

Judaism as Culture

The Beauty of Secularism

Presented by the Posen Foundation

Judaism as a Culture

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Forward

The "Judaism as a Culture – The Beauty of Secularism" collection was published [originally in Hebrew] with the encouragement and support of the Posen Foundation.

The Posen Foundation aims to promote Judaism as a culture, among others, in an attempt to strengthen secular Jews, by responding to the question which has affected the self-confidence of many, namely, "*In what way am I Jewish, if my way of life is not religious?*"--a question, whose very formulation, raises the notion that Judaism is only a religion.

Those who raise this question, which poses a difficult dilemma for many, are forgetting that there are two points of departure: The first asserts that, "*If I am Jewish, I must become orthodox and maintain a religious way of life*"; while the second posits that, "*If I don't observe the mitzvot, I am not a Jew, but I don't care.*" The latter assertion is infinitely more dangerous to the future of the Jewish people than the absence of observance.

This collation of articles is dedicated to the idea of Judaism as a culture, not only a religion; that Jews who are not religious can still be good Jews. A Jew, according to famed Hebrew-language author, Yosef Haim Brenner, is Jewish by his [her] very existence, i.e., he [she] is a Jew because he/she is a Jew.

Most of the world's Jews are not religious in the Israeli [orthodox] sense. They are secular, but respect Jewish tradition and support the right of religious Jews to live in accordance with their beliefs.

Jewish culture created over the last generation is, for the most part, secular. Secularism views Judaism as a culture, not a religion. It regards Jewish culture as based on the ever-renewable spiritual treasures of the past, an openness to world cultures, and an attempt to benefit from one's own culture as well as from universal culture.

There are many ways to be a Jew. Maintaining a religious way of life is only one such. To be Jewish means to be acquainted with the rich and varied culture that Jews have created throughout their history and to go on creating that culture. To be a Jew means to respect the views and way of life of those who are not part of one's camp, and to seek ways of working together toward the continuity of Jewish culture. It means identifying with the fate of the Jewish people, while remaining open to the big world, rather than being confined to a narrow field.

The collection of articles on "Secular Jewish Culture" is dedicated to the idea that Jewish culture can be secular and that secular culture can be Jewish. This is a multi-faceted notion, as are the collections' writers and articles. Among them, one finds academics who describe the face of secular Jewish culture, or discuss a specific issue within it; activists in the field, who bring of their experience in promoting culture that is both Jewish and secular; thinkers who present their own personal views on the matter; and interviews with Daniel Posen, the director of the Posen Foundation, responsible for its navigation—who is also the son of its founder, Felix Posen; Prof. Ron Margolin, who heads the Ofakim Program, which trains teachers to teach broad Jewish culture; and MKs Nitzan Horowitz and Shlomo Mula, both members of the secular lobby in the Knesset. There are also instructive articles on field work conducted by bodies devoted to educating young people to regard Judaism as a culture.

There are writers whose ideology is secular, and religious writers who observe *the mitzvot* to varying degrees, are acquainted with the many facets of Judaism and are not part of the religious coercion campaign waged by some in Israel. These religious writers recognize the right of every man and woman to live their life in their own way; much as secularists demand the right of every person to be secular or religious, and to live his/her life as he/she sees fit.

Jewish culture comprises both religiosity and secularism. Cooperation between secular and religious is what made this brochure possible.

David Shaham
Editor

Judaism, a Jewish State & Social Justice

by Dr. Ovadia Ezra

The summer of 2011 brought a concept back into the public discourse that has been missing from it in the last decades. Up until then, the slogan, "The people demand social justice" seemed foreign to Israeli existence, as if the concepts underlying social justice--equality and solidarity--are in contradiction to both Jewish and Zionist values; and the state is a product of its leaders' vision.

Amazement over the content of the demand for social justice was partly due to the fact that after the fall of the Soviet bloc (in the wake of which the remains of the social welfare state disappeared also from many Western European countries, including Israel), a demand with social content seemed totally disconnected from reality. An additional reason was wonderment as to where content reflecting universal values, instead of, for example, patriotic, particularistic national values, had been introduced into in our new national separatist existence. Long forgotten is the fact that the values on which the Zionist movement was founded--which also form the basic values of the Jewish State--were far different from those which mark Israeli society today.

To Begin with *Altneuland*

In tracking the vision of the Zionist leaders' realization of the idea of a national homeland for the Jewish people, we can begin with Benjamin Zeev Herzl's (somewhat utopian) book, *Altneuland*, "Old-New Land," translated [from German] into Hebrew by Nahum Sokolov, under the title, *Tel Aviv*. In this book, Herzl presents a vision of a secular and for the most part, egalitarian Jewish State--both in the mutual perceptions of its citizens and in the attitude of the State's Jewish citizens to its non-Jewish citizens. For Herzl, being a non-Jew did not mean being inferior or having fewer rights. In his view, the Jewish State recoiled from racism and opposed any form of dispossession (a lesson drawn from what he himself had known and experienced in Europe of the 19th century, in which in many places, Jewishness was a characteristic which inflicted pain and suffering on those possessing it).

The Jewish State which Herzl saw in his mind's eye aspired to progress, equality openness and tolerance. Yes, it was a naïve vision that assumed that one could settle millions of Jews in Eretz Yisrael, without dispossessing the Arab population already living in it. Ahad Ha'am criticized that assumption, a critique that proved correct two

generations later; and one, which two generations after that, began to threaten the Jewish character of the State.

Rome and Jerusalem, a book by Moshe Hess, lesser known than that of Herzl, expressed a similar view on the desired nature of the national state of the Jewish people. In that book, the Jewish State is presented as realizing clear socialist values, some of which Hess (a communist before becoming a socialist) was able to trace back to ancient Jewish sources. Already at its very inception, the Jewish people applied values which underlie the demands for social justice. The notion of a *shnat yovel*, a Jubilee Year, in which slaves are released and lands revert back to their original owners, for example, is just one of the wonderful ways to avoid the accumulation of capital in the hands of the few through dispossession or exclusion of others. Another ancient custom, which Hess regarded as the realization of progressive ideas, is the *shnat shmita*, or sabbatical year, in which debts which borrowers were unable to pay back in time, were forgiven.

In Hess' book, the national aspect occupies a central position in the establishment of the State. In line with the renaissance of the nationalist idea in Europe of that same period, Hess believed that the Jewish people as well, deserved a State. However, at the heart of his vision, lay the principles of equality and cooperation among creative people. In his mind's eye, he saw a socialist state based on Hebrew labor, aspiring to egalitarianism, developing modern culture and leading the way to progress.

Realizing Universal Notions

Even the central pre-state political movements and those present at its founding were socialist workers parties that aspired to realize universal notions of cooperation and egalitarianism. Prominent pre-state forces included many organizations which regarded Zionism as the liberation movement of the Jewish people on the one hand; and viewed socialism, as a worldview sustained by universal principles, on the other-- values which should and can be realized at one and the same time.

