



THE
A. B. Yehoshua Controversy
AN ISRAEL-DIASPORA DIALOGUE ON JEWISHNESS,
ISRAELINESS, AND IDENTITY

DOROTHY AND JULIUS KOPPELMAN INSTITUTE ON AMERICAN JEWISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

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The articles included in this publication represent a small portion of the totality of responses in print, on blogs, and in public discourse to the discussion that was launched on the first evening of the American Jewish Committee's Centennial Symposium, May 1-2, 2006.

The selection of articles, editing, and some translating from the Hebrew were the work of Rabbi Noam Marans, associate director of the Contemporary Jewish Life Department, and Roselyn Bell, director of publications, at AJC.

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Foreword

AJC's Centennial Annual Meeting in Washington opened with a four-part symposium in which prominent Jewish intellectuals addressed the challenges of the Jewish future as well as the meaning of Jewish spirituality, community, and continuity.

The first panel was held at the Library of Congress on the evening of May 1, 2006, moderated by Ted Koppel, with discussants Cynthia Ozick, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Leon Wieseltier, and A.B. Yehoshua addressing the question, "What Will Become of the Jewish People?" The lion's share of the publicity centered on Yehoshua's highly emotional negation of the importance of the Diaspora and his prediction of its eventual disappearance.

If ... in 100 years Israel will exist and ... I will come to the Diaspora [and] there will not be [any] Jews ... I will not cry ... I don't say I want it.... But if ... Israel will disintegrate ... for me personally ... there is no alternative to be a post-Zionist Jew.... [Being] Israeli is my skin; it's not my jacket.

He went further, accusing Diaspora Jews of "playing with Jewishness" because their decisions as Jews were made in American terms. He characterized this phenomenon as "plug and play" Judaism.

Yehoshua's remarks were met with an immediate outcry in Israeli newspapers and on the airwaves. Political leaders, journalists, academics, commentators, and others all took issue with Yehoshua. This discussion continues largely unabated. The intensity and depth of feeling in Israel is captured in this publication.

Yehoshua's statements drew an equally negative reaction in Washington. In ignoring the remarkable efforts of the American Jewish community to strengthen Jewish education and its connectedness to Israel, as well as the essential role of American Jews in reinforcing the America-Israel relationship, he failed to recognize that American Jewry is serious about its Jewish future and that the security and well-being of Israel depend on the vitality of American Jews.

Yehoshua's statements were not unexpected. He had said the same thing before. They reflect classic Zionism. In 1950 David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, in his exchange with AJC's president, Jacob Blaustein, declared that the "ingathering of exiles" pertained only to countries in which Jews were oppressed, not to Jews free to practice their religion and live openly as Jews in democratic nations. In a sense, then, Yehoshua was harking back to an earlier Zionist era and an ethos that was rejected in Israel virtually from its founding.

In fairness to Yehoshua, his Zion-centered views are very much a part of Jewish liturgy, not that this was foremost in his mind. After every meal at which bread is eaten, observant Jews say, "May the All Merciful break the yoke from off our neck and lead us upright to our land." And the Amida, the foundation of the Jewish prayer service, includes among its

benedictions the plea to the Almighty “to gather us from the four corners of the earth.”

In response to the firestorm that his remarks produced, Yehoshua called Alfred Moses, AJC’s Centennial Celebration Chair, in Israel to apologize for the tone of his remarks. He had not intended to be vituperative, he said. He went further, explaining that the distinction he sought to make between Jews living in Israel and their fellow Jews in America was that actions by the Israeli government on such issues as the Disengagement, the treatment of Palestinians, and the location of Israel’s security fence become Jewish values, whereas the ways in which American Jews influence American policy on such issues as the Vietnam War, immigration, and even the war in Iraq become American, not Jewish, values.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Yehoshua, we are grateful to him for challenging us to think more deeply about what it means to be living as a Jew in Israel and how this differs from the Jewish experience in America. In pondering this issue, we are ever mindful of the challenge for Jews in America to preserve Jewish content in our lives, to make the relevant absolute and the absolute relevant.

The essays that follow reveal the depth and intensity of what it is that binds and separates the two largest Jewish communities in the world, a topic that until now has not been seriously and widely considered in Israel.

Leon Wieseltier
Literary Editor
The New Republic

Ambassador Alfred H. Moses
Chair, Centennial Committee
American Jewish Committee

Dr. Steven Bayme
National Director
Contemporary Jewish Life
American Jewish Committee

The meaning of homeland

A.B. Yehoshua

Just before I entered the hall for the symposium in Washington that inaugurated two days of discussions on the future of the Jewish people in light of the century that has passed since the founding of the host organization (American Jewish Committee), my youngest son phoned from Israel and told me about how moved he was by the memorial ceremony, in which he and his wife and toddler daughter had just taken part, for the fallen of Israel's wars. I made a brief comment to the panel's moderator about the fact that the symposium was taking place on the eve of Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day, and I hoped that, amid the many congratulatory speeches at the start of the evening, this would be noted and that we might also all be asked to honor the Israeli Memorial Day, as customary, with a minute of silence. But this didn't happen. And Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, due to be marked the following day, received only faint and brief mention from the speakers.

I do not cite this as a grievance, but rather as a symptomatic example that may also explain my gloomy state of mind at that symposium, given that the deep and natural identification that a large portion of American Jewry once felt with Israeli life has been steadily and seriously weakening in recent years. All of the participants in the subsequent discussions agreed that, for some years now, a slow process of disengagement of American Jewry from Israel has been intensifying. The reasons are numerous and complex, and related both to the fact that the "Israeli drama" has lost many of its attractive features for American Jews, and to the accelerated processes of assimilation occurring to varying degrees within America itself.

Missed opportunity

Even though the title of the symposium was "The Future of the Past: What Will Become of the Jewish People?" I may have been the only one to begin by talking about the failure of most of the Jewish people to foresee in the twentieth century the depth and vehemence of the hostility toward it, which eventually led to an annihilation unprecedented in human history. "The Jewish texts," which many Jews today consider to be the core of their identity, did not help us to understand better the processes of the reality around us. The Jews were too busy with mythology and theology instead of history, and therefore the straightforward warnings voiced by [Ze'ev] Jabotinsky and his colleagues in the early twentieth century—"Eliminate the Diaspora, or the Diaspora will surely eliminate you"—fell on deaf ears.

After Palestine was taken over by the British, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 promised a national home for the Jews, and if during the 1920s, when the country's gates were open wide, just a half million Jews had come (less than 5 percent of the Jewish people at that time) instead of the tiny number that actually did come, it certainly would have been possible to

A.B. Yehoshua is a prize-winning author of novels, short stories, plays, and essays, and a professor of literature at Haifa University.

establish a Jewish state before the Holocaust on part of the Land of Israel. This state not only would have ended the Israeli-Arab conflict at an earlier stage and with less bloodshed—it also could have provided refuge in the 1930s to hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews who sensed the gathering storm, and thus would have significantly reduced the number of victims in the Holocaust.

The Zionist solution, which was proven as the best solution to the Jewish problem before the Holocaust—when the Communist revolution cut off Soviet Jewry, the gates of America were closed because of the Depression, and European democracies were destroyed by fascism and Nazism—was tragically missed by the Jewish people. And if it weren't for those few (less than half of 1 percent of world Jewry) people who, a hundred years ago, believed and actually sought the fulfillment of the need for the sovereign normalization of the Jewish people in its ancient homeland, the Jewish people could have found itself after the horrors of World War II just wandering among Holocaust museums, without even that piece of sovereign homeland that still offers some solace for the disaster that occurred.

But such a tough and piercing reckoning, coming from such an old-fashioned Zionist premise about our painful and tragic missed opportunity in the past century, is not welcome at the festive opening of a convention of a Jewish organization that, like many other Jewish organizations at the start of the twentieth century, shunned, if not actively opposed, the Zionist solution. Better to talk about all the Nobel Prizes and prestige garnered by Jews in the past century, about the intellectual achievements of Freud and Einstein, and about the tremendous contribution that Jews have made to Western culture. Therefore, right from the start, I felt like I was spoiling the nice, pleasant atmosphere with my anger. And instead of joining in the celebration of the wonderful spirituality of the Jewish identity, and of the cultural renaissance in America, and instead of extolling the texts that we must learn and the Jewish values that we must inculcate, I tried nevertheless to outline at least a fundamental boundary between Jewish identity in Israel and Jewish identity in the Diaspora.

This is no easy task nowadays. Many Israelis would disagree with me as well. The basic concepts of Zionism have either been pulverized beyond recognition within the normality of sovereign life, or usurped in a distorted and grotesque way by fascist rightist ideologies or radical post-modernism.

And this is where the conflict between myself and my listeners arose. (Not with all of my listeners, actually. Some, mainly Jews who had some Israeli experience, came up to me after the discussion was over to express deep solidarity with what I'd said.)

I did not talk about “the negation of the Diaspora.” The Jewish Diaspora has existed ever since the Babylonian exile, about 2,500 years ago, and it will continue to exist for thousands more years. I have no

doubt that in the future when outposts will be established in outer space, there will be Jews among them who will pray “Next year in Jerusalem” while electronically orienting their space synagogue toward Jerusalem on the globe of the earth. The Jew has a wonderful virtual ability to express his identity with consciousness alone. The lone Iraqi Jew in Baghdad after the American conquest or the two Jews sitting in Afghanistan are no more or less Jewish in their foundational identity than the chief rabbi of Israel or the president of the Jewish community in America. The Diaspora is the most solid fact in Jewish history; we know its cost, and we are aware of its accomplishments and failures in terms of Jewish continuity. In fact, the most harshly worded statements concerning its theological negation are to be found scattered in the “core” religious texts; there is no need for an Israeli writer to come to Washington to talk about the negation of the Diaspora.

All of the reports suggesting that I said that there can be no Jewishness except in Israel are utterly preposterous. No one would ever think of saying such an absurd thing. It is Israel and not the Diaspora that could be a passing episode in Jewish history, and this is the source of my compulsion to reiterate the old and plain truths that apparently need to be repeated again and again. Not just to Diaspora Jews, but to Israelis, too.

Jewish identity in Israel, which we call Israeli identity (as distinct from Israeli citizenship, which is shared by Arab citizens who also live in the shared homeland, though their national identity is Palestinian)—this Jewish-Israeli identity has to contend with all the elements of life via the binding and sovereign framework of a territorially defined state. And therefore the extent of its reach into life is immeasurably fuller and broader and more meaningful than the Jewishness of an American Jew, whose important and meaningful life decisions are made within the framework of his American nationality or citizenship. His Jewishness is voluntary and deliberate, and he may calibrate its pitch in accordance with his needs.

We in Israel live in a binding and inescapable relationship with one another, just as all members of a sovereign nation live together, for better or worse, in a binding relationship. We are governed by Jews. We pay taxes to Jews, are judged in Jewish courts, are called up to serve in the Jewish army, and compelled by Jews to defend settlements we didn’t want or, alternatively, are forcibly expelled from settlements by Jews. Our economy is determined by Jews. Our social conditions are determined by Jews. And all the political, economic, cultural, and social decisions craft and shape our identity, which, although it contains some primary elements, is always in a dynamic process of changes and corrections. While this entails pain and frustration, there is also the pleasure of the freedom of being in your own home.

Homeland and national language and a binding framework are fundamental components of any person’s national identity. Thus, I cannot point to a single Israeli who is assimilated, just as there is no Frenchman

in France who is an assimilated Frenchman—even if he has never heard of Molière and has never been to the Louvre, and prefers soccer matches and horse races. I am sure, for example, that some of the British pilots who risked their lives in defense of London during World War II knew the names of the Manchester United players better than Shakespeare's plays, and yet no one would dare call them assimilated Britons.

Identity as a garment

What I sought to explain to my American hosts, in overly blunt and harsh language perhaps, is that, for me, Jewish values are not located in a fancy spice box that is only opened to release its pleasing fragrance on Shabbat and holidays, but in the daily reality of dozens of problems through which Jewish values are shaped and defined, for better or worse. A religious Israeli Jew also deals with a depth and breadth of life issues that is incomparably larger and more substantial than those with which his religious counterpart in New York or Antwerp must contend.

Am I denouncing their incomplete identity? I am neither denouncing nor praising. It's just a fact that requires no legitimating from me, just as my identity requires no legitimating from them. But since we see ourselves as belonging to one people, and since the two identities are interconnected, and flow into one another, the relation between them must be well clarified.

As long as it is clear to all of us that Israeli Jewish identity deals, for better or worse, with the full spectrum of the reality and that Diaspora Jewry deals only with parts of it, then at least the difference between whole and part is acknowledged. But the moment that Jews insist that involvement in the study and interpretation of texts, or in the organized activity of Jewish institutions, are equal to the totality of the social and political and economic reality that we in Israel are contending with—not only does the moral significance of the historic Jewish grappling with a total reality lose its validity, there is also the easy and convenient option of a constant flow from the whole to the partial.

Not by chance do more than half a million Israelis now live outside of Israel. If Jewish identity can feed itself on the study of texts and the mining of memories, and some occasional communal involvement—and as long as all those capable Chabad emissaries are supplying instant Jewish and religious services everywhere on the planet—what's the problem, in the global age, with taking the Israeli kids and exiling the whole family to some foreign high-tech mecca? After all, the core of the identity is eternal and accessible anywhere.

This is how Israeliness in the homeland will also become a garment that is removed and replaced with another garment in times of trouble, just as Romanian-ness and Polishness were replaced by Englishness and American-ness, and Tunisian-ness and Moroccan-ness were replaced by Frenchness and Canadian-ness. And in the future, in another century or two, when China is the leading superpower, why shouldn't some Jews

exchange their American-ness or Canadian-ness for Chinese-ness or Singaporean-ness? Just think about it: Who would have believed in the sixteenth century that within 200 or 300 years, the Jews would be concentrated in an unknown land called America?

The Jews have proven their ability to live anywhere for thousands of years without losing their identity. And as long as the *goyim* don't cause too many problems, Jewish perseverance will not falter. If Israeliness is just a garment, and not a daily test of moral responsibility, for better or worse, of Jewish values, then it's no wonder that poverty is spreading, that the social gaps are widening, and that cruelty toward an occupied people is perpetrated easily and without pangs of conscience. Since it will always be possible to escape from the reality to the old texts, and to interpret them in such a way that will imbue us with greatness, hope, and consolation.

The national minority among us of the Palestinian Israelis, who share Israeli citizenship with us, could also make a contribution to this identity, just as American Jews contribute to the general American identity, and the Basques to the Spanish identity and the Romanian minority in Hungary to the Hungarian identity, and the Corsicans to the French, and so on. The more Israeli we are, the better the partnership we have with them. The more we concentrate solely on Jewish spirituality and texts, believing this to be of chief importance, the more the alienation between us grows.

The simple truth

I keep bringing up the matter of texts, because in liberal Jewish circles this has recently become the most important anchor of identity, as evidenced by the return of manifestly secular people to the synagogue—not in order to find God, but to clutch onto identity. The struggle for Soviet Jewry is over; the Security Council will deal with Iran; there is nothing left but to return to the familiar and the known. As someone who has spent his whole life dealing with texts—writing, reading, and analyzing—I am incensed by the increasingly dangerous and irresponsible disconnection between the glorification of the texts and the mundane matters of daily life. Instead, I propose that we continue to nurture the concrete and living value of “the homeland,” rather than the dull and worn-out value of Jewish spirituality.

In all the Bible, the word *moledet* (homeland) is mentioned just twenty-two times, and many of these times in reference to other nations. The first sentence spoken to the first Jew is, “Go for yourself from your land, from your *moledet*, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.” And throughout their long history, the Jews obeyed the first part of this imperative with great devotion, moving from one *moledet* to another with surprising ease. And the terrible end to these wanderings needs no further mention.

