

Who is a Jew? Covenant and Contract

I.

At first blush, explaining the uproar within American Jewry as Israel came perilously close to amending its Law of Return appears a rather straightforward task; there is, after all, a demographic foundation for the American Jewish reaction. There are now some hundreds of thousands of intermarried couples in the United States, and a significant number of these have involved conversions to Judaism, conversions the vast majority of which were performed by Conservative or Reform rabbis. So revision of the Law of Return is an issue that is taken quite personally by very many American Jews, including many among the most visible and the most vocal members of the Jewish community in

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America. There is not a single Jewish federation in the United States, for example, in which the response by its leaders to the "Who is a Jew?" debate has not been sharply affected by immediate personal experience. No one listening to the debates at the various national or local meetings during the past several months could have failed to be moved by what became, very early on, a virtual mass confessional, distinguished leaders talking openly and with evident anguish and anger about the effect of the proposed amendment on their own children and grandchildren, about their brothers' and sisters' children.

But of course, even the immediate question is not yet answered, for the obvious fact of the matter is that if we round off the rate of aliyah from such people, or from American Jewry at large, for that matter, we come up with zero percent. That being so, it would seem that there is no practical consequence whatever to the proposed amendment to the Law of Return. Why, then, the anguish, why the anger? And why,

beyond even these reactions and far beyond the families of intermarried Jews, well into the body of biologically "pure" American Jewry, is there so widespread a sense of downright betrayal?

There are two immediate explanations. First, for better or for worse, American Jews have understood that they are part of a covenantal relationship to Israel: they owe, and provide, Israel unconditional support; Israel, in turn, provides them unconditional acceptance and yes, even refuge. And now, quite suddenly, Israel proposes to impose conditions on its acceptance of American Jews. The fact that those conditions will affect only a tiny number of people directly is beside the point; we are dealing here with an axiomatic foundation of American Jewish life and of the most basic understanding American Jews have of Israel. Nor, the axiom having been violated and the unconditional having become conditional, can we be certain what tomorrow's new conditions, revised principles of selection, may be.

And second, we are not dealing here with a *halakhic* ruling by a peripheral source of authority; it is not a *bet din* or a council of sages, but the government of the State of Israel itself, in the clear and cold light of day, that was on the verge of asserting the new definition. It is one thing to have the *halakhic* definition implemented through administrative regulation; it is quite another when it is formally and officially endorsed by the allegedly secular authority of the state at the highest level.

But so stated, the explanation leaves much, far too much, unsaid. If, for example, ours is a covenantal understanding,

why was the response to the first 22 times the amendments came before the Knesset — this last was the 23rd time — so muted? If, as I shall soon argue, American Jews feel themselves at home in America, why does the availability of Israel as refuge matter to them so?

And so forth. The truth is that there is much here that is puzzling, and that there is not one of us in America who anticipated so passionate or so widespread a reaction. Marginal Jews and committed Jews alike, observant and secular alike, liberal and conservative alike, leaders and followers alike — it was impossible to have a conversation, however casual, with any Jew in the past several months in which the subject was not raised, and in which people did not express a sense of profound grief, quite as if something that mattered very much to them had died.

So we are required to go beyond the immediate explanations, and consider in some detail the cultural and religious, the historical and political sources of the American — and also the Israeli — response.

II.

The basic building block of America is the individual. For better or for worse, America is obsessed with the individual, and that obsession colors the relationship of the individual to the political society, to the polity. For us, it is as if each of us has signed a contract with the polity: Here is what I owe the state, and here are the limits to what the state may claim of me. It seems to me that the citizens of Israel, by contrast, have entered into something more like a cov-

enant with their polity, and a covenant has no limits.

War is part of the reason for the difference, of course. In time of war — and in Israel there is no other time — the citizens are mobilized. But there is more to it than war; there is also the culture of the region, the fact that Israel is in the Middle East of the *millet* system, in the Middle East where the *hamullah*, the clan, still matters so.

Size also contributes: Israel is in so many ways a neighborhood posing as a country. When the submarine *Dakar* went down some years back, with some 70 sailors drowned, an Israeli research institute learned that one of every three Israelis knew at least one of those who were lost. Imagine: in Vietnam, 57,000 Americans were killed; like most of my friends, I did not know a single one.