The best known movement prior to World War I, was the Poalei Zion Party (later to become the *Achdut Ha'avoda* Party), whose prominent leaders became the heads of the State upon its founding. David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Berl Katznelson, Yisrael Shochat, and the party's spiritual father (who did not get to come to Israel), Dov Ber Borochoy, regarded the values of egalitarianism and socialism as the basis for the realization of the Zionist enterprise and the purpose of Jewish settlement in

Eretz Yisrael. Along with its rival party, *Hapoel Hatzair*, the Young Worker--whose prominent leaders included Yosef Sprinzak, Eliezer Kaplan, Yosef Aharonovitch, and spiritual father Aaron David Gordon--it established the *Histadrut*, or General Federation of Labor. These two parties later merged, forming Mapai, the Workers' Party of the Land of Israel, whose heads led the Jewish State upon its inception.

From many of the names mentioned here, one can gather that that the ideological, political and social infrastructure on which the State was established, and according to which it was led in its initial years, was mainly a socialist one which aspired to a just and egalitarian society.

Thus, the State of Israel was conceived in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust of European Jewry, on the basis of a mainly secular ideology: socialist Zionism. There were some who regarded it mainly as a refuge for the *she'erit haplita*, the surviving remnants. But, it aspired to much more than that. Its founding document, the Declaration of Independence Scroll, presents the values to which the State's founders aspired, and which the new State purported to realize: *"The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations"*—a highly ambitious, value-laden promise, full of hope and optimism.

Despite its economic and social hardships, in its initial years, the State attempted to adhere to the model of a welfare state that also cares for the weak and needy.

The Alienated Awaken

With the years, the socialist values at the base of the State's founding were replaced by ruthless capitalism; and the universal ideas, which the founders of the State aspired to realize, were gradually substituted by nationalist and religious extremism. Israeli society turned from a society that reflects solidarity, mutual responsibility and compassion, into a ruthless, alienated, heartless one. For many in it, life became a desperate battle for survival.

And so, in the summer of 2011, hundreds of thousands--who were sick and tired of hopeless battles for survival, who felt alienated from society and lacking the means to affect the national agenda--awoke and embarked on a desperate battle to revive the dream of a welfare state. They saw their counterparts in neighboring counties rising up against oppression and the negation of political liberties and understood that economic oppression also limits personal freedoms and renders society despicable; that one must rebel against it, just as one must rise up against any form of oppression. In their non-violent but firm way, they swamped the streets with a call for social justice, for re-establishing the welfare state and for a return to the very same values on which the state was founded and about which its founders, dreamt: egalitarianism, cooperation, mutual responsibility, and yes, also compassion. This is perhaps the rearguard battle on behalf of socialism as a whole. It is certainly the last battle here to bring back values of egalitarianism and a social welfare state. If it fails, and the demand for social justice plummets into the abyss of oblivion, or is preserved as a vague memory of times past, then all that will be left of the founding values of the Jewish State will be cynicism, opportunism, heartlessness and greed.

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What is Jewish Secularism?

by Dr. Yedidya Itzhaki

In the past, non-religious Jews were known as "free thinkers". The label had a positive connotation, stressing the potential positive values implicit in the worldview and way of life of people who were not religious. Even among the religious, labeling people who were not religious "free", was the accepted norm, albeit with a negative connotation. "Religion" was at times described as *ol torah u'mitzvoth* [the yoke of Torah and *mitzvoth*]. The religious regarded those who were not religious as Jews who having cast off the yoke, were free of Torah and *mitzvoth*.

In recent years, the term "free" has been replaced by "secular", which has a negative association, as implicit in it is an assumption that while there is sanctity in a religious way of life, such sanctity is missing from a way of life which not religious; i.e., the life of those who are not religious is secular, i.e., devoid of sanctity.

The significance of this distinction depends on the way we interpret the concepts "sanctity" and "secular" and our associations with these. In its original form, "secular" was not the antithesis of "religious", but the opposite of "holy", as is written in the Book of Leviticus [10:10], "*And that ye may put difference between the holy [kadosh] and the common [chol].*" This quote underscores a quality referred to as "holy", which is unrelated to religious ritual. Thus, the days of the week are known as "secular days" [*yemei chol*] and the days that mark the first and last days of Pesach and Sukkoth, *chol ha'mo'ed*, or "secular days of the festival" (literally, "the secular [non-holy] part of the occasion").

For the Talmud sages, someone who was not a Cohen [priest] was secular. There is a fable about a high priest who while walking came upon a "secular" person. In Aramaic, a "secular" [*chiloni*] person means "a stranger", one who is not of the seed of Aaron. The association of the term "secular" with someone who is not religious is what creates the antithetical pairing, secular-religious, which presupposes that religion is by its very nature a matter of "sanctity". Consequently, that which is not religious is secular.

Lately, the term sanctity [*kadosh*] has taken on new meanings. It sometimes replaces the term "value", when speaking for example of "the sanctity of life" [*kdushat hachayim*]. Hence, one can take this to imply that a way of life which is not religious is devoid of values, because it is as if without "sanctity"; whereas a life of values is inextricably linked to a religious way of life. This is a claim which is often made especially in relation to educational values. The secular believe that the value content of secular humanism is in no way inferior to that of religion; that in many ways it is much superior to it, even if not associated with the value of "sanctity" in the religious sense of the concept.

The concept "secularism" is used by the secular despite certain reservations about it, as it has become a term that pertains to a non-religious way of life. Its primary significance, a lack of sanctity, is slowly disappearing. Although etymologically, it might sound a bit strange to talk about values of sanctity found in secularism, we can accept this paradox, partly because life itself is replete with contradictions and mainly because, as mentioned, the original meaning of the term "secularism" as a way of life devoid of sanctity, has been altered and now signifies a way of life that is not religious.

To Be Secular

Humanistic secularism is a worldview that perceives humans as autonomous beings, sovereign over their world, their bodies, their acts and their thoughts, in contrast to the religious worldview which ascribes their sovereignty to a supernatural entity, God, who is beyond the grasp of humans. To be secular is therefore, to have a humanistic worldview and a way of life that does not emanate from a religious worldview and is not associated with, linked or committed to, a religious framework. A religious framework is usually a voluntary or institutional-communal organization --but can also be regional, national, political, educational, or social--that functions on the basis of the religious affiliation of its members, or those who are in some way associated with it.

Our understanding of secularism is partly dependent on our understanding of religion: a secular worldview and way of life is the antithesis of a religious one and is based on a repudiation of religious views, frameworks and ways of life. This does not in any way mean that secularism is in essence "anti-religious" and, therefore, devoid of values of its own. Secularism is also not "religion-lite," or as the religious depict it, "casting off the yoke of torah and *mitzvot*." It is an autonomous, humanistic

worldview with its own values--values such as tolerance and pluralism. While these values somewhat negate a religious worldview, secularism has no quarrel with religion as such, in that it recognizes the right of religion to exist--so long as it does not impose itself on those who do not want it. Moreover, it views religion as part of man's sovereign right over himself.