If we don't want this kind of Jewish mindset (with the help of our Palestinian rivals for the homeland) to pull the rug out from under our feet, we ought to reiterate the basic, old concepts to Israelis just as much as to American Jews who, though they were offended by me, treated me with exemplary courtesy, perhaps because deep down, they felt that I was speaking the simple truth.

May 13, 2006

Ha'aretz Magazine

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An apology to those who attended the symposium

Reverberations from the first evening of the conference have made me realize to my distress that a not insignificant portion of the audience was offended by the tone of my remarks, as well as by part of their content. I wish, therefore, to express to them my deepest apologies. Everything I said about the partial nature of Jewish life in the Diaspora as opposed to the all-inclusive nature of Jewish life in Israel has been said by me over the course of many years in the past, both in print and in addressing numerous Diaspora Jews. Never before did this lead to such an angry reaction as it did this time. Presumably, there was something in my tone and imprecise formulation that insulted part of the audience. I say "part," because there were also those who came up afterward to thank me—which does not, of course, compensate for the feelings of the others.

The debate between us is a basic one that goes to the root of things. But we are one people, and I have never ceased to stress this cardinal principle. Nor was there anything in what I said at the conference that called it into question. I am appending an article [*see above*] that I have written for the weekly magazine of the Hebrew newspaper *Ha'aretz*, in which I deal with my opinions on the matter in greater detail. And once again, permit me to apologize to anyone whose feelings I have hurt.

A.B. Yehoshua

May 2006

A brief epilogue

The storm that arose in the wake of my comments—scores of articles that were published, for and against, in the Diaspora and in Israel—testifies truthfully that my words roused (albeit without particular intention) a raw and dormant nerve. Everyone—those who objected and those who agreed with my comments—repeatedly asserted that: a) What I expressed was not new. I have repeated and publicized these views for many years in many places and have expressed them scores of times to the Jews of the Diaspora and Israel. (As Alfred Moses, the past president of the American Jewish Committee and Centennial chair, said, "I heard

A.B. Yehoshua say the same things thirty years ago, and so I invited him ... because I wanted a debate.”) b) There was complete agreement among supporters and detractors of my views that it was very good that the debate on this age-old subject was rekindled.

Why the debate reignited with such force now calls out for a sociological and an ideological study both of the changes that have occurred in the concept of national identity in the world and how the importance and meaning of Zionism have lessened among the Jewish people. And here I wish to make one observation:

Two events of world importance took place during the twentieth century, only three years apart: A) the Holocaust, an event that has no parallel in human history, and B) the return of the Jewish people to its homeland after 2,000 years, also an unparalleled event in human history. In my estimation, the Jewish people have not yet fully digested the deep meaning of the failure of the Diaspora outlook as it was experienced during the Holocaust. And the Jewish people, including many Israelis, have not grasped the qualitative change that has occurred in Jewish identity with the return to complete sovereignty. Since the Diaspora mode of Jewish identity existed for more than 2,000 years, the qualitative change that has occurred within this identity with the establishment of the State of Israel has not yet been fully internalized.

Nevertheless, the fact that during the last seventy years the Jewish community in Israel has been transformed from less than 2.5 percent of world Jewry to almost 50 percent of that whole proves that, despite all, the trend from partial Jewishness to complete Jewishness is natural and true.

A.B. Yehoshua
August 2006

An Israeli without hyphens

Shulamit Aloni

In the debate surrounding A.B. Yehoshua's speech to the delegates at the American Jewish Committee convention, I would like to clarify a number of facts before taking a stance.

1. There is no more exile; there is a Diaspora. Every Jew can leave his country if he so chooses, can immigrate somewhere else, and can certainly come to Israel under the Law of Return and become an Israeli citizen. Equally, he has the right to remain where he is, with his citizenship and his community.

2. As long as he lives in the United States or in any other sovereign country, and is a citizen of that country, his obligations as a citizen are to his country, its laws, and the community in which he lives, just as the obligations of every Israeli citizen are to the state, its laws, and all that this implies.

3. Our connection to global Jewry, and its connection to us, is a historical and sentimental connection, an ethnic connection, and a religious connection, with all the contexts of the land of Zion and Jerusalem.

We are "one people" in the sense of "folk" or "peoplehood," but not in the sense of "nation," which has to do with citizenship and sovereignty. Thus, for example, American citizens of Irish origin are connected to the Catholic religion and the Irish people, just like American Jews have connections with Israel and the Jewish people with respect to ethnicity and culture.

4. The Jews elsewhere in the world live in Jewish communities and preserve Jewish traditions not because of any law or coercion (like here, for example) but out of an awareness of belonging, that is to say, by choice.

5. The Jews of the United States were full partners in the struggle to bring Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry to Israel, and in funding the absorption of the big immigration waves. This came out of full solidarity with the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

6. However, there is a big difference between them and us. We are living a sovereign life as Jews not through voluntary organizations but rather as full citizens: the Hebrew language, the culture here, the knowledge of the Bible in its original language, and the celebration of the Jewish holidays as holidays of citizens in their own country and in the proper season. When we pray for rain, this is a prayer of need; we have no huge rivers and no Niagara Falls. There, they pray for rain for reasons of tradition and religion and perhaps, since the establishment of the state, for us.

As a conscious atheist, I would not willingly take upon myself rabbinic rule over my life as a citizen, and certainly not as a woman. However, I am glad that the rhythm of my life is determined by the Sabbath and Jewish holidays—determined by the country's laws, historical and cultural meaning, and solidarity with generations past and with all Jews, and not by religious coercion.

Shulamit Aloni is a former member of Knesset from the Meretz Party, Israeli cabinet minister, and Israel Prize recipient.

7. The sovereignty of the people and its connection to its past, its land and its culture are of supreme importance. Here, there is no duality of identity like that among Jews abroad. I am an Israeli without hyphens. Israel is the father of the nation. In all the prayers throughout the generations and in their season, the plea is for the return of Israel to its land. Here the Arab is in the minority and he is an Arab-Israeli, which is to say he lives in a duality like Jews abroad. He deserves rights just like those of any Jewish citizen of the United States, and should be given the same rights as any Israeli Jew.

8. The Declaration of Independence opens with the direct connection between the Jewish people and its country, where its “spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped.” The formative declaration of the state also declares that it “will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel.”

With respect to observing “Jewish values”—such as human dignity and freedom; no discrimination on the basis of religion, race or sex; mutual aid and assistance for the subjects of discrimination; and making peace—it is very doubtful that we are more “Jewish” than the Jews of other countries. There they have proven themselves more than we have. Here there is scorn and ridicule for the “other,” including the immigrant whose mother is not Jewish. Here rights are not applied equally, and there are many racist elements, both in practice and in law.

Here we say that the Druze, who serve in the Israel Defense Forces in the most difficult of roles, are our “blood brothers,” but we have not invested in them one-tenth of what has been invested in Jewish settlers in the territories who break the law and hate the “other.”

The destruction, the killing, the robbery, and the humiliation we impose on the Palestinian population as a collective are contrary to international covenants and the “Jewish values” of which we boast. Of what is happening among us now, the Prophet Isaiah said then: “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!” (Isaiah 5:8). They block wells, chop down trees, destroy greenhouses, and turn every village and town into a detention camp. In light of all this, we have no right to boast of our Judaism as superior to the Judaism in other countries.

To sum up, everyone has the right to determine what kind of Jew he wants to be: religious, secular, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, enlightened and humanist, or arrogant hater of the gentiles and the “others.” Whether or not he belongs to a congregation or the Zionist movement, he knows that he is Jewish, he follows what is happening in Israel and to Jews in other places, and as long as he attends A.B. Yehoshua’s lectures, it means that he has not assimilated and does not want to disengage. That Jew, there, is different from Yehoshua and from me because he is a sovereign citizen of the United States and we are sovereign citizens of Israel.

The Jews in other countries do not need to feel guilty for being there, and we must not consider ourselves superior to them, just as Israel

must not be the Vatican of the Jewish people. We the Israelis must build a more moral society here in accordance with the values of which we boast unjustly. It is worth investing the effort, the anger and the love in building our society and our country, in which Jews are sovereign, in an enlightened, democratic, and moral Jewish spirit.

May 16, 2006

Ha'aretz

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Snubbed by Zion

Benjamin Balint

A new breed of unilateralism is emerging in Israel these days. It isn't the type responsible for Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip last summer. It isn't political at all. It's religious.

Israel's Chief Rabbinate recently canceled a long-standing arrangement whereby it automatically recognized conversions to Judaism authorized by Orthodox rabbis in the U.S. The decision, endorsed by Israeli Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, means that those who were converted by Orthodox rabbis in the Diaspora may have to convert again upon arriving in Israel and that Diaspora rabbis will have to submit to a tribunal of Israeli rabbis before their future conversions can be recognized here.

The move was a startling one, even shocking, asserting the supremacy of certain Israeli Jews by, in effect, demeaning the legitimacy of their American coreligionists. And it was done without consulting the American rabbinate, catching American Orthodox rabbis completely off-guard. The move rests on a dual assumption: There should be a worldwide uniform standard for conversions, and the official Israeli rabbinate should be the body to determine it.

Understandably, American Orthodox rabbis resent suddenly finding themselves in the same category as Reform and Conservative colleagues, whose converts have never been recognized by the Israeli rabbinate. Others feel that, by seeking to represent not just Israel but the Jewish people, the Israeli rabbinate is attempting to overturn a millennia-old de facto pluralism born of the Diaspora. Jewish peoplehood, they note, was never threatened by the fact that the Jews of Warsaw, for instance, adopted very different standards of Jewish law from the standards of the Jewish community in Baghdad.

The Israeli rabbinate, turning away from this model, cites Isaiah's prophecy as the justification: "For the Torah will go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." American rabbis now fear that their Israeli counterparts believe that the return to Zion entails a return to a monolithic Judaism. One American rabbi told the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* that the new edict gave the impression "that Rabbi Amar is trying to become a sort of Jewish pope."

Naturally, the new policy affects not just American rabbis but also the laypeople who have spent years preparing to become committed Jews. Rabbi Seth Farber heads an agency here called Itim that helps individuals navigate the often maddening Israeli rabbinic bureaucracy. He says that the decision has "sown panic among hundreds if not thousands of Orthodox converts overseas."

The Chief Rabbinate's move is best seen against the broader backdrop of the shifting relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. In recent years Israeli Jews have begun to answer what they perceive as the

Benjamin Balint is a Jerusalem-based writer and editor who has written on Jewish affairs for *Commentary*, the *Weekly Standard*, and the *Forward*.

paternalism of American Jews—whose financial and political support have greatly contributed to the country’s well-being—with a little paternalism of their own.

One reason for Israel’s new brashness is demographic. Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics announced last month that 5.64 million Jews live in Israel. For the first time since antiquity, there are more Jews in Israel than in any other country.

But another reason that Israelis increasingly think of themselves as the central agents of Jewish history has more to do with ideology. This notion was thrown into high relief by another recent case of Israeli conceit scandalizing American Jewish vanities. The very day that the population numbers were announced, the well-known secular Israeli novelist A.B. Yehoshua dismissed non-Israeli Jewish identity at a highly publicized panel in Washington. “Those who do not live in Israel and do not participate in the daily decisions that are made there and that are entirely Jewish,” he told the audience at a centenary celebration of the American Jewish Committee, “do not have a Jewish identity of any significance.... You are just playing at Jewishness.”

Although the notion that Jewish life in a Jewish state is fuller and more meaningful than Diaspora Jewishness is an old Zionist leitmotif, its resurfacing in this form infuriated American Jewish leaders. Many who attended the speech resented the spectacle of an Israeli author slighting one of the most fertile Diasporas in the history of Judaism and alienating Israel’s strongest friends.

In Mr. Yehoshua and the Israeli Chief Rabbinate—the secular left and the religious right—we have two fundamentalisms, both schooling American Jews in the most elemental questions of Jewish identity, and both looking to Israel as the last and best word on Jewishness itself.

Together, the episodes reveal an Israel-Diaspora relationship increasingly divided. Israelis are strikingly ignorant of American Jewish life: Students here do not learn about the Diaspora; or if they do, it is as history, not contemporary reality. American Jews, meanwhile, continue to think of a devotion to Israel as an important part of Jewish identity, but have been largely ignorant of Israeli disregard for them. They won’t remain in the dark much longer.

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Israel and the Diaspora: A post-Yehoshua response

Steven Bayme

Israeli novelist A.B. Yehoshua provoked controversy at the American Jewish Committee's Centennial Symposium in Washington, D.C., last month when he accused Diaspora Jews of "playing with their Jewishness" and lamented the great failure of American Jewry in not immigrating to Israel in droves. The resulting debate, covered at length in the Israeli media, has stimulated salutary discussion both of the reality of American Jewish life and how Israel and American Jewry need to relate to one another. AJC convened the symposium as part of a yearlong centennial program designed to foster precisely such a "battle of ideas" and hopefully identify fresh communal policy challenges and directions.

What about Yehoshua's actual arguments? First, they are hardly novel. Twenty years ago, Yehoshua described the Diaspora as the "neurosis" of the Jewish people. However, a decade ago he claimed to have modified his position, affirming the importance of Diaspora Jewry and urging a joint agenda on behalf of achieving literacy in the Hebrew language and advocacy of Jewish social values. Yet at the recent AJC meeting Yehoshua seemingly reverted to an outdated position that affirms Jewish identity exclusively in the Jewish state.

These arguments and even accusations are by no means entirely without merit. The birth of Israel in 1948 changed the meaning and map of Jewish peoplehood and identity in irrevocable and unqualifiedly positive ways. The return of the Jews to sovereignty and statehood constitutes the single greatest success narrative of modern Jewish history. To be a Jew in the twenty-first century necessitates a relationship with the Jewish state.

Yet, sadly, Yehoshua is correct in charging American Jews with failure. First, as AJC research on young American Jews recently demonstrated, in pronounced contrast to the narrative of the Holocaust, the narrative of Israel has not penetrated the consciousness of young Jews today. The very same young people for whom Holocaust memory is critical to their Jewish identity know astonishingly little of modern Israeli history and culture. Courses on the Holocaust have proliferated on American campuses while Israel studies have remained very much in incipient stages.

Secondly, we are witnessing a demographic ascendancy of Israel over the Diaspora. Within our lifetimes, for the first time since the destruction of the first Jewish commonwealth in 586 B.C. E., there will be more Jews living in the Jewish homeland than in the Diaspora. To some extent that demographic shift represents only the normalization that Yehoshua champions. However, it also confirms an age-old truism of Jewish history that Jewish immigration is driven primarily by economic conditions and opportunities. Affluent Jews, living in a relatively secure America, in turn make poor candidates for aliyah, save among those ideologically committed to it.

Steven Bayme serves as director of the Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations at the American Jewish Committee.

In addition, Yehoshua correctly perceives an increased detachment from Israel among American Jews. As assimilation proceeds unchecked, a growing distancing of Israel occurs as part of a general distancing from matters Jewish. The very strength of American Jewry, namely its success as Americans, thus belies its weakness as Jews, translated as decreased attachment to Israel. Perhaps the best evidence of the detachment lies in the fact that fewer than 40 percent of the most affluent Jewish community in history has ever set foot in the Jewish state over the first six decades of her existence.

Yet Yehoshua erred in trivializing American Judaism. The resurgence of Orthodoxy, contrary to so many predictions of its demise, constitutes a remarkable statement of the viability of Judaism in the Diaspora if Jews are indeed committed to its preservation. The presence of diverse and pluralist options in defining one's Judaism in America constitutes a statement of Jewish vitality and strength rather than strictly a tribute to American democracy and separation of religion from state. Full-time Jewish education in a broad network of Jewish day schools is now available to more American Jews than ever before. Jews who avail themselves of these opportunities receive a strong Jewish education precisely at a time when leading Israelis are concerned about the weakness of Jewish education within Israel's school system.

