseph Tabachnick, *Your People Shall Be My People: A Study of Converts to Reform and Conservative Judaism* [Hoboken: 1991]). The study was based on a sample of those who had participated in an introductory course on Judaism offered by the Chicago Association of Reform Rabbis and the Chicago Region of the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative) between 1973 and 1987. Not surprisingly, less than half (43 percent) deemed aliyah for others as important, and only 29 percent deemed it important for themselves.
- Such conflicting evidence might be resolved by further research. In the meantime, the major problem with regard to the whole issue of the relationship between intermarriage and ties to Israel is that currently there are virtually no data about the attachments to Israel among those in *mixed* marriages, which today constitute the vast majority of Jewish intermarriages.
15. S. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions*, 17.
16. *Ibid.*, 19–21.
17. Steven M. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions: An Update—The 1989 Survey of American Jewish Attitudes Toward Israel and Israelis* (New York: 1989), 5–10.
18. *Ibid.*, 11–14.
19. Robert Scheer, "Serious Splits: Jews in U.S. Committed to Equality," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 April 1988.
20. Robert Scheer, "The Times Poll: U.S. Jews for Peace Talks on Mideast," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 April 1988.
21. Gerald B. Bubis and Steven M. Cohen, "What Are the Professional Leaders of American Jewry Thinking About Israel?" *Jerusalem Newsletter* 107 (15 March 1989), 4. The sample of "Jews in general" is from Cohen's *Ties and Tensions: An Update*.
22. Mark L. Winer, Sanford Seltzer and Steven J. Schwager, *Leaders of Reform Judaism: A Study of Jewish Identity, Religious Practices and Beliefs, and Marriage Patterns* (New York: 1987), 63–64.
23. Menahem Kaufman, *Lo-ziyonim beamerika bema'avak 'al hamedinah, 1939–1948* (Jerusalem: 1984), 7. For a historical overview, albeit somewhat romanticized, of the Mizrahi in the United States, see Aaron Halevi Pachenik, "Ha'ziyonut hadatit be'azot haberit," in *Sefer ha'ziyonut hadatit*, ed. Yitzchak Raphael and S. Z. Shragai (Jerusalem: 1977), vol. 2, 226–241.
24. Jenna Weissman Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews: The Orthodox Community in the Interwar Years* (Bloomington: 1990), 17.

25. *Hapardes* 23, no. 7 (April 1949), 12–15. See also p. 10, which contains a report of the New York visit of Rabbi Yoseph Kahanman, “one of the great heads of yeshivahs, of Ponivezh, and now of the state of Israel.” The last phrase in Hebrew is “*medinat yisrael*,” not “*eretz yisrael*.”

26. Somewhat surprisingly, there is still no thorough study of the American Orthodox, especially since the Second World War.

27. William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva* (New York: 1983). This is the “world” known as the *haredi*, “black-hat,” “right-wing” or “ultra-Orthodox” community. Helmreich includes Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in his analysis. However, RIETS is clearly peripheral to the world of the yeshivah and not considered as part of it by the overwhelming majority of that world. As he suggests, it “is viewed by many in the other major yeshivas as not being part of the community because it not only permits secular education but maintains a college on its campus that is a required part of study for all undergraduates” (36). Although Helmreich makes no mention of it, there is every reason to suggest that the religious Zionism espoused in RIETS only confirms its “deviant” status. On the growing influence of the *haredi* perspective within Orthodoxy, see Menachem Friedman, “Life Tradition and Book Tradition in the Development of Ultra-orthodox Judaism,” in *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Albany, N.Y.: 1987), 235–255; Chaim I. Waxman, “Toward a Sociology of *Psak*,” *Tradition* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1991) 12–25.