The gaps between secularism and religion emanate from the assumption by religion that it has sole access to absolute truth, rejecting all other interpretations or viewpoints, i.e., in so doing, it renounces the very basis of secularism. Thus, while secularism does not reject religiosity's right to exist, religiosity rejects the right of secularism to exist. Religion, it should be noted, is not an essential component of human existence, but a complex of the world that characterized human thought during certain historic periods and has assumed the mantle of absolute, universal and biding truth. All religions recognize the basic assumption that religion is not part of man's existential essence, as they all assume a supernatural "revelation" which bestowed belief and religion on humankind; what they call "knowledge of God" which mankind did not possess prior to that Godly revelation.

Secularism, which regards the sovereignty that human beings exercise over themselves and the conduct of their life as an essential ingredient of their status as free human beings, seeks to give them back their sovereignty and primal universal liberty, albeit at a more highly developed level, which in its view, preceded the primal Divine "revelations". Today, secular freedom means recognizing our limits and knowing ourselves and our world by virtue of modern science and contemporary thought.

Religion is by its very nature, total; i.e., encompassing the total being of those who adhere to it. It pertains to one's total existence, thereby determining one's primary identity. A religious Jew is first of all an adherent of the Jewish faith, just as Christians or Moslems are firstly Christian or Moslem, and only then members of the nation to which they belong, or citizens of the country in which they reside. Religious identity often supersedes familial identity, i.e., for many religious people, commitment to religion supersedes commitment to family.

Secularism is, therefore, the acceptance of a primary identity, unrelated to religion. We have seen that this identity is expressed firstly in a way of life and a worldview characterized by humanistic values that recognizes the sovereignty of human beings

over themselves, their bodies and their ways, within the framework of a free and agreed-upon social and civil contract. A secular worldview does not restrict itself in any area, and does not bind one to a given vision of humankind and the world. Secularism calls for a plurality of views and perceptions and encourages a broad and multi-faceted understanding of reality and ways in which human beings can live. The existence of a broad range of opinions, perceptions, viewpoints and lifestyles, with openness toward them all, constitutes a highly important value in the secular worldview. It includes a perception and an acceptance of people's right to be different and empathy toward those perceived as "deviant"; and is opposed to interference in the personal affairs of individuals. As in secularism there is no duty to religion, it does not object to the existence of traditional practices, even if religious in origin. However, it does not view these as fulfilling a personal or communal obligation within a religious framework by virtue of a supernatural commandment. Rather, it regards these as cultural values whose acceptance is subject to a person's free will and degree of understanding.

Moreover, secularism is not another religion or a substitute for existing religions. It is not an all-encompassing system. It does not posit any kind of absolute truth and offers no individual or collective redemption. It is based on openness to highly diverse ideas and opinions. The secular, therefore, see no need to preach or proselytize. Secularism believes in actively defending the right of religious people, of all religions, sects and beliefs, to practice their way of life and to observe rituals as they see fit, within the framework of civil law, without external intervention; and insists on providing material assistance toward this end.

On the other hand, secularists demand the right to live their own lives in their homes and communities in their own way, free from obligations or even symbols imposed upon them drawn from a religious worldview and way of life that are incompatible with their secular vision of world.

Jewish Secularism

Hence, one can make the claim that secularism is a personal stand, a way of life maintained by individuals within their own personal frameworks. If that is the case, how can we then postulate a Jewish secularism, as that notion presupposes a collective secularism? Moreover, does Judaism not also contain within it an essential religious component, whose repudiation negates the very existence of Judaism? And what is Jewish about a secular worldview that rejects Jewish religion?

Indeed, if we accept the premise that Judaism is in essence only a religion, we will not be able to talk about Jewish secularism, because secular religion is impossible. There is no such thing as a Christian or Moslem secularism, Hinduism, or Buddhism, not even voodooism. For hundreds of years, Judaism was more than a religion. It stood for a much more complex entity and content than simply that of a religion. Judaism was different from other religions of the Middle Ages and of the modern era, in being a religion of one people--comprising religious belief, a way of life and self-determination of the Jews as a people. Those who perceived themselves as Jews by religion also regarded themselves as part of the Jewish people; and vice-versa, those who were members of the Jewish people also accepted the Jewish religion. For hundreds of years, there was no other way of being Jewish, because the nations in which the Jews lived did not accept them as full citizens if they did not convert; and Jewish communities preferred segregation, in the belief that Jews don't belong to these nations, but are a separate people.

Things changed fundamentally in the late 18th century, when central European Jews were granted equal civil rights (Emancipation) and many wanted to adopt the identity of another nation, the German nation for example, while at the same time continuing to hold onto the Jewish religion, i.e., the Judaic belief and way of life. Indeed, they regarded Judaism as a religion like all other religions and rejected membership in a people by virtue of their Jewish identity.

In contrast, at the end of the 19th century, movements sprung up within Judaism which emphasized the national aspect of Jewish existence and consigned the Jewish religious component to a secondary, historic status.

Today, Judaism exists in various forms. There are Jews who regard their Jewish identity as being solely a religion and view their national identity as being elsewhere, such as America, for example. Others perceive themselves as linked to the Jewish religion. There are Jews in Reform and Reconstructionist communities who are marking new paths in Jewish religiosity that highlight the link between the Jewish religion and the Jewish people--which they view primarily within communal frameworks in the countries in which they reside, such as America, for example. Orthodox communities, which are not a large minority of world Jewry or in Israel, are the only ones to cling to a traditional view of the unity of religion and peoplehood.

There is, therefore, a Judaism that is non-religious, as there are people who define themselves as Jews who do not adhere to the Jewish religion and don't observe its *mitzvot*. A majority of these repudiate the intrusion of its institutions into their personal lives. Their Jewish identity is, therefore, secular. For the most part, they are not organized within frameworks based on the secularism of their members. Their secular worldview, personal repudiation of religious beliefs and frameworks, and even more so, their lifestyle, which is not subject to religious directives, is what determines their secularism.