Lastly, the growth of academic Jewish studies on virtually every American university of note underscores the intellectual attractiveness of Judaism within elite American culture while making possible the advanced study of the treasures of Judaic civilization for the overwhelming majority of today's Jewish youth.

Moreover, Yehoshua errs profoundly in dismissing the political significance of American Jewry. The special relationship between Washington and Jerusalem owes much to the vigilance and constant activism of the American Jewish community.

Most importantly, however, Yehoshua ignores time-honored Jewish values of peoplehood and mutual responsibility between Jews. Rather than advocate synergy between Israel and the Diaspora in an effort to enhance the collective Jewish future, he effectively challenges American Jews either to move to Israel and become serious Jews, or stay in the Diaspora and continue to "play with Jewishness."

In this context, Yehoshua inadvertently poses the correct challenge to the Jewish future: How seriously do we take our Jewishness? That challenge applies no less to Israelis than it does to Diaspora Jews. In an age of freedom and volunteerism, Jews will survive as Jews only to the extent they seek to intensify their Jewishness and live creative Jewish lives.

Jewish identity needs to be constructed upon a language of Jewish values and traditions and pride in Jewish achievements. It is that challenge of creating a vital Jewish identity that should form the common agenda between Israel and the Diaspora. In that sense, rather than lament the conflict provoked by Yehoshua's comments, we need to expand the

dialogue and confront our common challenges as Jews seeking to give meaning to the concepts of Jewish identity and peoplehood in the twenty-first century.

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New York Jewish Week

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First and foremost a Jew

Yossi Beilin

The storm in the Jewish world that has been whipped up by A.B. Yehoshua's remarks reminds me very much of the storm generated by comments I made a dozen years ago, to the effect that it is better for the Jewish world to invest money in Jewish continuity and funding visits to Israel than to give aid to the State of Israel, which is one of the world's wealthier countries.

Then, too, the remarks were interpreted as an Israeli desire to disengage, heaven forbid, from Diaspora Jewry, instead of being understood as an almost desperate call to work together to ensure the continued existence of the Jewish people, rather than making do with sending checks to people who can exist perfectly well without them.

This time, too, in response to Yehoshua's comments that only in Israel is it possible to live a full Jewish life, there were those who argued that without the Diaspora, Israel would not be able to exist, as it is Diaspora Jews who guarantee it financial and diplomatic aid. There is no greater nonsense than this.

A state with 13 million Jews is of far more significance to the future of the Jewish people than all the efforts of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)—some of which have indeed helped Israel, but some of which have done it very serious damage—and of more significance than all the aid from the United Jewish Appeal and loans from Israel Bonds combined.

Like Yehoshua, I am a secular person, and like him, I believe that the true fulfillment of Zionism is normality—a normal life in the State of Israel, in the framework of which Jews can live like human beings able to fulfill themselves. Unlike Yehoshua, I see myself as first and foremost a Jew, and only afterward as an Israeli, though I must admit that this distinction is only intellectual: It does not have any practical significance in my private life because I have never been required, and I assume by now that I will never be required, to choose between the two.

My Judaism is my extended family, which I love and of which I am proud because I was born into it. I am always glad to meet a distant cousin, happy to listen to Hebrew, Ladino or Yiddish in unexpected places, and am moved to tears to hear someone recite “Hear, O Israel” in the furthest corner of the globe, because this is the slogan of my extended family. Religion, tradition, the many Jewish texts—all these are part of our self-definition, and even if they are not the be-all and end-all, dealing with them is important, and deepens Jewish identity.

Israel's great advantage is that the majority of its inhabitants are Jewish, and therefore the danger of assimilation does not exist here. Anyone for whom Jewish continuity is important, as it is for me, must make great efforts to achieve this end in the Diaspora. Among other things, he will find himself in a synagogue belonging to one Jewish movement or another, even if he is not religiously observant at all.

Yossi Beilin is a member of Knesset and chairman of the Meretz-Yachad Party.

In Israel, you can stay away from religious ritual and still know that your children will remain Jewish, because their environment is a Jewish environment, they speak Hebrew, and from kindergarten through university they study subjects connected to Jewish heritage (even if we have criticisms of the quantity and quality of these studies).

But our role, the role of Jewish intellectuals and Jewish leaders worldwide for whom the issue of Jewish continuity is important, cannot be confined to making statements like “come to Israel or you will disappear.”

We must reinvent ourselves, both with respect to ideas and with respect to organization, in order to ensure Jewish continuity in a world that, for all its anti-Semitic phenomena, is prepared to smile at Jews in a way it has never before smiled, and where a Jewish spouse is not a disaster but often even a great blessing.

Immigration to Israel is the most effective solution, but it is practical only for very few in the wealthy countries. When I initiated the birthright project, I did this in the conviction that Israel must be a meeting point for the Jewish people as part of the effort to ensure Jewish continuity. The project’s success should convince the Israeli government and Jewish communities worldwide to expand it, so that no Jewish young person who wants to visit Israel will be unable to do so.

Secular Jewry must formulate for itself its own definition of who is a Jew, and it must not grant religious Jewry a monopoly on this definition. It is untenable that a person whose father is Jewish and who wants to be defined as a Jew should be rejected by us and required to undergo religious conversion. It is untenable that spouses who marry Jews and who see themselves as Jews are required to undergo religious conversion, even if they themselves are agnostic, for example.

We must make significant changes in the Jewish world. It is inconceivable that the global Jewish organization should continue to be the Jewish Agency for Israel, that the World Zionist Organization should continue to act as though the Jewish state had not yet been established, and that the representative of American Jewry should be the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, many of whose member organizations are nothing more than an empty mailbox.

It is necessary to establish a global Jewish organization in which a real discussion about Jewish continuity will be conducted, and which will advance innovative projects suited to the technological developments of the twenty-first century and afford an answer to the question of our extended family’s existence even in a situation in which it is not persecuted, does not live in a ghetto, and is not facing *numerus clausus* laws.

The initiative that was proposed on this subject by President Moshe Katsav could well be an opening toward the establishment of such an important global framework. Yehoshua’s contribution—whether or not we agree with it—has raised the subject of Jewish continuity from its slumber, and for this he deserves thanks.

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Disconnected from reality

Ze'ev Bielski

“Judaism cannot exist outside Israel. Those who do not live in Israel and do not participate in the daily decisions that are made there and that are entirely Jewish, do not have a Jewish identity of any significance.”

This statement was made by author A.B. Yehoshua to the Jewish leadership in America at a conference of the American Jewish Committee. As chairman of the board of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization, I should support what he said. Our primary role is to encourage the immigration of all the Jewish youth in the world to the State of Israel. That is the state's duty.

Especially now, just a few days after “Herzl Day,” as declared by the state, I find Yehoshua's statement disconnected from the existential reality of the Jewish people. More than half of the Jewish people live in Israel. The state is perceived by the Jewish community in the Diaspora as a strong and established state, not as a weak state just starting out, connected as it was in the past by an umbilical cord to Diaspora Jewry, and dependent upon it.

The concept of aliyah has also changed. Most of the immigrants arriving in Israel today come to guarantee their family's life as Jews, to give their children an opportunity for education and a profession, and to build their future in a Jewish society and state. Immigration from distressed communities has dwindled, and the motives for immigration that we knew in the past, like escaping the immediate existential dangers that existed in exile, have nearly disappeared. Jewish communities abroad are mostly developed and strong. They are deeply rooted in their locales and involved in day-to-day life there.

That is how millions of Jews in the world want to live. This is their free choice, and even if it does not match our aims, we have no alternative but to respect it.

However, let us remember that the Jewish communities of the world face the difficult and troubling problem of assimilation, which in some places is as much as 80 percent. The younger generation's distancing from Judaism and their lack of interest in a Jewish framework and community is also a difficult problem faced by many communities. These trends contribute to erosion in the number of Jews outside Israel by some 50,000 a year!

Therefore, the State of Israel must make it a top priority to help Jewish communities stop this erosion and, in various new and creative ways, enlist them in the cause of continuing the existence of the Jewish people—wherever it may be.

The main way in which we propose to do this is to position Israel as a source of interest, challenge and identity for Jewish youth from all over the world, and as the meaningful center of their personal identity. We see

Ze'ev Bielski is chairman of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization.

the enormous influence that a visit to Israel has had on tens of thousands of young people, whom we bring every year for a short visit, as in the Taglit [birthright Israel] program, or for longer periods of time. Encouraging aliyah was and will be in the future one of the main goals of the State of Israel. The Jewish Agency is the bridge to fulfillment of that objective.

We are working to strengthen the “attractive” elements of Israel, but in the absence of significant factors that help “push” them, most Jews in the Diaspora, particularly in the United States, choose to remain where they are. The lives of many of them are connected to Israel. They contribute to it generously and are involved in many joint projects, like strengthening the Galilee and Negev, narrowing social gaps or advancing education. They regard the connection with Israel as the primary means for connecting their children with Jewish tradition, culture and values, with the assets of Jewish culture and community life, and particularly as a means for guaranteeing their continued lives as Jews.

In today’s reality, these are the main challenges facing the existence of the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora. In a technological, mobile and accessible world, in the global village of our day, a Jew living in New Jersey can hold a bar mitzvah for his son at the Western Wall, send his daughter to the Hebrew University for an education, use Skype to talk with friends in Tel Aviv, host in his home young Israelis who are going to be counselors at a Jewish summer camp, contribute to the establishment of student residences in Afula, take part in a project to advance youth in Dimona, and be involved in life in Israel through repeated visits to the country.

If we do not recognize this reality and the challenges it poses to the Jewish people, we might lose the entire campaign. Or give up in advance on our continued existence as a people, for which Israel is the experiential center and the source of identity. The concept posited by A.B. Yehoshua regrettably ignores this reality and is not consistent with the experience of our lives in this era.

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Israeli Judaism: The Judaism of survival no longer works

Yair Caspi

There is truth in what A.B. Yehoshua told the centennial conference of the American Jewish Committee. Until the modern era, Judaism was never a “religion” like Christianity, which is responsible primarily for its adherents’ spiritual life, but a guide for life, which seeks to guide all the acts of man and all the ways of society. Life in a Jewish state in which, potentially, most of the decisions are “Jewish” is a far more “Jewish” life than in the Diaspora, where a very small part of a person’s life is conducted from within his Judaism.

Surprisingly, this is not the position of modern Zionism but, as it happens, a traditional Jewish posture originating in the Bible, which asks of mankind, “In all your ways acknowledge him,” and continues in the Mishna and in the Talmud, which explicate *halakha* (Jewish religious law) as it applies in all spheres of life.

And there is also falsehood in what Yehoshua said. The majority of our life in Israel, for a long time, has not been conducted according to Judaism. We avoid that challenge in two ways: Secular Jews measure their lives mainly in terms of the world’s cultural values (is it “democratic,” are “individual rights” preserved, and so on); religious Jews confine their Jewish life to observing *kashrut* (the dietary laws), Shabbat, and studying Talmud.

Yehoshua misleads his readers. What makes our deeds Jewish is not the fact that they are done by Jews in the State of Israel. Our deeds are Jewish because they stem from a basic Jewish vision about the proper conduct of society and mankind. This is the vision that the Zionist movement sought to revivify through the “exemplary society” it set out to establish in the Land of Israel. Before we can go to the Jews of the Dispersion and offer them Israeli Judaism as the perfect ideal, there is a great deal of work to be done.

To understand the precise core and the misleading element in Yehoshua’s remarks, we need to go back very far and to survey the history of the idea of Israel as an exemplary society as the formative element of Jewish identity, which begins with the revelation of a purposeful creation and a singular role for the Hebrew nation, and is renewed, after a very long and inactive period, in the form of the Zionist movement. And is lost and again strives to arise again.

The world has a purpose

A thousand times since his creation, man has looked at the world: at the land, at the sky, at the sea, at the trees, at the animals, at the people. A thousand times he saw land, sky, sea, plants, animals, people. But one morning everything changed. Suddenly all the individual items fused into

Yair Caspi directs the Psychology in Judaism program at Tel Aviv University.

a picture. Suddenly man saw a grand design. And in the design each detail fulfills a role that has been set. And the observer, filled with inspiration, sat and wrote: “In the beginning.” “Let there be light.” Suddenly everything spoke. Suddenly the voice was heard. Suddenly the person saw that every stone and tree and animal had a purpose. Suddenly it was revealed that every item in the world fulfills a mission.

The discovery from Genesis, that the world has a purpose, changed man’s understanding of himself. Henceforth he had a new question to guide him: What is my place in the design? What was I intended to do? The man who asked discovered an invitation to be a partner with his creator in completing himself and his world.

The special invitation he received fired man with enthusiasm, but also with resistance. He liked being the creator’s assistant, but did not like being told what to do. Therefore, after he scored several achievements, he started to wonder: Maybe I have reached the level at which I can decide about my future by myself?

The rest is known, and it repeats itself in almost every generation: The God of truth is dismissed and replaced by a selection of false gods that exempt man from the long, hard road and that can be interchanged according to need.

The exemplary nation

The patriarch Abraham identified the pointlessness of worshipping false gods and taught others how to listen anew to the voice that calls on man to fulfill his mission. Moses found that natural talent is a national destiny—being a pioneer in the next stage of human development. The nation of Israel undertook to specialize in personifying an exemplary society on earth. Moses and his successors laid foundations that evolved into principles of this service:

Know what is above you. Do not be tempted into a belief that exempts you from your basic responsibility. Recognize what you have received in your world and the possibilities that your gifts open up to you. Seek proper intention and proper action in all your ways. Make the perfection of man and society the cardinal mission of the nation and educate to that end. Build institutions for the development of the method. Take social responsibility for those who have received less than you, because the collective mission will not succeed if part of your nation feels that it does not belong. Discover what you were not meant to do and accept limitations. Do not despair at unavoidable sins along the way, and achieve repentance. Set for yourself holidays for remembering the formative events through which you became aware of your important calling. Do not become addicted to your sacred work, and set aside a day on which you only receive that which already exists, a day without purposeful activity.

The Judaism of survival

The Jews liked being God's chosen people. But very quickly they tired of the demanding mission—to live a life of obligation. They began to wonder: Why did we, of all people, receive harder work than all the nations? Why is it that we, of all people, have to devote ourselves to sublime goals when around us everyone is out to have a good time? And how is it that the whole world is wrong? And who even knows whether God exists?

At the end of the Second Temple era the Jews found a compromise solution to the serious tension created between the responsibility of being the leaders in human development and the desire to be like everyone else: They decided to make themselves smaller. To preserve all that had been revealed until that point. Not to add more. They left the land and put off to the distant future the day when they would return to fulfill their labors.

Judaism shifted itself into a waiting mode. The fullness of the Jewish role changed. It was no longer the vanguard of the human journey, but the “preserver of the commandments.” Preserver of the great achievements of the patriarchs. Preserving them for the future day on which we will go back to fulfilling the mission in full. Preserving and waiting for a different person with a great spirit behind him.

Judaism went into exile—from full responsibility for an independent life. From a task that it postponed for the future. From the Land of Israel. So that they would one day be able to unite and return and complete an unfinished creation, the Jews decided to freeze themselves in the present and to take upon themselves the last common denominator upon which all Jews had agreed before being scattered to the four corners of the earth—the Babylonian Talmud—as the basis for *halakha*, religious law, that is not to be changed.

Light unto the nations

While they were sleeping, the world changed; the discoveries of the Hebrew nation, which had at first been rejected, began to be accepted.