There is also the fact that the Jews in their own land are ripe for a pervasive sense of the collectivity. Jewish religious and cultural teachings alike are oriented towards the behavior and the destiny of the people, not towards individual salvation. And there is as well the heritage of socialism that Israel's founding fathers bequeathed it; it is a long distance from John Locke to A.D. Gordon or Berl Katznelson.

The consequence of all this is that in Israel there are no limits to the claims of the state, and no clear boundaries, for that matter, between the society and the state. Or, to put the matter somewhat differently: we in America can have a wall of separation between church and state because we accept a fence of separation between society and state; in Israel, there is no wall between synagogue and state, and the fence between

society and state is barely six inches high.

I do not intend a judgment by this distinction between contract and covenant. The American way has costs as well as benefits. Our scandalously low rates of political participation may well be one of the costs of a government that is seen as separate from and sometimes even adversary to the inviolate individual. Both Carter and Reagan ran for president against the government, a style that would be utterly incomprehensible in Israel. And these days, in particular, one can legitimately ask whether all Americans understand that they are partners to the American social contract. If the much heralded "civil religion" that allegedly informs American life is real, it is apparent that we now have a growing number of agnostics, and even heretics. Huge numbers of Americans perceive themselves as outside the system.

For now, I want merely to draw attention to a distinction and a difference that are most often overlooked, and that are a major barrier to genuine understanding each of the other, and that are critical to an understanding of the American response to the "Who is Jew?" matter. We in America are used to civic lives of very limited liability. As much a political junkie and an American patriot as I am, I can effectively "drop out" whenever I choose, retire to the private space that is my inalienable right.

I can imagine an Israeli's response to these distinction: "What a round-about way to make the case for marginality, what a tortured defense of homelessness, of precisely that which Zionism and Israel came to cure; what a *galut*

mentality! Life is about commitments and investments, and you seek to define your preference for standing aside as a cultural imperative rather than calling it what it is — a moral choice. You take marginality, which is an inherently unhealthy, constricted condition, a condition which, because it inhibits commitment, is less than fully human, and try to make a virtue out of it."

I shan't quarrel with that. Marginality is what we know. I am suggesting that our marginality stems not only from the condition of being Jewish in a Christian country, but also from an American political culture that permits, legitimates, and even reinforces it. And I am suggesting that what may indeed have begun as a condition has evolved into a cherished value. I am suggesting that a political culture of limited civic liability — call it marginality if you will — is a defining characteristic of America.

And what most Israelis find it exceedingly difficult to understand about us is that, our profound attachment to Israel notwithstanding, we have become, in terribly serious ways, Americans.

The living culture of a people must, in the end, reflect the sights and sounds and assumptions of its environment, the actually experienced. That its desert and its mountains and its wars and its neighbors have all helped shape the living culture of Israel is plain; what was not predicted and not expected is that we in America, too, would finally leave Warsaw and Minsk and the shtetl behind us, leave the lower East Side behind us, that to Mount Zion and Mount Sinai we would add the Green Mountains and the Rockies, that this land would become genuinely our land, from California to the New York island, from the Ivy

League to the Electoral College, that we would become, as I have said, Americans — or, more precisely, become American Jews, a new thing under the Jewish sun, a community forged out of a particular synergy that is authentically our own.

What are the consequences of our at-homeness in America for our understanding of the "Who is a Jew?" debate?

One consequence is that the category of citizenship has virtually sacred status with us. We are, after all, the children and grandchildren of immigrants; our parents and grandparents were converts to America. They may have begun their sojourn as refugees, but they finally became Americans by choice. Come watch the tears of pride as immigrants to America raise their right hands and swear to uphold the constitution of the United States; it is a sacred ceremony you behold.

And no one asks, once you have made it through the quota system, who your parents were. An Englishman must pass the same test and take the same oath as a Mexican, a Mexican as a Russian, a Russian as a Vietnamese. The conversion is based wholly on consent, not on descent. If the government of Israel now tells us that citizenship in the Jewish state must henceforward be *kahalakhah* (according to halakhah), we are distressed, for such a system of classification by the state is entirely alien and offensive to us.