The argument that there is no such thing as secular Judaism, only "Jews who observe the Torah and *mitzvot*", and "Jews who have cast off the yoke of Torah and *mitzvot*," emanates from a worldview which is basically religious. The term "*mitzvah*" has acquired the meaning of a good deed. However, its origin lies in the verb "to command", giving an order from high that cannot be questioned, pertaining to the 613 *mitzvot* (the mythological commandments given by God to the children of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai); and the many supplements and reservations introduced by *halachic* sages in the course of subsequent generations. *Mitvot* are, therefore, halachic rulings that determine the way of life of religious Jews. Secular Jews have no "Torah and *mitzvot*" that obligate them. Such Jews should not be regarded as people who "fail to observe *mitzvot*," but as people who are governed by a humanist value system--in a normal democratic regime, products of the human spirit, and civil law that include all-encompassing social responsibility. Gleaned from a secular standpoint, the Torah and its *mitzvot* are, indeed, highly important cultural values. Many *mitzvot* in the Torah regulating inter-personal relations are based on exalted universal values and as such, are also likely to be accepted by the secular--not as God-given *mitzvot* at Mount Sinai, but because of their intrinsic value. This is not the case in relation to archaic *mitzvot*, or *mitzvot* whose essence lies in religious ritual, or those which reflect inhuman, zealous, racist, sexist perceptions found in Judaism's code of *mitzvot*. Such "*mitzvot*" negate the humanist worldview at the core of secularism. And while these *mitzvot* might be of interest to us historically and anthropologically--as they are undoubtedly part of our culture--they are certainly not part of our way of life.

Many non-observant people do observe some religious rituals. Almost all Jews have their sons circumcised; many celebrate a son's Bar Mitzvah, or marry in a religious ceremony. Some fast on Yom Kippur, or light candles on the Sabbath.

Does this make them religious? And if not, where are the boundaries of secularism? We will discover the answer to these questions when we recall that the mainstay of secularism lies in a humanistic worldview and a way of life which is not subject to religious *mitzvot*. Thus, persons who observe some *mitzvot*, in the belief that these were God-given, are religious, even if they allow themselves some laxity in observance. But, if their observance of *mitzvot* is linked to maintaining tradition, to a belief that they are cultural values, or out of respect for the memory of our fathers and forefathers and not out of a belief in the *mitzvah*'s Godly source, then the choice to observe or not to observe a *mitzvah* is a human choice and therefore, a clearly secular act.

An additional question concerns the Jewishness of a secular worldview that rejects Jewish religion; i.e., what makes a secular Jewish worldview, Jewish; and what is the essence of Judaism as a nationality?

In Israel, Jewish secularism is based first and foremost on daily life in a Hebrew-speaking Jewish environment. Along with Jewish secularism, both in Israel and worldwide, it is nourished by the Hebrew and Jewish culture of Jewish history. It is based on the Hebrew language, culture and literature and millennia of Jewish holy and secular writings. Secular Jewish culture also includes the Jewish religion as one of Judaism's central pillar, a Jewish way of life, including the rich religious literature, generations of Jewish philosophy, both religious and non-religious, and Jewish culture, created in Hebrew and in other languages over the last generations and in our time. All these elements and many more form part of the national culture upon which our Jewish identity stands. Our extensive cultural heritage is the basis of that identity.

One more question: is the existence of Jewish secularism not a divisive factor, which negatively affects the unity of our people? Does secularism not imply severance with the age-long tradition of the Jewish people? For centuries, Judaism maintained a measure of unity as the religion of a single people, and did not tolerate ways of life which diverged from those determined by its spiritual leaders. But, that unity was preserved at the very high price of losing large factions of the Jewish people. Those who did not behave in accordance with rabbinic/*halachic* directives were often excommunicated and banished from the Jewish community. Despite this, the Jewish community has always contained a diversity of opinions and contradictory perceptions, and diverse lifestyles of various groups and communities. For the past

300 years, the Orthodox Jewish establishment has not had the power to expel those which it considered had strayed from the Jewish people. Consequently, there are diverse streams within the Jewish people, both secular and religious. Religious Judaism, too, is not monolithic. It comprises Orthodox, Reform and Conservative movements and more. Moreover, there are sects in Orthodox Judaism which are mutually hostile and reject each other. Hence, Judaism is a multi-faceted, pluralistic framework, with diverse customs and opinions. It is not homogeneous. One can choose from a wide spectrum of belief systems and lifestyles and still be considered a Jew.

Jewish secularism in its diverse forms is a legitimate option of Jewish existence. There is nothing negative about such plurality. On the contrary, it can enrich the spirit of the nation and the power of its cultural creativity. Moreover, it can ensure the existence of the Jewish people in the generations to come. The Jewish people is unified in its ancient culture--the primary component of Jewish identity. Secularism, therefore, does not constitute a severance with the age-old tradition of the Jewish people. Moreover, more than any other group or sect within the Jewish people, the secular are engaged in expanding and invigorating contemporary Jewish culture--on the basis of generations of Jewish cultural tradition--thereby rendering secular Judaism the preserver of the generational continuum of the Jewish people.

Dr. Yedidya Itzhaki is a researcher and literary critic. The article is based on the introductory chapter to his book "*An Uncovered Head: Jewish Culture – A New Perspective*," published by Sifriat Hapoalim.

Know How to Respond to the Orthodox (Book Review)

by Tova Birenbaum

On the day Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, I traveled with my class to Rachel's Tomb [on the outskirts of Bethlehem]. While on the bus, we learned of the assassination. I was sitting by the window, gazing at the *siddur* [prayer book] in my hands, when suddenly I noticed circles of dancers beginning to form in the parking lot. Hats and *kipot* were jumping up and down and a joyful cry could be heard: "There will be a big funeral tomorrow!"

At that moment, something in me changed. I could literally hear the bursting sound of the bubble in which I had lived.

Since then, nothing in me has remained as it was.

On that same evening of November 4th, I set out on a personal journey in search of my identity, which began at the Tombs of Rachel and Rabin and is ongoing. I have a long list of questions and my aim is to come up with the right answers, ones that will enable me to look in the mirror and recognize myself.

One of the troubling phenomena, a direct outcome of the assassination, was the rejection of anything pertaining to Judaism by the public which defines itself as secular. The notion that the assassination was the result of compliance with Jewish *halacha* and its rabbis painted the religion as a whole and all who represent it, in dark colors. Ignorance of Jewish cultural heritage contributed little to the issue; and the orthodox hegemony, which rules over so many areas in the Jewish public arena, doomed Judaism in its entirety.

In juxtaposition to the antagonism toward Judaism--which was not born with the assassination, but took on unprecedented proportions in its wake--a new renaissance movement arose in Israel, which sought a substantive encounter and dialogue with Judaism and its symbols. Communities of study, prayer and holiday observance--with a secular or traditional pluralistic orientation—came into being. Groups and communities were happy to discover that Judaism has many faces; that it is essentially

multi-voiced; and that one can study Torah and celebrate holidays in independent and creative ways.

The erosion of the uni-dimensional identification of Judaism with religion--with *halachic* practice as its mainstay--is slow, but can no longer be ignored. The view that Judaism can be experienced as a culture and that a person can be secular in his/her way of life--while at the same time, committed to Jewish culture, its preservation, development and the creation of new spheres relevant to present-day realities and social issues--is broadening.