The world adopted the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible, and its readers, from all the ends of the earth, found in it an exciting personal invitation to come along on the journey to perfect man and society. Those who joined found themselves suddenly enlisted in a task that made them partners in a new community—humanity.

From the Jews the world received the future—the revelation that what is does not determine what will be, but on the contrary: Taking on the vision of the world as it should be changes the present.

Every person received from the Jews an invitation to find himself a place that was no longer determined by his race, origin, class, appearance or money—but solely according to his good deeds.

Idol worship, everyone suddenly agreed, was a mistake. The world

received from the Jews the notion of one God. And the world received from the Jews one day of the week on which to remember that there is someone managing the world even when man does nothing. From the world the Jews received confirmation that they did indeed have a special role.

An exemplary society

In the middle of the eighteenth century, after about 2,000 years of postponement, the Jews discovered that the exile was over. Judaism, which had remained frozen, no longer stood up to competition with the Enlightenment and the general culture. Having no choice, the Jews decided to go back to being a chosen people.

“You chose us” and “light unto the nations” were translated, in the language of the Zionist movement, into the vision of an exemplary society that would be established in the Land of Israel and would serve as an example—for a singular convergence from all corners of the earth to complete an unfinished mission: to heal a sick nation that was living in the past and the future, and had no present; to renew an ancient culture that knows how to connect the Israeli consciousness of mission with outstanding achievements from the world’s cultures; to renew a connection with nature and soil; to take complete responsibility for the totality of a nation’s life; for social legislation that sets new standards of mutual responsibility; for a life of truth, simplicity, integrity, readiness for sacrifice, fraternity.

The vision of the Jewish-Israeli exemplary society that inspired the return to Zion in its first decades was replaced by two different styles of idol worship: the worshipers of the new, who believe that God is in new technology, in the latest social norm, in state-of-the-art products, in the departure from all the old values, in children without limits, in man who will soon be God.

And, in opposition to them, the worshipers of the old, who believe in a Torah that even God is forbidden to change; who narrow their lives and exempt themselves from discovering the human role in all the possibilities that have entered the world; who believe that redemption will come when the king from the House of David returns to us and all old land shall be returned, and a priest shall perform sacrifices on the mount; and those who allow themselves to subjugate gentiles and to exploit secular Jews, because they are already the chosen people.

The Torah of Israel, which knows the secret of connecting yesterday and tomorrow, of relating the needs of the individual to responsibility for the public good, of bringing together religion and science, nation and world, is found today in very limited use. And we are again beset by a worldwide rift between religion and culture, which poses an existential threat to the State of Israel.

The Judaism of survival no longer works. And the Jewish people is

disintegrating because it has lost its formative element: the consciousness of the mission that its members took on themselves and which molds them as a people. They don't know who is a Jew, because there is no agreement on what a Jew is obligated to do. The Diaspora has not succeeded in constructing a system of principles which a majority of the Jews there want and are ready to commit to. We have lost the connecting element—between Diaspora and Land of Israel, between Israel and its Judaism. Israel's young people, secular and religious, no longer believe in anyone or anything.

For a human development program that pointed the way for a mission for humanity and forged a model nation and changed the world and then lost its way, Jews are needed who will restore it to its place.

We need people who are ready to give up the illusion that someone is safeguarding for them someplace a ready-to-use Judaism to which people can return when they take off time from their careers and from enjoying themselves. Individuals who know that there is no one from whom to learn Israel's role today, and who will take it upon themselves to relearn all the books of Judaism, without preconceptions about what they are permitted or forbidden to discover. We need sinners who have decided to repent and who have discovered that they have to renew with them all of Judaism, so that they will have something to come back to.

We need perceptive people who will discover anew the tools and the methods with which purpose is deciphered in reality and a mission is found for man, who will discover the essence and the core, and will take it upon themselves to differentiate it from habitual postponement and survival.

We need strong people who are ready to acknowledge their dependence, to record what they received and what they did not do alone, to be thankful for it, and to begin to rewrite the Book of Blessings.

We are very much in need of people who know how to hear a cry, who are available to listen to the requests of those who have lost their way and do not know what to do. We need pioneers who will write new prayers.

We need men and women who are ready to prepare themselves for a very old profession: world experts in the struggle against the new and the covert ways of idol worship.

We need pioneers who will build us a house of study to mend the world and man and the nation. Who will articulate the "positive commandments" and "negative commandments" for our time. Who will write the missing tractates of the Talmud: on parenthood, relationships, career, technology, the State of Israel. Who will muster the courage to add to the Ten Commandments: Do not buy for no reason. And much more.

We need people of faith who are certain that the whole world will join them tomorrow, but are ready to work alone today. We need people of patience who are ready to start, knowing that this journey of ours will take several generations. We need people of humility who do not know it

all, who want only to make a beginning and to invite a nation to rewrite itself. We need people whose worlds have been ravaged and whose alternatives have run out and who know that Israel will not exist if it is not guided by a vision concerning its role. We need pioneers who take upon themselves to do even before the voices have been heard.

When that happens, we will be able to appear again before the American Jewish Committee and say: We are offering the real thing. You are invited to come and grow with us.

May 18, 2006

Ha'aretz

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Israeliness or Judaism— Must we choose one?

Leonard Fein

Let us speak of Zionism—knowing before we begin that any conversation about Zionism is bound to come to no conclusion.

Why speak of Zionism just now? Perhaps because during the opening session of a remarkable symposium in Washington, D.C., on May 1 and 2, convened by the American Jewish Committee to celebrate its 100th anniversary, the Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua delivered a series of remarks that limned the Zionist debate quite clearly and apparently stunned the audience. We will get to those remarks in a bit.

Zionism, as Abba Eban was fond of pointing out, was a nineteenth-century prescription for what was then perceived as “the Jewish problem.” The problem was that there appeared to be no safe place for the Jews, no place free of anti-Semitism, in Europe. That was Theodor Herzl’s core understanding. Stripped to its essence, Herzlian Zionism asserted that if you could not free Europe of anti-Semitism, then you had best free the Jews of Europe. The Jews needed a place of their own, a Jewish home. Given the enthusiasm of the time for the nation-state, a “home” morphed fairly easily into a state.

The formal transition from “a national home for the Jewish people,” the words of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, to a sovereign state did not happen until the Biltmore Conference of 1942. The two dates are separated by only twenty-five years—but also by a catastrophe that almost no one foresaw until it was upon us. (Each time I write here a declarative sentence, I realize that there are footnotes galore that qualify it. I happily leave that task to others, if they are moved to take it on.)

Zionism actually began before Herzl, who is usually described as “the father of political Zionism.” In its earlier versions, it embraced a brutal critique of the distorted Jewish life that had developed in the Diaspora—or, to use Zionism’s word, a word rich in Jewish resonance, in exile. That critique persisted and persists still. Later it was supplemented by a predictive assertion: The Jews of the Diaspora would either fall victim to assimilation (as the German Jewish community seemed to be demonstrating) or to anti-Semitism. We would either be seduced or be raped; either way, we were doomed.

And Zionism was very nearly right. Indeed, it is entirely possible that the Jewish people has by now “lost” as many people to assimilation as it did to slaughter. Yet, obstinately and irritatingly, here we are.

Zionism, loathe as any ideology to acknowledge its error, continues to predict the Diaspora’s demise. And who knows? Who with total confidence can say that America’s Jews, notwithstanding their very low birth rate, notwithstanding the evident disaffection of so many Jews, will still be a thriving community a century from now?

Leonard Fein is a writer and teacher who founded *Moment* magazine, *Mazon: The Jewish Response to Hunger*, and the National Jewish Coalition for Literacy.

(I know, of course: Who can say with total confidence that Israel will still be a thriving Jewish state a century from now? But that, in this context, is quite beside the point.)

In any event, Zionism foresaw neither the Holocaust nor the rise of so vigorous an American Jewish community, two events that have, together with Israel's birth, radically changed the course of Jewish history. And there were other things it did not foresee, could not foresee, that have profoundly affected the world it sought to shape: the rejection of Israel by all those Jews who voted with their feet and chose to go elsewhere, and the bitter and bloody conflict in which Israel has been involved since its inception.

For all that, Zionism delivered on its main promise. It became the sought-for haven; it created a nation-state that is strong, productive, resilient, ever so lively.

Now, the question that A. B. Yehoshua raised at the Washington symposium is, essentially, a post-Zionist question: What is the relationship between the State of Israel and the Jewish people? Yehoshua's answer to that question is, as I understand it: Nothing. Israel is a nation "like other nations," like France or Thailand or Argentina. People who live in Israel are Israelis. Their Jewishness (Yehoshua recognizes that there is in Israel a "national minority," like the Basques in Spain, but his remarks were intended to deal with a different matter) is in the language they speak, in the air they breathe, in the vital (as also the mundane) ways they choose to exercise the power and the responsibilities that come with statehood. He evidently believes that there is no future for the Jews outside the Land, that they live in an illusory world, that the old Zionist analysis (seduction or rape) remains correct, that the professed (but waning) affection of the Jews for Israel ("Next year in Jerusalem") is an empty gesture, that there is no substance to "Judaism" beyond Israeliness.

Predictably, his remarks, delivered at considerable length and with great passion, kicked up a storm. I have listened very carefully to the tape of the session (available on line at www.ajc.org) and commend it to you. Yehoshua did not strike me, as he apparently did many who were present, as rude. By the end of the session, he did seem a bit overwrought, but the reaction, I think, was due less to perceived rudeness than to the clarity with which he proclaimed his post-Zionism. Now that there is a Jewish state, he argued, there is neither purpose nor future for this odd thing we call "the Jewish people."

Yehoshua is hardly the first to put matters so starkly. He is not all that different from a group, in the early years of the State, who called themselves "Canaanites." Now that the Jews have returned to their land, the Canaanites argued, it was also time to return to their natural history. The entire Diaspora experience was a distortion; their "natural history" meant their pre-exilic history. That argument is not so weird as it may at first blush seem. David Ben-Gurion wanted the teaching of Jewish history to regard the Diaspora experience as a kind of parenthetical period in the real history of our people.

Had not Zionism, from its inception, argued that the Diaspora was a distorting experience? Was not *shlilat hagolah*, negation of the Diaspora, a conventional component of Israeli wisdom, and is it not still? And does not the Arab (or Palestinian) resident of Nazareth, who speaks a fluent Hebrew and whose fate is bound up with Israel, have a far closer relationship to Israel than the Jew of Great Neck?

The response to Yehoshua at the symposium came principally from Leon Wieseltier, who insisted (correctly, in my view) that the idea of Judaism is prior to and larger than the idea of Israel.

Indeed. Amos Oz used to (and may still) argue that the great achievements of the Jews in the last century—the resurrection of the Hebrew language, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the creation of the kibbutz—all happened in Israel. Here in America, Oz asserted, we’d accomplished nothing—that is, nothing that mattered Jewishly. Yet, for all my respect for Oz, I believe he is simply wrong about that. American Jews have been Jewishly important in their liturgical and even theological innovation, in their advocacy of feminism, in their Jewish scholarship. And if Yehoshua is correct, Israeli Jews have been Jewishly important simply by virtue of their being.

The argument about Zionism comes down to an argument about Judaism. If there is substance to Judaism, then the lack of Jewish self-consciousness that Yehoshua appears to recommend is a defect; if there is no substance to Judaism that deserves recognition, if Judaism amounts to no more than Israeliness, then we here are meaningless as Jews (and doubly so as “Zionists”).

The late Ben Halpern once wrote of a distinction between “Exile” and “exile.” The lower-case “exile” is a geographic allusion. It comes to distinguish between Jews inside the Land and those outside it. That exile is anywhere that is not Israel. The upper case “Exile” is an existential description. So long as the world remains unrepaired, all of us are in that Exile, whether we live in Boston or in Jerusalem.

Halpern was a Zionist as I am a Zionist. He understood that the State of Israel is the most important and consequential project of the Jewish people in our time. (Whether it was a mistake for Halpern or for me not to have cast our lot with Israel, not to be more intimately part of that crucial project, is another matter.) It is that perception that “entitles” us to care as deeply as we do for what happens in Israel, for how the Jews manage the difficult task of creating a nation-state that is benign rather than, as so many nation-states are, malignant. That task is made easier by a lively sense of Exile.

AIPAC Jews who know nothing of Judaism, whose Judaism consists of their advocacy on Israel’s behalf, are no different from Peace Now Jews who know nothing of Judaism, whose Judaism consists of their (substantively quite different) advocacy on Israel’s behalf. And “mere” advocacy on Israel’s behalf is not a sufficient definition of Zionism. If there is any point to the continued use of the word, and of its elaborate

institutional expression (altogether a very big “if”), that point must somehow include a link between the Jewish state and the Jewish people. If it does not, if Yehoshua’s logic prevails, then Zionism will not merely have outlived its utility, but will have rent the Jewish people. How odd: Neither seduction nor rape will have led to our demise, but Zionism itself.

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In the Diaspora: You're taking us for granted—don't

Samuel Freedman

One summer in the early 1970s, my best friend made the obligatory summer trip of an American Jewish teenager to Israel. He returned to New Jersey relieved of his virginity but otherwise unimpressed. Over beers and Allman Brothers records, he complained to me about the rancorous debate in the Knesset, the rugby scrum for bus seats, the paratroopers who bedded all the choicest tourist girls, notwithstanding his own night of good luck in the Negev. "It's like a whole country of Sicilians," he concluded, "except they're all Jews."

Maybe Israel could afford the swaggering indifference back then. To a fault, American Jews built their communal identity around support for Israel, as well as memory of the Holocaust. Fund-raising drives and public rallies peaked during the 1967 and 1973 wars, and in the magical years in-between the vision of a kibbutz state spoke compellingly to the generation of the counter-culture, no matter how simplistic the received image of folk dancing and farm labor actually was.

You would think a deep, abiding, secure, enduring connection between American Jews and Israel remains a given, a certainty, to look at how two of the most significant figures in the Jewish State have chosen lately to spit in the eye of their *galut* brethren. First the novelist A.B. Yehoshua chose a luminous conference in May marking the Centennial of the American Jewish Committee as the occasion to launch one of his familiar jeremiads against the vapidness of the Diaspora. Then, as the World Zionist Congress convened last week, President Moshe Katsav made a public point of refusing to address Rabbi Eric Yoffie, one of the leaders of the Reform Movement in the United States, by his clerical title.

Admittedly, none of this dismissive rhetoric is new. The Zionist endeavor depended on the denigration of exilic Jewish life, sometimes deriding the weak, pale, near-sighted ghetto Jew in a stereotype that could have been borrowed from anti-Semitic tracts. David Ben-Gurion exulted in telling American Jews there could be no Zionism without aliyah, though I have yet to hear of an instance of a check from abroad going uncashed. In this same tradition, Yehoshua told the AJC conference, "Being an Israeli is my skin, not my jacket. You are changing jackets. You are changing countries like changing jackets." When his comments incited an uproar, Yehoshua pleaded common sense, saying, "If they were *goyim*, they would understand it right away."

As for Katsav's condescending attitude toward Yoffie, that, too, has venerable roots in Israeli society. Reform Judaism was a product of Enlightenment-era Germany, and the Conservative Movement an invention of twentieth century in America, while Israel developed neatly into *dati* and *lo-dati* sectors, with not much exposure to the adaptive streams

Samuel Freedman, a regular contributor to the *Jerusalem Post*, is a professor of journalism at Columbia University, and the author of several books on Judaism.

of Judaism. Israel's founding fathers, eager to enlist some Orthodox allies in the secular state and convinced that reason would outlast religion anyway, granted the Orthodox rabbinate hegemony over marriage, conversion, and other aspects of civil society.

But content is bound up with context, and in rehashing old calumnies in new times both Yehoshua and Katsav betrayed either an incredible ignorance of or a foolish indifference to the deteriorating ties between American Jews and Israel.