A second and still more fundamental consequence of the kind of America I have been describing is the simple fact that we, all of us in America, are also Jews by choice, or, as I have said, by consent. Not so in Israel, where a more organic Judaism — Hebrew as the spoken language, the Bible as a geography text, Shabbat as the national day

of rest, and so forth — produces Jews by circumstance. Israelis may, of course, choose to become explicit Jews, but there is no compelling need for them to do that; we, on the other hand, can be no other kind of Jew.

I am convinced that at the heart of the "Who is a Jew?" debate is this divide between choice and circumstance. We, American Jews to the core, believe that a person chooses an identity; in Israel, identity is assigned. Our identity is fluid, it is nowhere inscribed, we carry no document that makes note of it. We resist and resent the notion of identity by assignment, recalling not only the murderous purposes to which it was so often put, but believing it also a violation of the personal autonomy to which we we have become so fiercely committed.

That holds for entering Judaism and it holds for existing Judaism. The halakhah may say that Yisrael, Yisrael, *af al pi shechatah hu*, that a Jew cannot stop being a Jew, that Judaism is, accordingly, an essentially irreversible biological fact. American Jews, however, in their vast majority, do not accept that biology can or should fully determine identity; more, they actively reject the idea that the state is entitled to take notice of biology.

And yet a third consequence of our Americanness has to do with the very different role that religion plays in the two Jewish communities, in America and in Israel. Because we in America must be self-conscious Jews or not be Jews at all, and because in America, religion is so thoroughly protected from state intrusion, our Judaism is expressed principally through religious affiliation. Such affiliation is often quite independent of theological conviction; it

is more a sociological than a doctrinal phenomenon. So even the secular among us often light candles on Shabbat or attend services on the High Holidays. Nor have we, nor is it conceivable that we might have, a chief rabbi to pronounce authoritatively the right way and the wrong. In Israel, one need not cross the street to be a Jew — and if one does choose to cross the street, there stand the guardians of the gate, saying this is the way it must be — our way or not at all. Inevitably, the answer of very many Israelis is not at all. In Israel, the Orthodox own Judaism; back in America, each of us owns it for himself, herself. And once again, it is not comprehensible to us that the state will intervene to specify the terms of our possession.

(Here I am bound to add that I regard the lack of genuine religious pluralism in Israel as a tragedy for Judaism. For every *ba'al teshuvah* who has been won over by Orthodoxy, there are a dozen Jews-in-search who have been driven from any Judaic sensibility by Orthodox imperialism. And nothing so divides American Jews and Israeli Jews as our different understandings of the uses of the religious tradition.)

And now all these differences, these fundamental contrasts in basic understandings, have been starkly revealed. That is one reason why, whether the debate over amending the Law of Return has now been finally resolved or whether it crops up yet again, much of the damage has already been done. The tolerable ambiguities of the past have become stark contradictions, and while I have no doubt that American Jews will go on loving Israel and caring for Israel and giving to Israel, I have as well no

doubt that a distance has opened up between the two communities that will be exceedingly difficult to bridge. It is not merely that American Jews feel betrayed because the Israel they have viewed as a certain haven has now proposed to admit Jews as citizens selectively. It is not only that Israel may be prepared to permit the word "Jew" to be a matter of assignment rather than of choice — and that is a critical element of our liberal *weltanschauung* that we are not prepared to concede, not even in the name of Zion. It is also — perhaps above all — that we have learned, to our regret and consternation, that "we are one" is a fundraiser's slogan, not an anthropologists's finding.

III.

And now let us add to these observations on culture and religion some observations on history and politics.

Very many American Jews — and nearly all those in Jewish leadership circles — remember quite vividly the birth of Israel. And, in large measure, remain mesmerized by the events surrounding Israel's birth. It is no small thing to have experienced, if even vicariously, the transition from the Kingdom of Night to the Republic of Hope. It is no small thing to have etched in your mind and on your heart the image of Israel as reunion, the memory of the bent and the broken men, women, and children stumbling off the planes and the boats into the arms of their loved ones — and if there were no loved ones left for them, then into the arms of others prepared to help them stand straight and whole again.