The process which is dynamic and responsive to changing realities, constitutes a counterweight to antiquated, fossilized religious state laws, which dictate a way of life that is usually not consistent with the values of liberty, equality, tolerance and humanism. There is a high degree of dissonance between exposure of Israeli civil society to the range of options offered by modern Judaism, and orthodox hegemony that precludes their full realization.

One of the reasons for the gap between changes the Israeli public is undergoing, and the static legal and political system, is an absence of meaningful public discourse on the Jewish character of the State of Israel. Large segments of society are still barred from exposure to alternative ways of presenting and experiencing Judaism in the Israeli public arena.

Average Israelis don't feel at home in their culture. The Jewish way of life they choose to observe is not maintained as a result of substantive knowledge, but through the performance of rituals. Even if they have chosen to live a secular life, they sometimes feel inferior to other Israelis considered to be the representatives of Judaism in the State, the ones whose opinion is regarded.

The secular liberal public lacks a coherent belief system. Secular Judaism that brought about the State of Israel's establishment and built it, should recognize its own value and the rights emanating from our very existence here in Israel.

Dr. Yedidya Itzhaki's book, *The Uncovered Head*, was published several years after the Rabin assassination. It formed part of the momentum of Jewish revival and battle for democracy that characterized those years. In his book – which will shortly appear in English translation thanks to the Posen Foundation – Itzhaki seeks to provide a response to those wishing to crystallize a Jewish worldview on the basis of knowledge, not only intuition. In clear and flowing language, Itzhaki sketches a conceptual and historic picture of secular liberal Judaism. With noteworthy thoroughness, he outlines the important concepts at the base of the discourse on culture and identity, and by so doing, assists those interested in getting acquainted with the liberal Jewish story from its inception, to acquire a solid base.

Itzhaki begins at the beginning: What identity is – from renewed clarification of the triad - religion, nationality and people - to "coherent comprehension of concepts often tossed up into the air with no real understanding": humanism, liberty, pluralism, tolerance and more. The book guides its reader along the history of secularism--from the beginning of the Renaissance and humanism at the end of the Middle Ages--and focuses on pluralistic Judaism, which during long periods of Jewish history formed an integral part of it. In a simple way, Itzhaki demonstrates how the processes of secularization in society affected the Jewish communities in the East and in the West, and brought about the disintegration of the triad - unity of belief, *halacha* and peoplehood.

Mixing in wonderful literary and philosophical quotations, Itzhaki describes a fascinating historic course: Hasidism, which emerged at the end of the 18th century, began to gnaw at the unity of orthodox authority. Along with the emancipation and enlightenment, it paved the way for a return to Jewish pluralism. The Haskala Movement, which espoused the integration of Jews into their non-Jewish environment, separated the nationalist component of Jewish identity from its religious elements, belief and *halacha*. And then, while the orthodox focused on the religious components, the socialist Jewish movements--with Jewish nationalism as their focus --emerged. Itzhaki identifies the various streams in Judaism which crystallized during this process: orthodox, reform, conservative, traditional and secular; and shows how the secular *aliyot* (immigrations) shaped the secular character of the state-in-the-making.

He describes the controversies over the character of the young state, which were quickly settled to free up time for matter of real importance. The picture which emerges from Itzhaki's portrayal is apt to be perceived as that of a minority persecuting the majority and using political manipulations to impose its way of life, with no consideration for the rights of the minority. In relating to the *Who's a Jew* Law, Itzhaki focuses on limitations on commerce and culture on Shabbat, the prohibition to sell *hametz* during Passover, entrusting matrimonial matters to rabbinical courts and the exemption of yeshiva students from military service.

What is missing from his description is the fact that the secular majority never really fought to alter these laws. Leaving the status quo in place for over 60 years is testimony to a tacit agreement by the secular public, whether for lack of awareness of alternatives, or because of simple conservatism.

The Uncovered Head is being republished and the latter phenomenon is testimony to the fact that the book is more important than ever. If there is to be a real exchange on the Jewish character of the State, we first need to be familiar with the history and concepts. It is important that the secular public understand that the option it has chosen is not only legitimate, but offers an unparalleled positive alternative for people to exercise sovereignty over their choices and to apply cultural Jewish elements to their way of life, in a relevant and respectful manner. Beyond being armed with knowledge, in the form of "know how to respond to the orthodox," the discourse within the liberal secular camp also needs to expand. Apologetics in face of the religious camp must stop; and a new age of creative discourse committed to Jewish culture, in the positive sense, must begin.

Only when we are finally secure in our sovereign secular identity, will we be able to get to the important questions we haven't dared address: who are we, the Jewish people? Why are we sitting here in the Middle East? And, how will a Jewish and democratic state be established here?

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Judaism as a Plurality of Jewish Cultures

by Yaakov Malkin

In the common discourse of Jews who are free of religion, "Judaism" is a term for Jewish culture. It includes secular, religious and ethnic Jewish cultures, with their varied creations, lifestyles and beliefs—which are either widespread or in conflict—ways of celebrating the Sabbath and national holidays and ceremonies in the life-cycles of individuals and families.

In contrast, in Jewish religious discourse, the word "Judaism" refers to the Jewish religion. This interpretation is accepted by religious Jewish minorities, such as ultra-orthodox Jewry that includes Hasidic Jewry, or Chabad (to whom Rabbi Shach referred as "the cult closest to the Jewish religion").

The definition of Judaism as a national culture comprising many Jewish cultures ensures the rights of the secular majority to live a life free of religious injunctions; and the rights of all religious minorities to live a life shaped in their own fashion--so long as it does not negatively affect the rights of the majority or of other minorities. There is little value in defining Judaism as a religion, as this seems to negate the right of "freedom from religion" of Jews devoid of religion; Jews who believe in the right of all individuals to choose their way of life--within the framework of their commitment to the laws of a democratic state, laws based on universal rules of justice. Democracy ensures freedom to choose one's lifestyle, as an expression of the sovereignty of individuals over their religion-free lives.

Israeli governments recognize Judaism as a religion in its orthodox version, as represented by their officials, the chief rabbis. Having two Chief Rabbis serves to perpetuate the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Judaism, which are rapidly diminishing. By defining Judaism as a religion, one is, in fact, legitimizing discrimination of women in courts, on public buses, in institutions of higher education closed to women, or in certain political parties in which women don't have a right to be elected to leadership positions, or to be members of Knesset. In the name of Judaism as a religion, most of the public is barred from using public transportation on Shabbat and on Jewish holidays. On leisure days intended for cultural activities and entertainment, community centers are closed, as are theatres, cinemas, libraries, cafes and restaurants.

In Israel, only rabbis are allowed to work on Shabbat and on holidays (including on Yom Kippur), with full pay, activating community houses and the synagogues of religious minorities.