Except in the Orthodox sector, the bond has been waning for at least a generation, and as the secular, leftist American Jews who disproportionately supported Zionism for much of the twentieth century die off, the connective tissue will become only more tenuous. It would be hard to imagine a more self-defeating strategy for Israeli leaders than to insult and snub the American Jews who still care—the sort who attended the AJC conference and the WZC meeting.

On its own terms, Yehoshua's critique of Jewish identity in America has merit. The challenge of residing in and enjoying a tolerant polyglot nation while remaining uniquely committed to Israel is one not easily met. Indeed, the high rate of interfaith marriage for American Jews, and with it the birth of a whole caste of half-Jews, attests to the difficulty in reconciling nationality and peoplehood.

While Yoffie has personally held to an admirable, unflinching standard of Zionism, the Reform Movement has enabled the dilution of Jewish identity with its acceptance of interfaith marriage. And during the grim summer of 2001, in the wake of the Dolphinarium suicide bombing, Reform authorities in America cravenly cancelled the summer programs in Israel for high school students.

Such points of contention bear debate and vigorous discourse. What Yehoshua and Katsav supplied was something altogether different, a denial of Jewish legitimacy except on their terms. The secular novelist and the Orthodox politician share the same misapprehension: the way to make an American Jew into a Zionist is to scold or shame him into it.

I cannot conceive of a more losing proposition. As the success of birthright Israel has demonstrated—much to my own surprise, I must confess—there exists even in drifting, disengaged American Jewry some latent, ineffable yearning for connection to Israel. Being told you are inherently deficient or insufficiently observant is not exactly the way to capitalize on such feelings.

No sensible American Jew pretends to fully grasp the Israeli experience. In this country, without mandatory military service, precious few Jewish parents could comprehend what the kidnapping of one soldier means to mothers and fathers all through Israel. Still, some of us will experience such events as more than a few dribbles of type on the bottom of the CNN screen, and we'd prefer not to be reviled for our trouble.

The Diaspora no longer exists in any meaningful way. The Jewish world has only two addresses that matter anymore, America and Israel.

The “American uncle,” to use Yossi Beilin’s term, may make a useful, cathartic target, an easy object of ridicule. But is life going to be better when someone else becomes the favorite nephew?

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Jerusalem Post

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The work will be done here

Tzvia Greenfield

Not surprisingly, the debate that writer A.B. Yehoshua sparked with his remarks at the convention of the American Jewish Committee in Washington involves the most profound issues of identity that now concern Jewish society in Israel and abroad. In fact, it appears that the two sides to the debate represent the two sides of the same coin: Both of them cast doubt on the historical importance of the State of Israel.

On the one side are Israelis who see their native experience in the land as one of crucial importance, one that detaches them from the chain of Jewish generations and reconstitutes them anew as “Israelis”—closer to their brothers-in-fate, the Palestinians, than to the descendants of the Jewish people in exile.

On the other side are the Jews of the Diaspora, who proudly consider themselves citizens with equal rights and considerable influence in the places where they live. Most of the supporters of Israel among them feel that at most Israel is another small wrinkle in Jewish history—a kind of sometimes impressive and sometimes unfortunate experience, but not truly critical with respect to the fate of the Jewish people.

The thing is that the two sides to the debate are not really very far from each other. Both aim to minimize the importance of the State of Israel as a profound and restorative revolution in the chain of the history of the Jewish people. Therefore both sides believe that Israel does not need to be really important to the Jewish people. The former, because they prefer to detach themselves entirely from the continuum of Jewish history, and the latter because, in effect, they see themselves, rather than the State of Israel, as the continuation of the historical continuum of the Jewish people.

Judging by the tempestuous reactions, it appears that what was not understood at all in Yehoshua’s remarks is that the debate does not exist between these two negativistic approaches. Instead the debate rages between two groups: those who believe that Israel has afforded a renewed opportunity to the sons and daughters of the Jewish people to reenter history not just as individuals, but rather as a significant collective with a common cultural vision; and those who do not at all grasp the significance of renewed Jewish entry into history as a collective with a vision, and content themselves with passive Jewish continuity outside of history.

The latter choose to believe that there is no far-reaching existential difference between the Jews who are citizens of the State of Israel and the Jews who are citizens of the various countries of the Diaspora; in both cases it is a matter of individuals who have certain preferences and nothing more. In their view, then, the Diaspora solution of Babylonia is as satisfactory and as existentially adequate with respect to Judaism as is the Israeli solution. Indeed, perhaps it even has a moral advantage in that it

Tzvia Greenfield is the head of the Mifne (Turning Point) Institute for Democracy and Judaism.

does not entail the complications of Israel as having harmed and as still harming the Palestinians' existence.

The former believe that in an age of liberty, there is a point to Jewish continuity only if it entails taking complete responsibility, insofar as possible, for all aspects of our lives and for shaping reality, as a moral collective with a common cultural vision that aspires to instill its cultural connection in the coming generations as well. This collective responsibility inevitably includes not only the shared concern for the continued existence and physical flourishing of the inhabitants of Israel. It also, equally, includes the moral responsibility to prevent injustice and to end the occupation of the Palestinian people completely, as well as to relate in an egalitarian way to all minorities, including, of course, the Arab minority that lives in Israel.

Our Jewish brethren in the Diaspora who are concerned about the fate of Israel must acknowledge that in preferring to live among the nations and not within the sovereign collective in Israel, they are relinquishing the truly significant Jewish existence: the opportunity to shape—and the responsibility for creating and living within—a comprehensive moral reality in the spirit of the prophets of Israel. We need them and their love. Therefore, let us hope that they and their children will continue to see themselves as part of the Jewish people in all its generations. But the truly great historical, cultural, and moral work of the Jewish people will apparently be done elsewhere. Here, in the State of Israel.

May 15, 2006

Ha'aretz

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More right than wrong

Hillel Halkin

The Israeli author and novelist A.B. Yehoshua has never been shy about expressing his opinions. Nor was he that when he appeared in a panel at an American Jewish Committee conference held in Washington last week. According to a report in this newspaper, Yehoshua “stirred controversy” by saying “that only the State of Israel can ensure the survival of the Jewish people” and went on to declare:

“For me, Avraham Yehoshua, there is no alternative [to being Jewish].... I cannot keep my identity outside Israel. [Being] Israeli is my skin, not my jacket. You [Diaspora Jews] are changing jackets... you are changing countries like changing jackets. I have my skin, the territory [of Israel].”

That Yehoshua’s “passionate presentation,” as the [*Jerusalem*] Post report put it, “became the talk of the conference,” I can vouch for, since I was a panelist there myself, though not together with Yehoshua.

On Yehoshua’s panel were the prominent novelist Cynthia Ozick; the author, columnist, and literary editor of *The New Republic*, Leon Wieseltier; and the Israeli religious thinker and Talmudic scholar Adin Steinsaltz. While Yehoshua spoke, Ozick, a small, fragile-looking woman, sat shrinking in her chair as if she were being bludgeoned; Wieseltier stared glumly into space; and Steinsaltz looked on with an impish grin like someone at a boring dinner party that has just been livened up by a stink bomb. The members of the audience fidgeted in discomfit.

I sympathized with them. They had come from all over America for what was supposed to be a festive event, the centennial celebration of the founding of the American Jewish Committee in 1906, and here was one of their guests of honor telling them that they had been wasting their time for the past 100 years, and that they were simply play-acting at being Jews when the real thing was taking place elsewhere, in a Jewish state. Yehoshua was being a party pooper and they resented it.

They were right to. It was bad manners on his part. There’s a time and place for everything, and this was not the time or place for a harangue from the “Diaspora-negating” school of radical Zionism, which most American Jews assume was buried with David Ben-Gurion and his generation, and which the conference’s delegates were surprised to discover still alive and kicking in the person of a famous Israeli author.

And not only bad manners. There was a measure of ingratitude in it, too. After all, not only was Yehoshua, like me, flown to Washington, put up at a fancy hotel and paid a handsome honorarium, all at the expense of the American Jewish community, he has enjoyed—as has the entire State of Israel—this community’s largesse for many years. It has bought his books, invited him to speak, been instrumental in getting him attractive teaching positions when on sabbatical from his post at the University of Haifa. One shouldn’t spit in the well one has drunk from, not if one is a single individual and not if one is, collectively, the Jews of Israel.

Hillel Halkin is an author and translator whose most recent book is *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel*.

Which is why, on the whole, I've stopped spitting in it, even though I happen to agree with much of what Yehoshua said.

Once, I was more like him in this respect. I can remember a national convention of rabbis—it was in Washington too, I believe—that I was invited to address some time in the late 1970s or early '80s. It was a few years after I had published my book *Letters to an American Jewish Friend*, which was an exercise in Diaspora negation itself, and I was playing the role of the fire-eating Zionist to the hilt. The rabbis wanted me to talk about Israel-Diaspora relations? Well, then, I would tell them what I thought. I thought every self-respecting Diaspora Jew belonged in Israel, and that American Jewry should liquidate itself as soon as possible by moving there en masse.

The rabbis, needless to say, were as offended as Yehoshua's American Jewish Committee audience, and they too had every right to be. This was what I had to say to American Jews—that they should all pack up and move to Israel? One expected to hear that kind of message from a street-corner orator on a soapbox, not from a supposedly serious speaker facing a hall of American Jewish leaders.

And because I don't really enjoy giving offense, I've stopped talking that way to American Jews. Many of them—certainly a large percentage of those who come to events like the AJC conference—take their Jewishness seriously and work hard at it. They're supportive of Israel and they care about Israel. They deserve to be cared about by Israeli Jews in return, and they certainly don't deserve our ridicule or disdain. Our situation in both America and in the world is far better because of them.

And yet, deep down, I think that Yehoshua, manners aside, is more right than wrong. Israel is the only place in the world in which one can live a Jewish life that is total—in which, that is, there is no compartmentalization between the inner and the outer, between what is Jewish and what is not. It is the only place in the world in which Jews are totally responsible for the society they live in, for the environment that surrounds them, for the government that rules them. It is the only place in the world where Jewish culture is not a subculture in a greater culture but is rather that greater culture itself. It is the real thing and by comparison, Jewish life in America, or anywhere else in the Diaspora, as dedicated and committed as it may be, indeed seems like a kind of play-acting. Why would a truly dedicated and committed Jew want to live anywhere but in a Jewish state?

Is there a way of saying this to American Jews without hurting their feelings or making them feel that they are speaking to arrogant Israelis? There doesn't seem to be—which is why many Israelis, though in their hearts they agree with Yehoshua, keep it to themselves. Perhaps this is why American Jews think we all vanished with Ben-Gurion, when all we've really done is become more polite. Politeness is not A.B. Yehoshua's forte. One can censure him for that ... and envy him just a little bit, too.

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Distant relations: Why Israelis don't "get" Diaspora Jewry

Gilbert N. Kahn

A.B. Yehoshua caused an absolute turmoil at the recent 100th annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee in Washington when he told the assembled members and indirectly all of American Jewry that they, living in the Diaspora, were not real Jews. As he stated, "real" Jews live in the Land of Israel, speak Hebrew, and serve in the Israeli army.

For one of Israel's most renowned literary personalities, these views were not new. In fact, Yehoshua, like many old-time secular Israelis, has been preaching this line for years. To kick off AJC's centennial celebration, Yehoshua appeared on a panel with Ted Koppel, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Cynthia Ozick, and Leon Wieseltier. Yehoshua caused such a sensation with his remarks that he reportedly left his copanelists virtually speechless. In fact [according to published press reports], the fallout from Yehoshua's remarks not only captured most of the attention of the convention's attendees and left their public relations' apparatus juggling to spin out the conference's message, but it also outflanked President George W. Bush, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who addressed the 2,000 attendees at the gala dinner. In addition, it also captured the focus of the Israeli press for an entire week.

Not since the days of the salon debates among European Zionists in the pre-World War II era have the echoes of this fundamental debate been heard so loudly. Yehoshua cut to the bare bones of Jewish existence: whether Judaism is a religion, a nationality, or both. Furthermore, it brought into focus the nature of the Jewish experiment in Israel and the place that Jewish history and Jewish religion do or ought to hold in the state.

Yehoshua spoke directly for the secular Israelis. He challenged Diaspora Jews to make a serious and sincere bargain with Israelis by coming on aliyah. Jewish life for Yehoshua cannot be lived outside of Israel. To do so today, he believes, Diaspora Jews are fooling themselves.

Admittedly, this age-old challenge is particularly daunting to religious American Jews. No observant Jew can dismiss out of hand the challenge made by Israeli leaders since at least the days of David Ben-Gurion, that living a full, Jewish life means living in the State of Israel. At the same time, Yehoshua should comprehend that his attack has virtually no resonance whatsoever among any other segment of Diaspora Jewry. As he must well understand, aliyah today is a mere trickle from among the nonreligious Diaspora community.

Specifically on its merits, Yehoshua's charge is outrageous. It represents an exceedingly distorted view of what it means to be Jewish. This is true for the secular Jewish community in Israel, of which he is a proud

Gilbert N. Kahn is a professor of political science at Kean University in Union, New Jersey.

member, as well as for a number of other segments of Israeli society.

In today's Israeli "secular" school curriculum, there is less Jewish history, less Jewish text, and less Jewish religion taught than ever before. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the pioneers who settled Israel as well as the hundreds of thousands of Russian and Ethiopian *olim* are receiving no basic understanding of what being a Jew—not an Israeli—means.

At the same time, the religious control of Israel cannot be left entirely in the hands of a religious establishment that is basically intolerant, insensitive, and uncompromising in its attitude toward religious pluralism as practiced in America as well as among many portions of European Jewry. The Israeli rabbinate must become far more willing to work with nonobservant Jews than it is today. The specific modalities to be developed must reflect not only a commitment to *halakha* but also religious creativity and boldness. Israeli rabbis must pledge themselves to a far greater sensitivity to those not like themselves. The Israeli rabbinical establishment is still viewed by large portions of Diaspora Jews as well as by secular Israelis as controlling their lives (*kashrut* and Shabbat closures), extorting funds (for *yeshivot* and institutions in repayment for political favors), and monopolizing life-cycle events.

Recognizing this, Israel must become much more hospitable and open to the Diaspora's forms of Judaism: a more religious one than most Israelis, a more religiously knowledgeable one than most Israelis, but also a less nationalistic one than Israel's.

Despite his subsequent apology, A.B. Yehoshua really does not appreciate Diaspora Jewry. He does not recognize the personal, financial, and political commitment that most American Jews have and make for the State of Israel.

Admittedly, Diaspora Jews face a very different challenge than do Israelis who face bullets and bombs on the front lines. Diaspora Jews face the regular challenge to defend Israel in the marketplace, in the universities, and in the halls of government. Both sides need to learn to cultivate this symbiotic relationship, to cherish it, to debate it—but at the end of the day, most importantly, to respect it

May 6, 2006

New Jersey Jewish News

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How Jewish is Israel?

Tony Karon

If we concede A.B. Yehoshua's claim that Israel is the source of Jewish identity in today's world, we reduce Jewish identity to a conversation between anti-Semitism and a blood-and-soil nationalism that is Jewish only in the sense that anti-Semites use the term, i.e., racial. But if, instead, we define "Jewish" on the basis of the universal ethical challenges at the core of Judaism, then not only is the Diaspora an essential condition of Jewishness, but Israel's own claim to a Jewish identity is open to question.

The idea that the modern State of Israel expresses some ageless desire among Jews across the Diaspora to live in a Jewish nation state is wishful thinking. Before the Holocaust, Zionism had been a minority tendency among Western Jews, and scarcely existed among those living in the Muslim world. And a half century after Israel's emergence, most of us choose freely to live, as Jews have for centuries, among the nations. That choice is becoming increasingly popular among Israeli Jews, too: 750,000 at last count—hardly surprising in an age of accelerated globalization that feeds dozens of diasporas and scorns national boundaries.