28. It is perhaps even more revealing that ArtScroll Publishers blatantly omitted a phrase implying religious Zionist sentiments from its translation of Rabbi S. Y. Zevin’s *Hamo’adim behalakhah*. See Reuven P. Bulka, “Israel and the State of the Religious Mind,” *Morasha: A Journal of Religious Zionism* 2, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 1986), 30–34. For another critique of the ArtScroll phenomenon, see B. Barry Levy, “Judge Not a Book by Its Cover,” *Tradition* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1981), 89–95, and the response by Emanuel Feldman, *Tradition* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 192. For a more extensive version of Levy’s critique, see his article, “Our Torah, Your Torah and Their Torah: An Evaluation of the ArtScroll Phenomenon,” in *Truth and Compassion: Essays on Judaism and Religion in Memory of Rabbi Dr. Solomon Frank*, ed. Howard Joseph, Jack N. Lightstone and Michael D. Oppenheim (Waterloo, Ont.: 1983), 137–189.

29. Cf. Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: 1983), 123–166.

30. Such an approach is somewhat similar to the religious Zionism espoused by Rabbi Jacob Reines, rather than that of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. See Michael Zvi Nehorai, “Harav Reines veharav Kook—shetei gishot leziyonut,” in *Yovel orot: haguto shel harav Avraham Yizhak Hacohen Kook*, ed. Binyamin Ish Shalom and Shalom Rosenberg (Jerusalem: 1985), 209–218.

31. For evidence that there is a correlation between religiosity and national Jewish identity and identification, see Simon N. Herman, *Israelis and Jews: The Continuity of an Identity* (New York: 1970); John E. Hofman, “Hazehut hayehudit shel no’ar yehudi beyisrael,” *Megamot* 17, no. 1 (Jan. 1970), 5–14; Rina Shapira and Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *Mi atah hastudent hayisraeli* (Tel-Aviv: 1973); a series of surveys conducted in Israel in 1974 by Shlomit Levy and Louis E. Guttman and published in Jerusalem during that year in four parts by the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research (Part IV, *Values and Attitudes of Israeli High School Youth*, contains an English summary); Eva Etzioni-Halevy and Rina Shapira, “Jewish Identification of Israeli Students: What Lies Ahead,” *Jewish Social Studies* 37, nos. 3–4, (July–Oct. 1975), 251–266; Simon N. Herman, *Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: 1989); Eva Etzioni-Halevy and Rina Shapira, *Political Culture in Israel: Cleavage and Integration Among Israeli Jews* (New York: 1977), 157–178.

32. See Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*, aug. ed. (New York: 1972). For a Conservative ideological perspective, see Mordecai Waxman (ed.), *Tradition and Change: The Development of Conservative Judaism* (New York: 1958).

33. Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism* (Philadelphia: 1963), 268.