The Word "Jew" in Secular and Jewish Discourse

In the discourse of Jews who are free of religion and the obligation to observe its injunctions and the rulings of its rabbis, a "Jew" connotes membership in the Jewish people. It includes the offspring of a Jewish father or mother who live in Jewish society and culture--or those who are in some way connected to them. This is the accepted ethnic definition in many nations, each of which still maintains its own unique features.

"People", "nationality" and "nation" are synonyms for a human group distinguished from other groups by its members' awareness of their membership in it, a national language shared by its members (even if these also have dialects or other languages), awareness of a common historic heritage, affinity with a territory considered as the historic homeland, or life in the Diaspora on many territories – like the Jewish and the Greek peoples beginning with the first century BC.

In the past, religion comprised a central component of the definition of a group. During religious eras of human culture, nations lived a religious life and culture. There was either one religion, as among the Egyptians; or several religions, like those prevalent among the Jewish people in biblical times (admonitions by the prophets are proof of this); or among the French and German nations, when Christianity split up into Catholics and Protestants. Today, in Western countries of the post-religious age, where the majority of the population lives a life free of religious injunctions, religion and its leaders are separated from the national leadership and state.

Having a member of one nation become a member of another nation occurs through what is known in Israel as "social and cultural conversion," a process which takes one or several generations--as in the case of the Huguenot French and Protestant Dutch became part of the English nation; or assimilated Jews who became part of other nations. (According to historian Salo Baron, 90 percent of the Jewish people in the days of the Roman Empire were assimilated.)

The definition of "Jew" in the discourse of Jews who are free of religion, is an ethnic one (that includes a shared culture). It is not conditional on a religious definition that

seeks to impose membership in one of the Jewish people's religious minorities. This is how Israel absorbed millions of Jews who were compelled or chose to settle there, without having orthodox rabbis examine the Jewishness of their mothers.

In the historic-national Jewish consciousness, reflected in literature and in biblical myths, the Jewish people was created from Bnei Yisrael families and a large mixture of other nations who joined them. The Judaism of some of the Kings of Israel would have been rejected by the orthodox rabbinate, even if all Jews consider these to be Jewish kings; and even if their mother's mother was a Moabite who did not convert halachically.

The racist-religious definition that Jews are people whose mothers are considered Jewish by the rabbis, makes Israel the only country in the western world to discriminate against Jewish citizens because of a religious definition which bears no relevance to their lives. One expression of such discrimination is the demand that secular Israeli Jewish citizens undergo orthodox religious conversion and pledge (usually falsely) that they will observe the *mitzvot* for the rest of their lives.

As a result of the religious definition imposed by the orthodox minority, some Israeli citizens are barred from marrying in accordance with the laws of the country, even if burdened with all other obligations, such as enlistment into the IDF, working for a living, paying taxes – obligations which religious Jews can shirk off at will.

Orthodox rabbis also threaten secular Jews who seek to be free of religious coercion, Jews who declare that they are "without religion." The State allows Jewish and Moslem religious leaders to declare that an individual is a member of their religion, in contradiction to his/her will and conscience. He/she then has to suffer from discriminatory laws that don't enable him/her to marry someone of his/her own faith.

In the discourse of Jews who are free of religion, the expression "secular Jews" (known in the past as "free Jews") is a term for Jews who believe a person is sovereign over his/her life, has a right to freely choose his/her lifestyle and is committed to the rules of justice, the laws of democracy, and to social and national solidarity.

Secular Jews believe in what **is**, as opposed to what should be. This distinguishes them from religious Jews, who fear that what **is** deviates from what appears in their rabbis' version of the Holy Scriptures. A belief in what **is**, is the perception that our knowledge of reality is correct, so long as there is no information contradicting it; i.e., recognition of the validity of the scientific hypothesis, so long as it withstands the test of refutation and experimental proof. The belief in what should be is a commitment to rules of behavior and of justice and democracy on which these are based—rules vital to the existence of a society in which human rights, equality and freedom of choice in the pursuit of happiness, will be upheld.

How Does One Define a "Jew"?

In the discourse of religious Jews, secular Jews are defined in a negative way, as "non-believers"; as if there are people who don't believe in what **is** and what should be, in moral values and the voice of their conscience commanding adherence to these values. In actual fact, there are no "non-believers" in the world, because belief in that which should be is the condition for life in human society; and belief in what **is** and what can be expected, the condition for survival in nature.

Most Jews in the world are without religion. They lead a life free of injunctions. Their Jewishness is expressed in membership in the Jewish people and life within its culture – in awareness of the Sabbath and national holidays, in commitment to social and national solidarity, in creating or consuming Jewish cultural products, in a secular Jewish education for their children, in the national consciousness—in essence, an awareness of all the Judaisms contained in secular and religious Judaism: awareness of the Bible as the formative literature of Judaism as a culture; awareness of the Sabbath and national holidays; awareness of continuity and change in the development of Judaism and of religious streams which transcended geographic boundaries and ethnic Judaisms; awareness of Eretz Yisrael, perceived by all Jewish communities as the homeland of the Jewish people in the past and a destination to which to return in the future; and awareness of Hebrew as the national language of the Jewish people.

The belief in individuals as sovereign over their lives is accompanied by a variety of beliefs and perceptions of the concept of God. Among Jews who are free of religion, and who believe in man's sovereignty over his life, there are diverse beliefs and perceptions of God: pantheists, such as Spinoza, who believe that nature is God and that love of God is love of nature; atheists, who believe in God as a "literary hero"

created by human beings in literary works and myths; agnostics, who believe with absolute doubt, in the existence or non-existence of God; deists, who believe godliness is the name of a supreme being that exists somewhere out there, above and beyond what we know; a being cut off from the world and from humanity.

Judaism as a Culture of Many Judaisms

Most Jewish creation as we know it, is secular creation of the last 300 years, since the beginning of secularized Judaism. Moreover, historic research, which was renewed with secular Judaism, discovered dozens of Jewish works, confiscated by Talmudic-rabbinical orthodoxy, which controlled most Jewish educational systems up until the 18th century.

In ancient times as well, there were diverse active Judaisms in conflict with each other. Each of these contributed literary works, thought and art to the trove of Jewish culture. Their return to the trove of contemporary Judaism enriched it and altered the image present-day students of Judaism as a culture, have of Judaism in ancient times; alongside the oral Torah (that developed from the Judaism of the Pharisees); Hellenistic Judaism that spoke, prayed and read the Bible in Greek; Christian Judaism, whose communities multiplied in Eretz Yisrael and is currently dispersed over three continents; and whose literary creation comprises the New Testament. Only in the 4th century, did Christian Judaism depart from Judaism by establishing a separate religion which became the religion of the Roman Empire. Karaic Judaism developed in opposition to rabbinic-Talmudic Judaism. It recognized neither the latter's authority, nor that of the oral Torah. Ethnic Judaisms developed in communities living in certain geographic locations.