The State of Israel was created by an act of international law in 1948, largely in response to the Holocaust. It was violently rejected by an Arab world that saw it as a new Western conquest of the territory over which so much blood had been spilled to defend Muslim sovereignty during the Crusades, so, like most nation states, Israel had to fight its way into existence. Its victory came at the expense of another people, whose dispossession was the precondition for Israel achieving an ethnic Jewish majority. And the conflict fueled by the unresolved trauma of its birth has condemned the Jewish state to behave in ways that mock the progressive Zionist dream of Israel fulfilling the biblical injunction to Jews to be a "light unto the nations."

Former Knesset speaker Avraham Burg puts it eloquently:

The Jewish people did not survive for two millennia in order to pioneer new weaponry, computer security programs or anti-missile missiles. We were supposed to be a light unto the nations. In this we have failed. It turns out that the 2,000-year struggle for Jewish survival comes down to a state of settlements, run by an amoral clique of corrupt lawbreakers who are deaf both to their citizens and to their enemies. A state lacking justice cannot survive. More and more Israelis are coming to understand this as they ask their children where they expect to live in 25 years. Children who are honest admit, to their parents' shock, that they do not know.

So, while Yehoshua challenges the Jewish identity of the Diaspora, Burg challenges the Jewish identity of Israel. Of course, they use different definitions of "Jewish." Yehoshua dismisses religion, and says it is the land and language of Israel that defines him. I am not religious, but I share Burg's belief that Judaism is fundamentally an ethical challenge

Tony Karon is a senior editor at TIME.com.

epitomized for me by the famous “on-one-leg” definition by Hillel: “That which is hateful unto yourself, do not do unto others; all the rest is commentary.”

The fact that in Israel, Hebrew was transformed from a liturgical language to eclipse the Yiddish, Ladino, and Arabic in which Jews had communicated for hundreds of years is a remarkable feat of nationalist social engineering, but nothing more. The notion of identity deriving from the soil seems to owe more to nineteenth-century European nationalism than to Jewish ethics. I can’t see anything Jewish about investing hills and piles of stones with a spiritual significance worth dying and killing for.

Growing up in apartheid South Africa was an object lesson in Jewish ethics. Yes, there was plenty of anti-Semitism in the colonial white society, but the mantle of victimhood belonged to others. And if you responded to the very Jewish (although in no way exclusively so) impulse to seek justice, you found yourself working side by side not only with the remarkable number of Jews who filled leadership roles in the liberation movement, but also with Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and others, each articulating their own traditions within a common identity based on the common values.

Judaism’s universal ethical calling can’t really be answered if we live only among ourselves—and Israel’s own experience suggests it’s hard to live only among ourselves without doing injustice to others. As physical threats to Jewish existence in the Diaspora have receded, Zionists today cite the specter of “assimilation.” But assimilation holds no fear for the happy Diasporaist who expresses his traditions as just that—traditions—alongside those of others.

The idea that Jews should live in a ghetto is one from which Jews were, mercifully, liberated variously between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. A.B. Yehoshua and others want to revive something we’re better off without. All of the great Jewish intellectual, philosophical, moral and cultural contributions to humanity I can think of were products not of Jews living apart, but of our dispersal among the cultures of the world. Maimonides or Spinoza, Marx, Freud, Einstein or Derrida; Kafka, Proust or Primo Levi; Serge Gainsbourg or Daniel Barenboim; Lenny Bruce or Bob Dylan—I could go on ad nauseam—all are products of our interaction with diverse influences in the Diaspora.

Jewish identity is always in flux and contested. The Zionist moment is a comparatively brief one in the sweep of Jewish history, and I’d argue that Judaism’s survival depends instead on its ability to offer a sustaining moral and ethical anchor in a world where the concepts of nation and nationality are in decline. Israel’s relevance to Judaism’s survival depends first and foremost on its ability, as Burg points out, to deliver justice, not only to its citizens, but to those it has displaced. Until then, Israel’s own Jewish identity also remains uncertain.

May 21, 2006

Ha’aretz

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How can going to the beach on Pesach be more Jewish than going to *shul*?

The following interview by Yair Sheleg with Ambassador Alfred Moses, chair of AJC's Centennial, was conducted in Israel and appeared in *Ha'aretz* on May 22, 2006. The format has been revised to reflect the dialogue/interview process.

Alfred Moses ... 77, a former president of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), a former U.S. ambassador to Romania, adviser to President Jimmy Carter and President Bill Clinton's special envoy in Cyprus, is the man who invited [A.B.] Yehoshua to the conference in honor of AJC's centennial.... Now visiting Israel, he wanted very much to respond to Yehoshua's remarks, which prompted numerous reactions in the Israeli press.... Moses says he had heard a similar Yehoshua speech in 1975.

Moses: I invited him despite that speech, not because of it. I invited him because I wanted a debate and undoubtedly Avraham [*referring to Yehoshua by his first name*] made the symposium. No one is quoting Moshe Halbertal [*a lecturer in philosophy at the Hebrew University*], who delivered a much more interesting address or Anita Shapira or Hillel Halkin. Clearly, he brought about the excitement, and I thank him for that.

For the same reason he promises to invite Yehoshua again, to a large gathering the AJC is planning for next March, to conclude the centennial celebrations.

Moses: What upset people was not the content, but the dogmatic way in which he spoke. He had one idea that he repeated over and over, without connecting to the audience or the panel, in a way that did not contribute to the discussion. Even at the end of the discussion when the audience asked questions, he did not really answer them. Formally speaking he answered, but in actuality he again gave speeches instead of answers.

Moses admits that there is truth in Yehoshua's remarks.

Moses: I agree that there is a threat to Jewish existence in the Diaspora, and this internal danger, the danger of apathy, is greater than the external danger that threatens Jewish existence in Israel. The religious people in the Diaspora will remain Jewish. The problem is with the secular-civic society. A Jewish uniqueness is essential for Jewish survival. I agree with Yehoshua that in the Diaspora there is a problem of dual loyalty. The fact that we live in a non-Jewish environment has advantages, but it also has a cost.

Who will shed a tear?

Moses: The absurdity in Yehoshua's approach is that if the Israeli Arabs and foreign workers are more important than Diaspora Jews, then over time there will no longer be a Jewish state and Israel will become a country like all other countries.

Alfred H. Moses, a past president of the American Jewish Committee and chair of its Centennial Committee, is a partner in the Covington and Burling law firm and a former U.S. ambassador to Romania.

His second mistake, which is even harder for me to accept, is the negation of the Diaspora. In many respects, Israel and the Diaspora are communities that are mutually dependent. The very existence of Israel, for better or worse, is dependent on the United States. The Europeans will shed many tears at Israel's funeral, but won't do anything to prevent it. The only country that is obligated to prevent Israel's destruction, and that will act to do so, is the United States.

The American commitment to Israel is influenced considerably by American Jewry. True, there are also independent interests and values that prompt the United States to protect Israel, but without the Jewish presence there, that might not be enough.

Yehoshua's claim that Jewish existence in the Diaspora is a partial existence, while Jewish existence in Israel is total, is, in Moses' opinion, ridiculous.

Moses: What significance is there to the fact the taxi driver in Israel is Jewish or Arab, and in New York he is from Bangladesh? This has no effect on my life! Is an Israeli Jew who goes to the beach on the first day of Passover more Jewish than a Jew from New York who goes to the synagogue on that day?

Hebrew is certainly a significant factor. It is definitely easier to understand the traditional sources and Jewish thinking overall in Hebrew. But if a person has no connection to the sources, that is of no significance because the language is only a means of getting closer to the sources.

On the definition of Israel as the "center" of the Jewish people

Moses: This definition does not appeal to me, because it signals competitiveness. Certainly there is something unique about Israel, but centrality is a judgmental concept that I wouldn't get into.

Afterward, he quietly reveals, as if sharing a secret, "Personally, I do think of Israel in terms of centrality, but my personal opinion is unimportant for the future of the Jewish people."

How can ties between Israel and the Diaspora be improved?

Moses: First, there has to be agreement on the analysis of the problem. My diagnosis is that, first of all, the excitement over the establishment of the state is now three generations behind us, and most Diaspora Jews who wanted to make aliyah have already done so. Moreover, Israel seems today, certainly in the eyes of Americans, less exciting. The description of Israel in the American media is less suited to the liberal values that most American Jews are identified with. It has to be noted that apart from what is happening in the territories, one of the things that disturbs Jews in the Diaspora very much is the Orthodox monopoly over the rabbinate here. Nevertheless, even the Reform and Conservative Jews in the U.S. very strongly support Israel.

Moses stands out among his fellow American Jewish political leaders not only because of his knowledge of Hebrew, but also because of his association with the Orthodox movement. He prays every Shabbat and sometimes during the week at the Modern Orthodox Keshet Israel synagogue in Washington, D.C. Because his Virginia home is quite a distance from the synagogue, he says, with an almost apologetic smile, that he comes to the synagogue on Saturdays by a “magic carpet,” but in the same breath notes that he would be glad to live closer so that he would not need the “carpet.”

He believes that Orthodoxy will gradually come to represent the dominant share of the hard core of the Jewish community in the United States.

Moses: Today it is 11 percent of the Jewish community, but among young people, its share is already 17 percent and that will continue to increase. Specifically because of that, much of the question of the future of the rest of the Jews depends on Orthodoxy’s position. Today there is considerable renewal and excitement outside Orthodoxy as well. Since the 1990 [National Jewish Population] Survey [*which cited an intermarriage rate of 52 percent*], there has been a huge return to Jewish education. Today we have 200,000 children receiving Jewish education on a daily basis, which is more than the number of yeshiva students in pre-World War Europe.

Dershowitz is exaggerating

The return to Jewish identity, Moses says, stems to a large extent from the overall legitimacy multiculturalism granted to separate identities, and in this respect, the intensity of Jewish identity is dependent on the level of legitimacy granted to it by the majority culture.

Moses: But we can also influence this process. We are working today with other communities that have a common interest in this, on encouraging ethnic identity in American society. On the other hand, German Jewry almost disappeared during the Weimar Republic, and part of its success in enduring actually stemmed from the overall anti-Semitism. So if a less favorable attitude toward separate identities emerges, it is possible that it will actually turn at least part of the Jewish community more inward, deeper into its separate identity.

Is he troubled, as Alan Dershowitz is, by the phenomenon of conservatives and liberals in the United States each from their own side attacking the Jews who are at the head of the opposing camp?

Moses: I think that Dershowitz is totally exaggerating. Most Americans are not at all interested in this discussion. It is more an internal Jewish discussion. Just as in the 1980s there was a Jewish broker on Wall Street convicted of crimes, and Jewish leaders were worried about anti-Semitic reactions. It turned out that the public related to him on an individual basis and there was no generalization applied to Jews as a whole.

The positive side of intermarriage is that many more Americans today know the Jews from up close. Anti-Semitism exists, but if it poses

a danger, it is certainly on a different level than what we were familiar with in the past. When I started working as a lawyer fifty years ago, there were firms that did not hire Jews to work there. Not long ago, I visited such a firm and proudly related that in my firm there is a lawyer who wears a yarmulke. I asked if this firm had anyone like that there. The answer was a chuckle: “Yarmulke? We have a minyan every day!” And that’s a firm that fifty years ago would not interview a Jew for a job. The reason is simple: In a competitive society you can’t allow yourself to leave out good people.

May 22, 2006

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Still one people

Gary Rosenblatt

Jerusalem—A.B. Yehoshua still doesn't get it. Or maybe he chooses not to.

The famous Israeli novelist made headlines in early May when, in a symposium in Washington sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, he declared that only Israel, and not Judaism or Diaspora Jews, could guarantee the survival of the Jewish people. His blunt arguments and cantankerous style set off a wave of angry reaction from American Jews so strong that the next day Yehoshua issued an apology of sorts. On the one hand he said he regretted offending his audience, but he added that listeners should not have been shocked because he has been making such statements for three decades.

Yehoshua's comments at the symposium, insisting that he feels no affinity with Diaspora Jews, reinvigorated the debate over the relationship between Israeli and Diaspora Jews, one which virtually all agree has grown increasingly distant over the years.

In Israel on Monday, Yehoshua spoke to a small gathering of about twenty Jewish professionals, half American and half Israeli, at a session intended to advance the discussion about the relationship. But it soon became evident that he either had not been listening to what he called "the storm" of criticism he has been receiving from deeply offended Diaspora Jews, or he preferred restating his case to engaging in any real dialogue.

Over and over he stressed that being a Jew is a matter of nationality, not religion, and that Jewishness is defined by living inside Israel—all that matters in the end. This was particularly curious because he emphasized that he strives in his work to create integration. But his statements were consistently divisive, distinguishing between truly realized Jews (those who live in Israel) and ersatz ones (in the Diaspora).

One of the most surprising statements he made was that he had little use for texts—the wisdom and writings of the Jewish people from the Bible to today—since they have not helped us avoid suffering throughout our history. This from a man of letters who has spent his life creating narratives that reflect the Israeli condition.

"All this talk of texts is an escape from real life," said an impassioned Yehoshua, who suggested that "Jewish lawyers in New York read and try to understand and debate recent Israeli Supreme Court decisions" as a more pragmatic exercise in Jewish writings of value today.

It's a valid and intriguing point, but why reject all the writings of the Jewish people that came before modern-day Israel? And why is Yehoshua worried that American Jews are obsessed with Jewish texts? Would that it were so, that our young people were consumed with Bible, Talmud and other forms of Jewish textual learning.

Gary Rosenblatt is the editor and publisher of the *New York Jewish Week*.

Our group did a valiant job of challenging Yehoshua, who managed to unite the Israelis and Americans among us in disagreeing with his basic premise. We argued that we are a people bound by a common history and narrative, and that a Jew in the U.S. whose daily life is guided by Jewish values is leading a more meaningful Jewish life than one in Israel who satisfies only his own needs.

Yehoshua would have none of it, and when he was asked if any of the criticisms he has heard over the last seven weeks have given him pause, he said no, and that it was important to reopen the old debate.

But that dispute—about the value of the Diaspora (or lack of it) when a Jewish state exists—is outdated. The fact that Israel has eclipsed America as the home of the majority of Jews in the world is cause for celebration, a miracle in itself. And there is reason to worry that European Jewry will continue to decline, the victim of a low birthrate and increasing anti-Semitism fueled by a growing Arab Muslim population.

But American Jewry, with all of its problems of assimilation, is not yet ready to disappear. Its political clout, wealth, stature and Jewish renaissance among a significant minority assure it a key role in the decades ahead. And Israel, though robust in many ways, is raising a younger generation that is largely unaware of, uninterested in and uneducated about its Jewish history, heritage and culture, and its connections to the Jewish people around the world.

The disturbing fact is that Israelis are not immune from Jewish assimilation.

At a time when most American Jews have not visited Israel, at a time when Israel's chief rabbinate is seen as a source of frustration, if not embarrassment, for the anti-religious feelings it instills among its constituents, and at a time when the president of Israel indicates his lack of understanding of American Jewish life by refusing to acknowledge a rabbinic title for Reform rabbis, it is painfully evident that much divides us as Israeli and American Jews.

What unites us, though, is not only the land of Israel that A.B. Yehoshua cites as a definition (and a barrier), but the sense of peoplehood that joined us once at Sinai and established our mission as a light unto the nations.

We still have one sacred book, the Torah, and while Yehoshua has no use for texts, I am convinced that most Jews believe our love and value of learning has sustained us through the ages. He may be enjoying his last hurrah as a literary icon and center of international attention, but his message is one that divides us at a time when we need most to be together.