34. Naomi W. Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* (Hoboken: 1975), 10.
35. *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: 1988), 38–40.
36. Waxman, *American Aliya*, 65–76.
37. *Emet Ve-Emunah*, 38.
38. See S. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions*, 18–21, in which he notes a growing percentage of low levels of attachment to Israel on the part of Conservative Jews.
39. A good analysis can be found in Howard R. Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, Calif.: 1981).
40. Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* (New York: 1967), 214–249.
41. W. Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources to 1948* (New York: 1965), 153.
42. *Ibid.*, 154.
43. *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook 77* (New York: 1967), 109.
44. Leonard J. Fein et al., *Reform Is a Verb: Notes on Reform and Reforming Jews* (New York: 1972), 65–73.
45. Gerald L. Showstack, *Suburban Communities: The Jewishness of American Reform Jews* (Atlanta: 1988), 89–92.
46. Bubis and Cohen, “Professional Leaders of American Jewry,” 6, Table 3.
47. S. Cohen, *Israel-Diaspora Relations*, 37, 48–59; *idem*, *Ties and Tensions: An Update*, 19–32, 47–52.
48. S. Cohen, *Israel-Diaspora Relations*, 67–70.
49. See, e.g., Chaim I. Waxman, *America’s Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: 1983), 98–103, 107–112, 147–151.
50. Many of the changes are analyzed in *ibid.*, 204–234.
51. Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew* (Philadelphia: 1973), 88–108.
52. See Melvin I. Urofsky, *We Are One!: American Jewry and Israel* (Garden City, N.Y.: 1978), 392. Steven Cohen found that 60 percent of his sample of American Jews agreed with the statement “I see the Jewish people as an extension of my family,” and only 23 percent disagreed (*Ties and Tensions*, 15). Interestingly, Mina Zemach’s findings were very similar when she presented an almost identical statement to her sample of Israeli Jews in her *Through Israeli Eyes: Attitudes Toward Judaism, American Jewry, Zionism and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: 1987), 13–14.
53. Chaim I. Waxman, “Religion and State in Israel: The Perspective of American Jewry,” in *State and Diaspora: The State of Israel and Jewish Diaspora—Ideological and Political Perspectives*, ed. Eliezer Don-Yehiya (Ramat-Gan: 1991), 97–107.
54. Liebman, *Ambivalent American Jew*, 105.
55. Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: 1977).
56. In fact, it was suggested, the very existence of the Law of Return supports this notion of Israel as the home of the extended family. See Waxman, “Religion and State in Israel.”
57. The responses were given by a number of participants in a series of lectures in the “University Day” program sponsored by the Westchester Women’s Campaign for UJA-Federation, 18 January 1989. Obviously, no claim is being made herein about the statistical representativity of the expressions.
58. Liebman, *Ambivalent American Jew*, 106.
59. It with within a similar context that, at the outbreak of the Six-Day War, Arthur Goldberg, then U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, rejected the accusations made by the Syrian ambassador that American Jews were guilty of dual loyalty because of their support for Israel. Goldberg responded that in the United States attachment to one’s “ancestral home” is not taken as “a sign of double loyalty or lack of attachment to our American institution.” He then made reference to President John F. Kennedy’s visit to his ancestral home and the degree to which that trip was applauded. Thus, according to Goldberg, Jewish

support for Israel is part of a comparable attachment to the ancestral home (USUN-81, 6 June 1967, 8, emphasis added). See also Waxman, *American Aliya*.

60. Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York: 1985).

61. The phrase is borrowed from the study by Marshall Sklare, Joseph Greenblum and Benjamin B. Ringer, *Not Quite at Home: How an American Jewish Community Lives with Itself and Its Neighbors* (New York: 1969).

62. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*, 151–158. See also Silberman, *A Certain People*.

63. Richard L. Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff, *Jews in the Protestant Establishment* (New York: 1982). Also see Samuel Z. Klausner, *Succeeding in Corporate America: The Experience of Jewish M.B.A.'s* (New York: 1988).

64. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions: An Update*, 41–43. See also Gary A. Tobin with Sharon L. Sessler, *Jewish Perceptions of Anti-Semitism* (New York: 1988).

65. For a discussion of another kind of goal displacement in a somewhat different context, see Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, enlarged ed. (New York: 1968), 353–354. On the connection between ethnic politics, antisemitism and the American Jewish attachment to Israel, see Peter Y. Medding, “Segmented Ethnicity and the New Jewish Politics,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 3, *Jews and Other Ethnic Groups in a Multi-Ethnic World*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (New York: 1987), 26–48.

66. Robert Silverberg, *If I Forget Thee O Jerusalem: American Jews and the State of Israel* (New York: 1970), 18.

67. *Ibid.*, 19.

68. Chaim I. Waxman, “An American Tragedy—Meir Kahane and Kahanism: A Review Essay,” *American Jewish History* 78, no. 3 (March 1989), 429–435.

69. For an analysis of the role of status inconsistency in the development of the American Jewish communal structure, see Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*, 76–79.

70. Ironically, many American *olim* find that with their aliyah there is a heightening of their identities as Americans; that is, they feel more American in Israel than they did prior to their aliyah. See Waxman, *American Aliya*. Also see Kevin Avruch: *American Immigrants in Israel: Social Identities and Change* (Chicago: 1981).