For those who carry such memories with them, Israel remains an irrevocable enchantment; whether or not it is *reshit t'zmichat g'eulateinu*, the beginning of the blossoming of our redemption, it is the foundation on which our capacity to hope rests. It is often suggested that Israel has given us a new self-respect, and perhaps that is so. But far, far more important, the birth and the continuing existence of Israel restore the validity and utility of hope. So when America's Jews rise to Israel's defense, it is not only for the sake of their embattled cousins, but also for their own sake: without Israel, hope dies; without Israel, therefore, in a very real way, life would not be worth living.

And so rise to Israel's defense we do. But plainly, such behavior has become more difficult and more delicate over the decades. The Israel we defend today is no longer the unmodified Israel of swamps drained and deserts made green, of immigrants ingathered and lives repaired. It is also the Israel of Jewish terrorists, of corruption both petty and grand, of Sabra and Shatila and of administrative detention, of Jonathan Pollard and of "Ghandi" and transfer. It is the Israel of the intifada and the iron fist. It is the Israel that vacillates gracelessly between a government of national incompetence and a government of national incoherence.

In the early years, when the data from the earthly Jerusalem began to encroach on our pristine image of Israel as the heavenly Jerusalem, America's Jews managed to accommodate the data by recalling Chaim Nachman Bialik's classic line, "I yearn for the day when there will be in [then] Palestine a Jewish jail, with a Jewish guard on the outside and a

Jewish prisoner on the inside." "Normalization," we called it, and we took a perverse kind of pride in the evidence that the Jews are fully capable of having, as Ze'ev Hefetz so cleverly put it, our own hard hats and hustlers, alongside our undoubted heroes.

But the day came — for some in 1967, for others in 1977, for still more in the summer of 1982 — when the category called normalization was no longer adequate to contain all the data.

It was then we created, together with the Israelis, a wonderful new category, one capable of containing an almost infinite amount of disturbing data. It is called media bias, a device that enables Jews to deny what our eyes are seeing and our hearts are feeling. No matter the evidence, our way has become to blame the messenger; easier that than to give aid and comfort to Israel's enemies; easier that than to leave transcendence and enchantment behind and deal with the gritty and ever-so mundane reality.

And so, over the years, America's Jews have become not only Israel's defenders, but also Israel's apologists, virtuosos at euphemisms, at excuses and alibis. But for a new generation, a generation that knows Israel as fact rather than as faith, as problem and paradox rather than as solution and salvation, neither normalization nor media bias is sufficient; all the euphemisms and the alibis wear increasingly thin. Our most recent data on these matters suggest that we may well be witnessing a significant generational shift, a transition from disappointment to a kind of self-protective distancing, and perhaps from distancing to actual estrangement.

So, for example, Steven M. Cohen's latest survey of American Jews finds

that 75 percent of those in the 55-64 age bracket describe themselves as "close" or "very close" to Israel; for the 25-34 age bracket, the figure drops to 56 percent. Among those 55 to 64, 73 percent agree that if Israel were destroyed, it would be one of the greatest personal tragedies of their lives; in the 25 to 34 age bracket, the figure is a third lower, just 50 percent. Perhaps most tellingly, because it describes behavior rather than attitude, 68 percent of the older cohort report that they often talk with friends or relatives about Israel; among the younger people, just 41 percent report such conversation.

This may all be an entirely natural phenomenon: perhaps the normal condition is modest affect, peripheral attachment; perhaps it is the generation of the mesmerized that is the exception, and it was foolish of us to suppose that its intensity could be sustained. But surely sustaining it is what we have sought and seek to do. And we are bound, in any case, to consider the obvious alternative explanation for the attrition of feeling: the new generation is a generation that knew not David. Alas, it is Arik that it knows.

Anecdotes make bad evidence, but I cannot get out of my head my daughter's report that last year, when she was a first-year graduate student at Northwestern University, several of her new non-Jewish friends said to her, in sum, "Nomi, there's one thing we can't understand about you. In so many ways, you are a caring, a liberal, a progressive and humane person — yet you have this real love for Israel. How do you reconcile the two things?"