June 30, 2006

New York Jewish Week

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Who will learn from whom?

Yossi Sarid

A thousand times I've urged the heads of the Reform Movement to strengthen their presence in Israel, and not just go rushing around upset every time they are threatened with new decrees that the Reform public cannot tolerate. But I was talking to the wall, and because they did not sow, they are now reaping the whirlwind planted by A.B. Yehoshua, who with strange cantankerousness is presenting them with his truth as though it were the Torah from Sinai.

It is not my truth. A number of the heads of the American Jewish Committee, insulted and shocked, asked upon hearing Yehoshua's remarks: Does everyone in Israel think that way? And my answer is: No, I don't think like my friend. If in his wrathful sermon he was trying to ask, "What is a Jew?" a far more important question than "Who is a Jew?"—then there is nothing in this tirade but vain arrogance. In many respects, the Jewish community in the United States is more Jewish than the Jewish "community" in Israel, and there is no reason for it to suffer from an inferiority complex.

Look, during just this past month Jews tried to awaken and stimulate American and international public opinion, which has been drowsily ignoring the genocide in Darfur, whereas here, in the land of the survivor and the remnants, not a peep has been heard. Here, before we deport them, we lock up 150 Sudanese refugees from the sword, who are fleeing from their slaughterers. From Nicholas Kristof in the *International Herald Tribune*, I learned of a girl in Philadelphia, Rachel Kuretsky, who instead of a bat mitzvah party, organized a large rally in her city and has already, with the help of her peers, raised \$14,000 for the victims in Darfur. Where are there other children like this girl?

And many good Jews showed up last week in support of the illegal workers in America—11 million people who can be expected to be used and then thrown away. But what happens in Israel? The Jewish Immigration Authority traps foreign workers as though they were animals, making life a misery for entire families, and no one says a word. So what is more Jewish, what happens there or what happens here?

True, sometimes they are really annoying, the uncles from America, when they have the nerve to interfere in our domestic issues. As casual observers who detect every flaw, they are not happy with the treatment of black immigrants from Ethiopia or Arab citizens; they express indignation and concern, stick their long Jewish noses into our affairs and even presume to give advice and money.

They, who have been castigated, are prepared to gather to their bosoms anyone who defines himself as a Jew and identifies with the Jewish people, without checking into the ritual fringes in his family, back unto the first generation. Across the sea they understand the meaning of "religious pluralism" and the equality of all the religious streams in Judaism,

Yossi Sarid writes a weekly column for *Ha'aretz* and is a former member of Knesset from the Meretz-Yachad Party.

whereas here we are still living under monopolistic Orthodoxy that meddles in the lives of citizens who seek the good of their country, and makes those lives a misery.

Will the Jews of America learn from us a chapter in mutual support and responsibility? Will we learn from them? Who will take an example from whom as to how to raise the miserable from the dung heap, and how not to abandon people in their old age?

It is not clear what Yehoshua is so proud of when his fury descends on the entire community, and Ted Koppel and Leon Wieseltier, as its representatives, stare at him as though saying to themselves: What is happening to the writer, what bee in his bonnet has stung him? One might think that the writer and his wrath come from a heroic state that conquers its impulses, and does not conquer and occupy its neighbors and oppress them for forty years.

And one more little thing that comes under the heading of the renowned “Jewish mind” and not the “Jewish heart,” which is famous in its own right: If in New York or Boston a tissue sample of genius were taken and sent to a laboratory, it is possible that it would yield a comparatively more developed culture—and one that is even more Jewish.

Israel is very Israeli, for good and for bad, and the Jews of America are not Israelis. This is obvious. But what is so Jewish about a place where we kiss more mezuzahs, prostrate ourselves on more holy men’s tombs, cheat the landlord more, and declare buffaloes strictly kosher? And in a case of the kettle—our kettle—calling the melting pot black, nothing cooled the temper of the important writer, who arrogantly poured boiling water on his astonished hosts.

May 15, 2006

Ha’aretz

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There is no Zionism without Judaism

Natan Sharansky

A.B. Yehoshua's remarks at the recent conference of the American Jewish Committee predictably kicked up a storm on both sides of the ocean. In Israel people charged that it is not true that Israelis are indifferent to the fate of Diaspora Jewry, and in the United States they said that were it not for their continuous aid and staunch support on behalf of Israel, the country would not have survived. On both sides, again and as always, this was the usual paternalistic reaction. We know what is good for you, we help you. Without us you will not survive.

But Yehoshua's remarks about the relations between Israel and the Diaspora, as infuriating as they may be, disturb me less than the way he described his own identity: My identity is Israeli, he said. The Jewish religion does not play a role in my life; it is the territory and the language that build my identity.

This definition of identity grants a bill of divorcement to the Jewish people, to the Jewish heritage, to 3,000 years of culture, creativity, prayer, rituals, tradition and everything that is subsumed in the term Judaism, and shows a preference for the Israeli "nation," which "arose from the sea" 100 years ago. For Yehoshua—and many, many others in Israel—the only thing that is important, existential, and relevant from the Jewish perspective is what happens here, in Israel; everything outside Israel is obsolete and its fate is to be lost. In making this claim, Yehoshua undermines and weakens the justification for the State of Israel.

The internal debate among us here on the question of the country's borders, and the discussion of the correct way to achieve peace in our region, derive entirely from the assumption that the State of Israel has a right to exist—morally, legally, and historically. This assumption faces constant questioning. The Hamas people try to undermine it, as do many other leaders in the Palestinian and Arab world. And many intellectuals in the Western world, who have adopted the Arab narrative that sees in us an anachronistic remnant of old colonialism, also try to undermine this assumption. Facing these debilitating forces is the belief held by many others in the world in the Jewish people's right to a national state in its historical homeland. We can win the struggle between these two approaches only if we ourselves, those of us who live in Zion, believe this and feel this way.

Ultra-Orthodox disciples of the Gaon from Vilna who immigrated to the Land of Israel in the eighteenth century, Zionist socialists at the end of the nineteenth century, and assimilated Jews from Soviet Russia who fought for their right to immigrate at the end of the twentieth century—they had nothing in common with regard to their perception of the Jewish tradition. However, all of them saw themselves as partners in the realization of the same ancient dream, the ancient Jewish prayer to return to the Land of Israel. All of them saw themselves as part of a spe-

Natan Sharansky is a member of Knesset from the Likud Party and a distinguished fellow at the Shalem Institute in Jerusalem.

cial people and of the unique historical process of the return to Zion. This belief was the source of their strength and the only guarantee of their success.

There is no Zionism without Judaism, and there never has been. Just as the Israeli people has never had a right to the Land of Israel—only the Jewish people. It was the Jewish people that received the Balfour Declaration, and it was they who were granted by the United Nations the legal right to establish a state. It was the Jewish people that returned to its ancient homeland, for which it had prayed and longed for, for 2,000 years. For if we are talking about the Israeli “people”—how is the right of a “people” that has existed for about 100 years greater than or equal to that of the Palestinians, who have been living on their land for about 300 years? What really distinguishes it from other colonial projects that have vanished from the earth?

The discussion of our right to the land and the war between our narrative and theirs is not a purely philosophical discussion, at least not in the eyes of the Palestinian leaders. When the leaders of Hamas, like Yasir Arafat in his day, were or are prepared to consider recognition of the fact of Israel’s existence, but not its right to existence, they are not playing word games. That is why Arafat reiterated over and over again his supposedly historical claims with regard to the absence of the connection between the Temple Mount and the Jewish people. It was clear to him that the historical connection that is anchored and based in Jewish tradition is the basis for the existence of the State of Israel, and without it, the state would disappear, just as it “appeared from the sea.”

The difference between Israeli identity according to Yehoshua and Jewish identity is exactly the difference between the fact of existence and the right to exist. The difference is between a group of people that lives on a piece of land and speaks the Hebrew language, and the descendants of a people that is scattered throughout the world, who have returned to their historic homeland.

If, heaven forbid, we cut ourselves off from the chain that links us to the Jewish people, if we cut ourselves off from 3,000 years of Judaism, if we cut ourselves off from being the realization of 2,000 years of Jewish hope—for next year in Jerusalem—then we will lose the right to our existence. And in losing that right, we will be lost.

Perhaps the Jews of the Diaspora were insulted by Yehoshua’s blunt remarks, but we, the Jews of the Land of Israel, we must rise up against them, for this is a matter of the very fact of our existence.

May 15, 2006

Ha’aretz

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A. B. Yehoshua was right

Yair Sheleg

The statements made by author A.B. Yehoshua at an American Jewish Committee conference in the United States should not have surprised anyone. Since he denies having said that Judaism outside of Israel is not viable, he effectively merely reiterated his long-standing theory that Jewish existence in the Diaspora is partial, while only Jewish existence in Israel is total existence, in which every facet of one's Jewish identity can find expression.

In any event, he claims that the anger directed at him stemmed not from his rejection of the significance of Jewish life in the Diaspora, but from his very statement that life in Israel is preferable.

Among other things, those who were angry at Yehoshua rehashed the old argument over “rejecting the Diaspora,” a central tenet of Zionist history. It is, shamefully, true that “rejecting the Diaspora” turned into “rejecting Diaspora Jews”—scorn for and arrogance toward Jews who were living outside of Israel, as if they were barely human.

But this fatal error, and the need to cultivate unarrogant brotherly relations with Diaspora Jews, does not mean that the ethos of “rejecting the Diaspora” was wrong per se, or that Yehoshua was wrong in claiming that from the point of view of Jewish identity, life in Israel is preferable. The sabra arrogance of the past should not be replaced by self-abnegation in the present.

In truth, these “rating games” are superfluous and divert attention from the urgent need to jointly cultivate a Jewish identity and face up to its challenges. But when Jewish leaders in the Diaspora continue to jeer at the presumption of Israel's centrality, they ought to be presented with a few questions on this issue—for instance, regarding the decision by most Western Jews not to immigrate to Israel.

Yehoshua correctly wrote in the past that today, when virtually no Jew is forcibly barred from immigrating to Israel, the decision not to immigrate casts a heavy shadow on the Jewish people's claim of eternal loyalty to its historic homeland.

This is not just a Zionist question.

The decision not to immigrate also casts doubt on whether Diaspora Jewry is truly willing to deal with what it ostensibly defines as its existential problem: assimilation.

After all, for all the problems with Israelis' relationship to Jewish tradition, immigration to Israel is still surely the simplest and most effective way to cope with the problem of assimilation.

Nevertheless, most Diaspora Jews choose not to immigrate, and thereby testify that even if they are genuinely troubled by assimilation, their personal comfort is more important to them. This choice affects

Yair Sheleg, an Israeli journalist, is a member of the editorial board of *Ha'aretz* and a researcher at the Israel Democracy Institute.

not only the question of immigration to Israel, but also internal Jewish issues. It is reflected, for example, in the reluctance of many Jewish leaders worldwide to speak openly against intermarriage, out of fear that this will generate tension with their non-Jewish environment.

It is also reflected in the opposition of most of the American Jewish establishment to President Bush's proposal that the federal government subsidize religious education. Even though it is clear that such subsidies could significantly reduce the cost of Jewish schools, which are currently very expensive, and thereby attract many additional students to them, this opposition stems from fear of future ramifications of any change in the hermetic separation of church and state.

One can understand this fear for the future, but in a situation where only 29 percent of American Jewish children receive a daily Jewish education, and given that Jews also manage to live in countries where there is no separation of church and state, the rejection of Bush's proposal looks a bit like self-indulgence.

Historically, Jewish existence was based on the clear decision that for all the Jews' (positive) desire to integrate into their environment, such integration would be only up to the point where it began to endanger Jewish identity.

Today, the pyramid has been inverted: Even most Jews who are interested in a Jewish identity are willing to invest in it only to the degree that it does not endanger—or even raise the specter of doing so in the future—their integration into society. Without a strategic re-inversion of this hierarchy of values, it is doubtful that all the projects, resources, and energy of many good people will be of any avail—and Jewish identity is liable, in the best case, to become a pleasant ethnic folkway, if it does not disappear entirely.

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Israelis could assimilate

Eric H. Yoffie

I offer my congratulations to A.B. Yehoshua on two counts.

First, his appearance at the American Jewish Committee program has managed to attract some attention to a delicate subject that no one really wants to discuss. Yehoshua himself has been promoting this discussion for a very long time. Twenty-six years ago he published a book entitled *B'zechut ha'normaliut (In Praise of Normalcy)*, making all the points that he made in Washington. The book attracted virtually no attention, but it appears that finally the Jewish world is prepared to listen.

Second, some of what Yehoshua says makes perfect sense. In some ways, it is possible to lead a fuller Jewish life in Israel than in the Diaspora. In Israel, you can be a Jew in a completely unself-conscious manner, without explaining to a non-Jew who you are. In Israel you are free of the psychological terrors of minority existence, which exist even in affluent and secure democracies. In Israel, Jewish values are not merely a personal resource but are the context that shapes public consciousness and debate. Indeed, Israel is the sole place where Judaism belongs to the public domain, where Hebrew is the language of the everyday, and where Shabbat and the festivals provide the rhythm of the calendar. In Israel you can celebrate a Jewish holiday as a joyous occasion and not as a strategy for survival.

But Yehoshua is far more wrong than he is right.

As a secular Jewish nationalist, he does not understand at all the role of Jewish religion in the history of the Jewish people. He does not recognize that Jewish peoplehood and Jewish religion are intimately related and inextricably intertwined, and it is the interplay between the two—however fraught with tension and hostility—that has maintained Jewish existence for 3,500 years. He refuses to see that the concept of the Jews being one people with a deep connection to the Land of Israel is a religious idea, rooted in Torah and covenant, and not an ethnic or political one. As a result, he does not understand the resilience of Diaspora communities that have built a strong religious life, and neither does he comprehend the vulnerability of an Israel in which religion has been marginalized and where many Israelis follow his example and view religion with ill-conceived contempt.

Some American Jews were apparently profoundly offended when Yehoshua spoke disparagingly of Diaspora Jewry. I did not agree with him, but neither did I take offense. Our community in North America is vibrant and undergoing a religious revival, and I am optimistic about our future. In my view, those who reacted so angrily protested a bit too much. Committed, self-confident Jews, of whom there are many in North America, have no reason to *shrie gevalt* when the quality of their Jewish life is questioned.

Rabbi Eric J. Yoffie is the president of the Union for Reform Judaism.

But I was much more concerned about Yehoshua's views of Judaism in Israel. In his May 12 article in *Ha'aretz*, he conflated Jewish identity in Israel with Israeli identity and asserted that it is impossible for an Israeli Jew to assimilate. His assumption seems to be that a Jew who lives in the State of Israel will always be Jewish because the very fact of a Jewish majority assures its Jewish character. But this is absurd, and dangerous as well.

As a Reform Jew, I believe in a diverse, pluralistic Judaism, but that is not the same as saying that Judaism can be stripped of its religious character and can become whatever you want it to be. If Israelis lose all connection with Jewish religious practice and belief, and assume that simply living in Israel is enough to make them Jewish, there is every reason to believe that Israelis can and will assimilate, even if it takes them a bit longer to do so. There is no reason logically or historically to think that Israel could not find itself fifty years from now populated by Hebrew speaking, once-Jewish *goyim* who are perfectly content to separate themselves from the Jewish people around the world.

The hostility to religion that exists in Israel came into being for a variety of reasons: the influence of socialist Zionism that prided itself on its secular principles; the disastrous impact of Israel's monopolistic religious establishment on the religious attitudes of average Israelis; and the failure of Reform and Conservative Judaism to do what is necessary to build a grassroots religious presence in Israel. Yehoshua is a product of these forces, whether he recognizes it or not.