In addition to these Judaisms, there are rational, mystical and messianic streams which have also created works disseminated among all ethnic Judaisms in countries under Christian and Moslem rule. These have exacerbated controversies and served as an additional motivating force for the development of Judaism as a culture, which in the modern era has also spread to the Americas.

All Judaisms – the secular, the religious and the ethnic – have met up in Israel and made their contributions to an Israeli Jewishness that is more special than other Judaisms, having been established by secular Judaism and the Zionist Movement; being the majority population; and renewing the Hebrew language as the national State language.

Recognizing Judaism as a culture which comprises a plurality of Judaisms in the present and in the past, calls for curricula that will present a selection of the entire works of the culture in the country in which those studying, live, as well as those of other Jewish cultures. Such recognition will require a major change in Jewish Studies curricula, primarily based on religious texts, the oral Torah and works related to it, which systematically ignore works of secular Jewish thought, literature and art, as well as that of other Judaisms that are part of the Judaism of all times.

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BACK TO HISTORY: "JEWISH SECULARISM" AND ITS FRACTURING

Prof. Shalom Ratsabi

When speaking of the concept "Judaism", as opposed to that of "religion" or "Jewish secularism", we are faced with what philosophers call "appearance". From among the most noted appearances, we are interested in opinions rather than truths – "things as they actually are" as opposed to "the world of ideas". While in the world of ideas, one can discover the truth through the imposing force of dialectics; in actual life, whose arenas are the public, political and cultural spheres, we have only rhetoric: presentation of varied viewpoints, persuasion and a compromise based on historic reality. Indeed, from an historic perspective, "Jewish secularism" is a phenomenon which accompanied the modernization process of the Jewish people, one of whose leading forces—in addition to emancipation and enlightenment—was Zionism.

It is only natural therefore, that Jewish secularism should be examined as a phenomenon linked to the crystallization processes, strengthening and realization of Zionism. In other words, one cannot understand the unfolding and problematic nature of Jewish secularism in absence of its association with the stated objectives of Zionism: a "return to history," or the "normalization" of the Jewish people.

Two central elements combined to thwart Jewish secularism from its very outset. One pertains to the nature of Zionism as a political or cultural renaissance movement; the other, to the uniqueness of Judaism as a religion or religious culture, that through a messianic vision, combines the national-particular with the universal that strives for a united humanity, as the realization of the "Kingdom of Heaven."

The articulators and shapers of political Zionism were post-emancipated, educated and assimilated Jews, like Herzl, Nordau and Pinsker. It is only natural for their Zionism to be secular and liberal. Their spiritual world and political values were no different from those of their assimilated friends from the reform-liberal Jewish camp. Unlike them, however, they perceived in anti-Semitism, the crisis of the nation state and understood that anti-Semitism was not a random phenomenon that would disappear with progress. Within the logical framework of a liberal state that differentiates between the personal and the public domains, and between society and state, one could speak about equality under the law, but not of social equality.

The equalization of Jews to other citizens of the state and a legal ban on their discrimination necessarily entailed state intervention in the private domain and in the authority of society--undermining the foundations of a liberal state. Full social equality could be realized only with the disappearance of the Jews as Jews, something many Jews could not accept--if only out of self-respect or religious or familial-ethnic loyalty and the like. Moreover, while the assimilation of individuals may be possible, the assimilation of many is very difficult—note, the conversion to Christianity of the Jews in Spain.

Moreover, the leaders of political Zionism felt that the legal standing of Jews, even post-emancipation, was very tenuous, because of the nation's stronghold on the state, which should be the rational "desirable" rather than the ethnic-national "concrete reality," which rendered the state the people's means of expression. Indeed, against this background, it became possible in the 20th century to exclude Jews from the state per the wishes of the sovereign, the people.

After it became apparent that assimilation was not a solution to the "problem of the Jews," the shapers of Zionism were forced to seek a different solution. As mentioned, they were assimilated and it wasn't their Jewish sensibilities which were affected – just as concern for Judaism was not their motivation. Their motivation in relation to the "question of the Jews" was their personal problem: they suffered social discrimination, because the majority society excluded them as outsiders. They, therefore, claimed that the solution lay in establishing a state in which Jews would be the majority and would consequently not suffer socially. They were not seeking a society, culture and state different from those in which they found themselves. They simply wanted it to be a state of the Jews.

That perception called for a transformation of the traditional messianic expectations and hopes of the Jewish people and their perception of exile and redemption. This was expressed not so much through the auto-emancipation motto, but through what was missing from it. Thus, instead of fully quoting Hillel's famous saying, "*If I am not for myself, who will be for me and if I am only for myself, who am I,*" for his brochure slogan, Pinsker chose the words, "*If I am not for myself, who will be for me,*" omitting its essence, "*And if I am only for myself, what am I?*" Indeed, on the basis of this transformation, one can understand the much used imagery of the Jewish people as a sick body in need of rehabilitation. This imagery should be interpreted in the spirit of Spinoza's prediction, that if the Jews succeed in

overcoming the febleness created by their beliefs, there is no reason why one of these days they couldn't reclaim their political independence. In other words, only "redemption from Judaism," in the words of Y.L Gordon, might ensure the national redemption of the Jews.

The problem was, however, that the character of political, liberal and secular Zionism changed already during its initial steps. The reason was a simple political one: the Zionism of the assimilated elite had no following. Due to their position in the multi-national frameworks of the Russian and Hapsburg Empires, the majority of Eastern European Jews experienced their identity as a separate people with a religion and culture of its own.

It was only when political Zionism adopted some of the values of traditional Judaism, such as opting for Eretz Yisrael and not for another country as the location for the state, that it became a national movement with the power to attain the longed-for Jewish State; i.e., from its initial steps as a political movement, political Zionism had a need for Jewish tradition and its symbols, which is how it came to abandon its liberal-secular character.

As a result of political Zionism's need to be linked to Jewish tradition, it necessarily also needed its adversary, cultural Zionism. The explanation is simple. Only through cultural Zionism could the Jewish people become a nation in the modern sense of nationalism. After all, from its outset, cultural Zionism was a "discourse of identities." It emanated from what is known as "the problem of Judaism." At its center, was the following question: if Judaism is a religion, then in defining the Jewish people as a nation, it appears that religion, like other cultural creations, is created by the nation. This awareness resulted in a mission for cultural Zionism and in the secularization and adoption of Jewish heritage through historic criticism, its interpretation and transformation into a culture, i.e., not as a creation whose source lies in revelation, but as the fruit of Jewish genius.

The secularization enterprise of engaging Jewish heritage was doomed to failure from the start. After all, as Leo Strauss has stressed, the authoritative layer of Jewish heritage, the Torah, presents itself as God-given, as a revelation. The question is whether in interpreting Jewish tradition in the same way as other high cultures, one is distorting the tradition to which one claims to be loyal? After all, French tradition never presented itself as a Godly revelation. It did so only in relation to Christianity.