Now here I must be crystal clear: I say all this not to blame Israel for having

been less than we expected of it, for having failed to fulfill our naive fantasies. It is not, in my view, Israeli behavior that leads to the disenchantment and the disillusion; it is the American Jewish community's insistence on avoiding reality, on squeezing the data into such categories as might keep enchantment and illusion alive, on refusing to acknowledge Israel's imperfections; it is the community's trafficking in magic and kitsch, in messianism and in melodrama, its reluctance to seek a relationship based simply on family ties and mutual respect. If there is blame to be placed on Israel, it is only on account of its readiness to encourage, to pander to our childishness: if we view Israel, as we have, as leaders in both communities have encouraged it to be viewed, as the harbinger of redemption, then the growing awareness of its radical imperfection must either be denied or it must lead to heresy; if Israel is taken, as it is, as more a faith than a place, people are forced either into idolatry and zealotry on the one hand or into blasphemy on the other, into the despair that is inevitable when they learn that this God, too, failed.

The fact, of course, is that Israel's failures, its imperfections, its enthusiastic pursuit of normalcy, are not especially remarkable, however lamentable some of us may think them. The people of Israel are people; some move with grace, some have clay feet. That is how it is, always and everywhere, with real people. The governors of Israel are sometimes statesmen and sometimes petty power-seekers; that is how it is with politicians, always and everywhere. Those who believed that the air of Jerusalem makes those who breathe it wise, *she'avor yerushalayim mahkchim*, did not take

account of the pollution that characterizes our time, the conventional pollution of a modern industrial society or the particular pollution of a people so burdened as we by a nightmare that will not go away. It was and is a grave mistake to suppose that this broken people would rise up and leap gracefully from the death camps into the end of days; somewhere, we were bound to stumble, and stumble we have. And it was a graver mistake still not to prepare the Jews of America for such falls, to pretend to them that all was well in Israel when quite plainly all is not well anywhere.

Perhaps, given the circumstances that surrounded Israel's birth, it could not have been otherwise. Perhaps there really was no way for American's Jews to respond to Israel save by transforming it into a *mysterium tremendum*, an enchantment beyond logic, beyond reason, beyond the tedium of facts. But whether or not the American Jewish community is culpable, it is, I believe, responsible for that transformation, and hence also for the disturbing consequences we now witness: for the older generation, disappointment; for the younger, distancing; for all, disenchantment.

That is why I believe that the "Who is a Jew?" debate is only in part what it appears to be about, a proposed amendment to the Law of Return. It is also a surrogate for the larger and ongoing issue, the issue of how we respond to an Israel that is so distant from our dreams, that is so plainly not turning out as we, both in America and in Israel, had hoped it would. For 40 years, years of stunning achievement followed by years of brutal disappointment, we in America have refrained from criticism of the Jewish state. But now comes an

issue which, as we perceive it, belongs to all of us, to us not less than to the Israelis, and so at last we feel entitled to speak up. And when we do, what comes out is a drenching thunderstorm, because all the pent-up frustration of our historic silence is now released. The words may be about who is a Jew, but the message is about much more than that.

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that a new precedent has now been set, to conclude that now that we have found our voice on this issue we will no longer be so timid in speaking up and speaking out on other and rather more important issues — in particular, on the human rights and the national aspirations of the Palestinians and on the Israeli response to those rights and aspirations.

Would that we might — not so much for Israel's sake, the truth is that we have little or nothing to add to Israel's ongoing debate of these matters. No, it is for our own sake that I wish we were prepared to wrestle more honestly and more openly with the fateful questions that will determine the direction and destiny of the Jewish state. For I deeply fear that the alternative to such openness and honesty is a withholding of passion, the displacement of intimacy by indifference. I deeply believe that Israelis, too, would prefer the risks of open debate to the damage of indifference, which is the direction in which a rising generation is now headed. Alas, we are not witnessing today, as some of us had hoped we might, a new maturity in the relationship, a revision of our messianic fantasies into something more modest. Instead, we are witnessing a revolution of collapsing expectations — or, if not yet quite a revolution, now one step and then another away from the enthusiasm

of the early years and towards a terrible estrangement.