The key for responsible Jewish leadership rests not in calling him names, but in asserting what he denies: that Judaism is rooted in covenant and Torah; that Torah-free civilizations have no staying power and in the absence of religious commitment, Israel will not remain a Jewish state; and that Israel needs not less Judaism but more, including a modern, moderate and pluralistic form of Judaism that will appeal to its well-educated citizenry. If we proclaim these beliefs and work to make them a reality, Israeli and Diaspora Jews will continue to argue and debate, but at least they will do so in the context of shared commitment, understanding and faith.

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Appendix: A.B. Yehoshua's comments at the AJC Centennial Symposium

The following is an edited transcript of the remarks of A.B. Yehoshua at the AJC symposium. Mr. Yehoshua's comments are reproduced here in order to clarify what was said as distinct from what was understood or interpreted in subsequent transmission. To view the entire panel discussion, go to www.ajc.org.

I am what I am. I have a country. I have a language. I have a people. I have a framework. I have a reality, like the Norwegian, like the Danish. I cannot be Danish. I cannot [be] Norwegian, as you cannot be Argentinean. You are what you are, and I am what I am, and the fact that people speak here about the possibility of being others never came to my heart, to my mind. I am what I am. I have a clear identity. I don't see the "other." Who is the "other" that I have to be like him? It's your problem. It's not my problem....

There is a joy in [celebrating], and I'm afraid that I will have to spoil it a little bit. We speak about 100 years of the American Jewish Committee that started in 1906. If you regard this past of 100 years, it is a great failure of every institution, not only in America, but everywhere—a great failure of the Jewish people, a people that lost in the middle of this [past] century a third of its members for nothing—not for territory, not for religion, not for money, not for ideology.... [T]hese Jewish people have not seen what is going to be. They misunderstood history. They misunderstood the opportunity to save themselves when this opportunity was offered to them through ... the Balfour Declaration, the possibility of the Jewish people to create a state before the Holocaust.

So when you look backwards, don't count only the Nobel Prizes that we got. This is not important at all.... We [must] look, first of all, honestly at our failure. Of course, it is also the failure of [the] European and the German civilizations ... but this was also our failure. We did not know how to defend our children. So ... we have to start ... [by] think[ing about this failure] if ... [we] want to think honestly ... [about] the future. This is one thing.

The second thing is, of course, why [there was] this failure, why we could not regard [the events] properly. All the red lights were ... [flashing] during [our] history about this conflict between us and our [hostile] environment. All the red lights were indicating this will not be finished ... [well]. On the contrary, this Holocaust could [have] happened in the Middle Ages, and it was postponed in a certain way.... [There was] the possibility of giving and offering the Jews in 1917 a homeland by the British when the number of the Jews in the world was 18 million. As the Jews ... [participated in] a great wave of immigration from East to West, only thirty thousand Jews came to Israel, to Eretz Israel after four years of the Balfour Declaration.¹ If there was not ... this tiny percent that had

1. About 32,000 Jews came to Palestine between 1920-23.

created this [future] state, we could come [out] after the Holocaust ... without this state....

So when we regard the future, let's first of all admit ... clearly that we are coming ... from a very big failure ... if ... the subject of this symposium [is] the past into the future.

We did not create a state before the Holocaust. The Jews did not come, even ... [as] the Jewish problem ... was becoming more and more crucial, and painful in the end of the nineteenth century. In the '20s there were four doors that were opening to the Jews to solve this problem: the Russian Revolution, which was promising liberty to all human beings and all the citizens of Russia; the democracies inside Europe; immigration to America; and Zionism. In the 1920s, the situation of the Jews, the Jewish problem was almost solved.... In ten years three of these doors were closed.... Soviet Russia had imposed upon the Jews [that] they cannot go out of the country. The immigration to America was stopped, and the [European] democracy was becoming fascist. The only door that [was opened] if the Jews would exploit it [was Zionism]....

If there was a state, with about three-quarters of a million ... Jews, that would [have] come already from Poland and Germany in the '30s when the big wave of fascism and Nazism was entering Europe we could [have] defended ourselves totally differently. We would [have] die[d] for something. We would [have] die[d] for the territory....

In ... [the Warsaw] Ghetto they fought there ... without arms ... for about two weeks, three weeks against [an] enormous German army because they had the opportunity to fight. I say it not only on the basis of struggling with Nazism. The question ... [is] taking responsibility ... [for] your existence. We ha[d] been object[s] in history, and we came to Israel. And this [was] the success of Zionism.

[The] success of Zionism against all prophecy was the fact that ... the Jew took responsibility ... [for] all the components of his life. He doesn't imitate anything more than ... [France] is imitating Belgium, or Belgium is imitating America, and you are imitating someone else. The question is not imitating. We are living in a totality that is, of course, changing, as everything [changes]. You are not [an] American like Jefferson. There are a lot of differences between you and Jefferson and Washington or Mark Twain.... But you are still American because you are in the framework. You can change [with]in your country, but you cannot assimilate. [Similarly,] you cannot say there is one Israeli who has been assimilated during these sixty years of [the state's] existence....

Every country is different...; every country has a different history. When Britain was bombed in the Blitz, was London like Buenos Aires? No. There was a war. There are times when there are wars, ... when every country has its own history, and own character. [Among] all the people here, ... everyone is different, but there's no one here who is more different than the other.... So we are different in relative differences ..., but not [in the greater] differences [between countries]. We [the speaker and

the audience] are different, when you are sitting in America, and you're thinking about Israel....

... My agenda is different.... If ... in 100 years Israel will exist, and I will come to the Diaspora [and] there will not be ... [any] Jews, I would say it's normal. I will not cry for it. I will say it's normal. Why? Because it's very natural that every one of you will be American, and extend his identification with the country in which he's living, with all the components of life in which he's living.... I don't say I want it, but I would say ... it's normal.... [I]t's very natural that every one of you will be American, and ... he did not have to think about what's happening here and there. It's finished.

But if ... Israel will disintegrate little by little ... by the option of the Diaspora—(we already have 700, 800 [thousand] Israelis who are living among you)—... globalization, ... [or] perhaps another war, another threat, ... and ... Jews ... would say ... Judaism doesn't depend on territory, [that] the key word is “survival,” and perhaps survival will be better in the Diaspora or America, and Israel will not exist anymore, [then] for me, personally, Avraham Yehoshua, there is no alternative to be a post-Zionist Jew.²

I ... will not have [and] cannot keep my identity outside Israel.... [Being] Israeli is my skin, it's not my jacket. You are changing jackets—from Argentina you take your jacket to Brazil, from Brazil ... to America, from there, there, and then you're moving. You are changing countries like the Jews have done all the time, changing countries like changing jackets.

I have my skin, the territory, the smell of the territory, the smell of the language—all this is my identity, whatever religion is inside this, or is not inside.... [T]o play all the time with the pathological interaction with the anti-Semite, what he thinks about you, what he speaks about you, this is not my game.

Identity is something that you belong to, first of all, to country, to territory, to framework, and things like that.... What we have done in the Diaspora is [to] keep all this territory, and language, and identity, and framework of peoplehood in mind. But it wasn't something abstract. We didn't live on abstract things. We live also and all the time [with] the idea of “Next Year in Jerusalem” and the redemption will be there and [that] we have a language of our [own], and [that] we have peoplehood, and we are responsible to each other—all the components that are ... in other people, but for us it [was]... [in] part imagination. This was the only difference.

The fact that part of our identity is only in our imagination, is not in a real thing. Jewishness like Americanism is what Americans are doing for good and for ... bad and the decisions we are doing everyday. And these are the Jewish decisions—[based on] Judaism as it was in the time of the Bible or the time of the Second Temple. What are we doing? Are we going to torture a Hamas person in order to get information about

2. Yehoshua uses the term “post-Zionist” here to mean “post-Israel,” not as it has come to mean in academic parlance, viewing the narrative of Israel's history in a demythologizing and reinterpreted manner.

another terrorist, about another terror attack that is coming? What is the extent [that we may go in] torturing him? Are we going to sell arms to dictatorships in order to improve our industry and to give more employment, but at the same time give arms to others? This is a decision that ... religious Jews ... [have never] done in Diaspora, but in Israel we have to do it. So this is a totally different kind of context.

You are not doing any Jewish decisions.... All of the decisions that you are doing are done in the American framework. You are not deciding about the Iraq war through [a] Jewish aspect. You are deciding it according to ... American interests ... because this engages all America. So this is ... totally different. You are playing with Jewishness—plug and play.... You're playing [in] a certain way with Judaism.... Now everyone will return to his country, to his city, engaging himself in his work, whatever he does in an American context, in a hospital, in a law office, or whatever he is doing, all his life [he] will be engaged in American decisions.

... I'm not discussing what is Jewishness; I have to answer questions about the withdrawal, the Disengagement....

I have to say to you,³ I very welcome your [Cynthia Ozick's] dual loyalty, but I ... don't get it.... I would like that you would have one loyalty, in Israel, and participate. The fact that Israel is in your mind, that doesn't help me. From time to time your mind is disturbing me, I have to say to you, Cynthia, because you don't see clearly what is happening in Israel, and because you are not with us to decide, for example, the question of territories and things like that. You are living with all your loyal feelings to Israel, [but] you are living in myth about Israel, and not in [the] history of Israel.

This is what annoys me, why I speak with anger. That in the recent years ... you [American Jews] are tired of Israel. You are becoming detached [from] Israel. After the '67 war, you had been all so enthusiastic about Israel. You are not coming anymore, or you are coming very few. There is not aliyah. Israel ... is not now a nice story.... There are so many problems. You cannot be ... as proud about Israel as you were thirty years ago. So [you] detach yourself, and ... you will find your Jewishness reading another book of history and going to synagogue. And you will go more and more to synagogue—you have to go more and more to synagogue because you cannot keep your Jewishness only by reading a certain book. You have to go to synagogue, and to pray, and to attach yourself to the classical way in which Jews have been preserving their Jewishness. Survival is the key word for Jews. This is the only great value of the Jews....

The problem is the price of survival, the limit of survival....

The question is what kind of life, not the idea of survival.... If in the end of the time, let's say, there will be still a Jew in the moon, connected to American Jewish Committee on the moon, praying "Next year in Jerusalem" on the moon, the last Jew—you will see that as success. But if the Japanese will be on the moon, and he will be the last Japanese, it will

3. In response to a comment by Cynthia Ozick that "I have a dual loyalty—total loyalty to the country where I live and the same feeling toward Israel."

not be a success for the Japanese. For you it will be success, that ... we have ... proved our survival. This was our mission, to survive. We are putting ourselves in the most difficult conditions, and we proved that we can survive. And we lose people all the time. We have been five to six million in the end of the second temple, we arrived to the eighteenth century with one million, but we survived. We lost, we are losing, all the time people, but we survive. The question is the price of the survival, and the content of survival.

... A Jew can survive with his identity, no problem. When the Americans came to Iraq, there was a Jew there. They found a Jew in Baghdad. He was sitting there, a Jew. He is not less [of a Jew] than you.... He did not have a synagogue, he did not have any ... Jewish community, but he was a Jew. He could survive under the regime of Saddam.... This is our capacity. This is also our problem.

I want to change the conception of the survival, and put it on another level, on the content of survival, on the totality of the elements that you are responsible for. This is a different agenda.

... The difference between you and me [is that] I'm married. ... I'm married, and you are ... [to] be nasty [about it] ... playing with the idea of marriage. I have to deal with daily work, daily decisions, small decisions. I have to ... know how the soldiers have to act in a barrage in the occupied territories, how to defend themselves [at] the same time, not to torture other people. I have to give practical questions. You are creating the Talmud. What is the Talmud? The Talmud is a discussion all the time about practical things. Now, I have studied the Talmud, but I don't read anymore the Talmud, and believe me, most of the people here do not read the Talmud.... They think about the Jewish text.... The problem to me is not text. The problem to me is life. Life. And life is decisions every day about many things, and this is how Jewishness is done for good and for the bad.

... What [does] it mean, "Israeli?" You have to know that if Moses would enter this hall, if Isaiah would enter this hall, if Jeremiah, if David, you would ask them, "Identify yourself—who you are?" They would say, "We are Israel, the sons of Israel." You [would] ask them, "Are you Jewish?" and they would say, "We don't know the term. What is Jewish?"

... The term "Jew," for the first time, was mentioned in the Bible ... when a Jew in Babylon, or in Persia, Mordecai, was called a "Jew." The name of the people [nation] ... is called People of Israel....

The name of the land is the Land of Israel. What means Jewishness? You are calling [it] all the time Jewishness. The original name of this people is Israel.... When I say I'm an Israel[i] ... I was just returning back to my original name.

... The fact is that when the State of Israel was created, and the Declaration of Independence was done, the last sentence [was] the declaration of why we create[d] a Jewish state that is called the State of Israel. We turn[ed] back to the original name, and the name of the land was the same thing.

... So when you ask me, you are dealing with your Israeli identity and not with your Jewish identity, I don't know what is my Jewish identity. My Israeli identity comprehends all my Jewish identity inside this.

... It's something ridiculous. You're sitting here in the Library of Congress ... and you are Jews, and this is a Jewish convention, but if [we] ... would meet in Jerusalem, among Israelis, you would say what is Jewish in this convention? What is Jewish in your gathering together? Whatever you are doing here in America, or in France or whatever, when a Jew is touching something, this is Jewish. But when you are coming to Israel, you have to give a double proof [as to] what is Jewish, and what is only Israeli. But the Israeli is the identity of everything, and this is Jewishness.

The State [of Israel] is a new kind of organization, but the state was before.... It wasn't called a state ... in the First Temple, or in the Second Temple. But this was a territory of a people, like ... other people, the Egyptian people, the Babylon[ian] people. There was also the Israeli people, and what we were yearning all the time, and what you are praying all the time, and what you have done in the Seder is all the time saying, we want to return back to this situation. This is what you are saying. So I have done what you have said, or my ancestor has done what you said. Now you blame me and say, "What is your Jewishness?" ... In what sense? How ridiculous is this kind of question?

... Every American who would stand here would not understand in what sense you're speaking. Yes, there is a possibility to keep Jewishness outside the country [of Israel]. Yes, I know it. This was also our disaster. This was the price we paid in history. You enjoy it, you do whatever you want. I don't want to be in this term of ... double loyalty. I would like to have one loyalty, and ... have many other affiliations. I have also learned [a] pluralistic identity, and I have many affiliations to art and to literature and things like that, like you and others.

... And if I would ... finish with the question of the future, the future of Israel depends, first of all, [on] if Israel ... returns to borders. We had blurred our borders, and we had, again, done the Jewish thing, and entered into the belly of another people. Now it's so difficult to pull out of this belly.

... There is a minority.... There is a national minority inside the majority; he is [the] Palestinian with Israeli citizenship, like the Basque in Spain are Basque with Spanish citizenship. This is a situation that is in many other countries; it doesn't contradict my identity, it doesn't decrease our identity.

Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations of the American Jewish Committee

The Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations, founded in 1982 as an arm of the American Jewish Committee, is an interpreter of Israeli and American Jewry to each other, and seeks to build bridges between the world's largest Jewish communities.

Specifically, its goals are achieved programmatically through a variety of undertakings, including:

- An intensive immersion seminar for American college faculty in the history, politics, culture, and society of modern Israel, conducted by Brandeis University. The goal is to enable college professors to teach courses on their home campuses on modern Israel, in all its complexity, as a Jewish and democratic state.
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- Studies of the respective communities, particularly of their interconnectedness, published in both Hebrew and English. These have included monographs, among others, on “Who Is a Jew,” “Post-Zionism,” and Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel.

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Chairman

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Director



American Jewish Committee

*The Jacob Blaustein Building
165 East 56 Street
New York, NY 10022*

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