If I am correct about all this, the apologies of the Presidents Conference, whatever their value in the public sector, are not an accurate reflection of American Jewish opinion; indeed, in the Jewish sector, they come as a growing embarrassment, and reflect the views of an ever-diminishing constituency.

But all that is another matter, for another time. For now, my point is simply that one of the contexts in which the "Who is a Jew?" question has unfolded is the context of an Israel in whose leadership American Jews have declining confidence, of an American Jewish community that has had to adjust from the Israel symbolized by Yoni Netanyahu to the Israel symbolized by Jonathan Pollard.

IV.

One cannot fully understand either the relationship in general or the reaction to the "Who is a Jew?" debate in particular without taking note of the other side of the coin of relationship, of Israel's attitudes towards American Jewry. I have already alluded to American Jewish disappointments in Israel; it is helpful to consider as well Israel's disappointments in America's Jews.

Our existence alone would be sufficient to disconcert and, in some ways, to disappoint the Israelis, for according to Zionist theory, America's Jews should long since have been pogrommed to death. And indeed, Zionist theory was very nearly correct in its grim prediction. But in the end — or should I say for the time being? — at least with respect

to American Jewry, Zionist theory was wrong, as it was wrong in claiming that if somehow the Jews of the Diaspora managed to escape or otherwise avoid the pogromist's knife the open society would get them, we would be assimilated to death. Whether through rape or through seduction, we would be undone, we could not survive.

And yet, blatantly, America's Jews have not only survived; here and there we have thrived — and it is not merely the Jews who have thrived, but, in ways almost no one predicted just a generation ago, Judaism as well.

Comes Zionist theory to assert that the Jews delude themselves, that in fact what we take to be thriving is merely a thin veneer, an illusory health that masks the fatal illness of irrelevance: Israel is not merely the center of Jewish life, it is the purpose of Jewish life. In refusing as America's Jews do to make aliyah, we betray not only Israel, but ourselves and our children, for surely we shall soon enough succumb to weightlessness, to pointlessness, to Judaic purposelessness. It is no accident that Israeli demographers consistently project for America's Jews a gloomier future than do our own equally competent demographers; in effect, Israelis cannot afford to take the evidence of Judaic success in America seriously, for so to do would be to admit the irrelevance of Zionist theory. And if it be argued that very many Israelis have on their own and for their own reasons concluded that Zionist theory is, indeed, irrelevant, then it must be noted that in this one respect, there are powerful reasons for Israelis to cling to the classic Zionist view. For if we are right, if it is in fact possible to live a meaningful and a satis-

fy Jewish life in New York or in San Diego, then what is my cousin doing hanging on in Tel Aviv or in Yeroham, where his life is both more difficult and more threatened, where he must raise his children to kill and be killed?

The success of America's Jews and the possibilities of American Judaism therefore come to Israelis as a challenge and as a provocation, and in a fundamental sense as a radical insult which they simply cannot afford to admit. And so they deny that success and that possibility, and view with disdain and even contempt those who insist on them.

On might suppose that as against the insult there would come the comfort of being loved as unconditionally as American Jewry loves Israel. There is here, however, a kind of Virginia Wolf syndrome that colors Israeli appreciation of the American Jewish commitment to Israel. Specifically, whether arising out of classic Jewish self-hate or from some other source, Israelis believe themselves to be unlovable; hence they cannot respect those who love them. More, they may accept but cannot respect a love that appears to them as mindless as it is intense.

So, for example, at a conference a year ago in Palm Beach, the audience was addressed on one evening by Abba Eban and on the next by Benjamin Netanyahu. When a visitor who arrived on the next day asked how the audience had responded to these night and day presentations, he was told that seventy-five percent of the audience had agreed with both. Shall the Israelis respect such a response?

Or, more generally, the Israelis know that the American community will go to great, even extravagant, even distorting

lengths to come to terms with Israeli behavior even when such behavior is the subject of brutal self-criticism within Israel itself. Long after the vast majority of Israelis had accepted that the 1982 invasion of Lebanon was a disaster, most vocal American Jews were still twisting to justify that invasion.

Given our behavior over the years, Israelis are entitled to suppose that were Ariel Sharon, for example, to become prime minister of Israel, we in America would issue press releases describing what a wonderful family man he is, and a farmer too, and would likely add that he cannot be the brute so many think he is, since he is a Jew and Jews, as everyone knows, have a unique sensitivity to human life.

And so forth. If I am correct about all this, if, whatever else America's Jews are to the Israelis, we are also a challenge and an insult and an object of contempt, if, as I believe current events demonstrate quite clearly, we are simply not taken seriously by Israel, if only a tiny number of Israelis have anything more than a superficial familiarity with who is an American Jew and what America's Jews are about, and if, in addition to all that, the Jews of America steadfastly resist the logic of aliyah, the American Jewish profession of love and commitment is transformed from a gift to be treasured into a curiosity to be manipulated and exploited. "Don't worry about the American Jews, who are neither real Americans or real Jews, who are most of all not serious people; their sentimental attachment to Israel is so essential to them, to their own sense of identity, that they will finally accept whatever we say or do. At worst, we will merely have to expand the hasbarah budget for a while."

Again: I say all this not to criticize the Israelis. Given the theories on which the Jewish state rests and the behaviors in which we in America engage, Israelis have come to a very nearly inevitable conclusion. I say all this because if we are to talk seriously about moving towards a more mature partnership, radical transformations of perception, of understanding, of underlying theory are required.

V.

It is plainly time for us to invest in the development of a new theory of Zionism — that is, in a new theory of Israel-Diaspora relations. A patchwork theory that was first developed to describe the condition of East European Jewry in the late 19th century and to prescribe for it can hardly work for American Jewry more than a hundred years later. It is bound to give rise to false expectations and to result in mutual disappointment. American Jews may live far from Zion, but they cannot, neither for their own sake or for Israel's sake, be thought peripheral to Jewish history. It has taken us in America many years to come to understand that, to develop the self-confidence and the self-respect that now at last we begin to display. Classic Zionist theory has no room for that self-confidence and self-respect. But if there is to be a healthy relationship between the two major Jewish communities of our time, it must go beyond a grudging acknowledgement of this new phenomenon; it must make room for our strength and take comfort from it; it must understand us as we understand ourselves, in order that there be not only

self-respect but reciprocal, mutual respect. That is the minimum foundation for a healthy relationship. And perhaps, just perhaps, the shock of our response to the "Who is a Jew?" Debate can serve as the occasion for a re-examination of who we are and of the claims we have upon each other. If so, we shall have begun to build a new and sturdier bridge to connect two communities that are inevitably profoundly different yet can remain if we so will it.

Building Jewish Culture in the Diaspora: Diaspora-Israel Partnership in Strengthening Jewish Education*

There is an overriding commitment which Jews throughout the world share — the survival of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. In the face of any external challenge to that survival we are one — Am Yisrael. Human and material resources are mobilized — alliances are forged — and paths are found to address the problem.

The issue of the perpetuation of the Jewish people in other than physical terms is far more complex. Questions such as the quality of Jewish life, the nature of Jewish culture, and the definition of a Jewish society come to the forefront and to these questions there are a variety of responses. Thus confronting the challenge of building Jewish culture

in the Diaspora brings us face to face with many issues about which there is as much disagreement as consensus. There is, however, a basis for affirming that Jewish education is a central concern for Jews everywhere as they attempt to perpetuate a Jewish culture and peoplehood that are continuous from our past, responsive to our present realities, and attuned to the challenges of the future. While Jewish education alone cannot resolve the problems of Jewish estrangement, alienation and assimilation, it has a critical role to play in determining the continuity of the Jewish people. To better understand how Israel and the Diaspora might strengthen Jewish education everywhere, there is a need to analyze the foundations on which Jewish education rests, the goals toward which it seeks to move, and the realities in which it takes place.

The foundations of Jewish education lie in a vast inherited tradition, a shared historical experience, and a world view that is shaped by core values. For some,

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