Thus, one can easily present French culture and history as the people's creation and go on with its development. Not so in Judaism.

There is a contradiction in the perception of cultural Zionism--whose mainstay is secularization through the interpretation and adoption of Judaism. On the one hand, its supporters criticized tradition in the Spinozan spirit, using strict historic criteria. But, unlike Spinoza, in an attempt to adopt tradition as the people's culture and creation, they applied an idealistic interpretation of the sources to prove that their viewpoint is grounded in these. While an historic approach requires an understanding of a text in the way its author understood it, cultural Zionism—Jews such as Hermann Cohen and the idealistic Jewish-German tradition—had pretensions of comprehending texts in a more faithful way than did their authors. This failing seems to stem from the fact that Spinozan criticism was fueled by the rational spirit of the Enlightenment Movement, while the aim of spiritual Zionism's conceptualizers was fed by romantic aspirations, linked in spirit to religion. Thus, the secularization of Jewish tradition and its adoption failed. Political and cultural Zionism's refusal to adopt the nationalist model and secular identity proposed by European Enlightenment (which Ahad Ha'am had initially adopted) and the adoption of traditional Jewish symbols based on history, origin, language and beliefs and opinions, has remained unchanged, as evidenced by our present-day reality.

Zionism failed not only in relation to the secularization process. It encountered additional, more serious problems, involving the very attribution of secularization as "Jewish". Implications of this are evident in the State of Israel and its attitude toward the use of force. These problematic issues pertain to the messianic vision, a necessary but insufficient condition for transforming the Jewish people into a nation in the spirit of modern nationalism. The explanation is simple. The Jewish messianic vision had two aspects, a particularistic one and a universal one. The particularistic aspect is what actually preserved the Jewish people as a people. But, if the particularistic aspect ensured the survival of the Jewish people, the universal aspect of the messianic notion--the redemption of Israel as part of the end of history, through *tikkun olam* [repairing the world] under God's sovereignty, or the realization of the moral "ideal"--is what prevented the transformation of the Jews into an ethos of "choice" "blood," "differentiation" and "land", akin to the ethos of integrated nationalism. A messianic perception that aspires to *tikkun olam* and to shaping deeds in the spirit of the moral "ideal" cannot emanate from an historic reality subjugated to

the rigid legality of causality. It must come from beyond "the available" and beyond historic experience.

Thus, for example, according to Ernest Bloch, the search for the "ideal" i.e., its messianic completion, will not succeed – not through historic developments and not in the gray structures of rationality, but in what he termed, "the principle of hope," the messianic belief in the completion of history. The reason for this is simple: in history, "something was not created out of nothing." From a similar perspective, and even more categorical, Walter Benjamin determined that, "Only the Messiah completes the historic process of events, in the sense that only he himself redeems." From this, he concludes that, "nothing historic can initiate its own attitude to the Messiah."

The problem is a return to history and the "normalization" of the Jewish people through the adoption of Judaism by secularization, and its transformation into Jewish nationalism, one of whose unmistakable marks is renunciation of the meta-historic universal aspect of the messianic vision. This means that political redemption under the guise of Jewish nationalism is, indeed, "a return to history" and "normalization" of the Jewish people, but at the price of erasure of the universal aspect of redemption and renunciation of *tikkun olam*. The practical implication of this process is the transformation of Judaism into an ethos of "choice," "blood," and "land", similar to the ethos of the nationalism of integration of other nations.

In this context, it is worth citing the words of Franz Rosenzweig's cousin, Eugen Rosenstock, who became a highly placed Catholic priest. He believed that with the secular turn in the history of the Jewish people, Zionism symbolized the beginning of the disappearance of the Jewish people. And so, in reviving its land and language, the Jewish people became a nation like all nations. Here, we should add that this danger did not escape the most noted philosopher of Jewish morality of the last generations, Hermann Cohen, who already in the second decade of the 20th century, rejected Zionism for two major reasons: first, the establishment of a state based on concrete reality, i.e., a state that would be the state of the Jewish people meant transforming the state from an intellectual system of laws, of the moral ideal, to power in the hands of concrete reality, serving the nation and its needs. The second, in acting toward the realization of Jewish nationalism, i.e., by pushing aside the universal messianic basis whose mainstay is a united humanity, Judaism loses its religious, moral and universal character and is no more than mere nationalism. In this regard, we should

recall the words of Achad Ha'am who asked whether the aim of the Jews was to establish another Albania.

Similarly, in a eulogy for Berl Katznelson, one of the conceptualizers of constructive Zionist socialism, Ernest Simon, pointed to Rabbi Kook and Berl Katznelson as having contributed to strengthening Jewish chauvinism. In relation to Rabbi Kook, it is clear. In his doctrine, he turns Zionist ideology into messianic theology and by so doing, frees Jewish nationalism of its reins of universalism. But what was Berl Katznelson's sin? The answer is simple. His opposition to having the labor movement join the Socialist International freed the Israeli labor movement from its universal brakes and put it at the disposal of Jewish nationalism.

To summarize: political Zionism failed in creating a secular Judaism, as it needed Jewish heritage in order to become a national movement of the people; whereas, cultural Zionism failed in its secularization enterprise and in its adoption of Judaism, mainly because of its nature and the contradiction inherent in its enterprise. No less grave is that "normalization" and a "return to history" resulted not only with a renunciation of Judaism as a religion, but also with the abandonment of its universal aspects and its transformation into an ethno-centric myth of "choice," "blood," and "land", much like the myth and ethos of integrated nationalism.

Against the background of these problematic issues involving relations between "normalization," "a return to history" and efforts to establish Jewish secularism, today, Jews have three alternatives: the first, is the one proposed by Strauss, according to which one should regard the notion of a human solution to the problem of Judaism as desecration of the sacred. A person cannot resolve a reality created by God on his own. The Jewish State is, in fact, a permutation in the character of the Jewish Diaspora, but it does not change the existential situation of the Jewish people. Hence, if Zionism is not capable of resolving the "problem of the Jews" in the modern era, then it can only be resolved on an individual level, by having Jews return to the orthodox fold.

Another solution which can bring Jews back to history, without giving up the universal aspect which restrains the messianic notion, is Buber's theo-political position, whose essence is what I call "anarchist" Judaism. Here, the return to history is perceived in the theo-political spirit of post World War I European religious socialism, whose representatives within Judaism and Zionism were Martin Buber,

Ernest Simon, Hugo Bergmann and the Ner Circle. This vision asserts that Zionism is not a political movement in the usual sense, but the renaissance movement of the Jewish people. Just as the European renaissance meant a return to the classic image of man, the Jewish renaissance meant a return to the image of man and to the biblical theo-political alliance within whose framework biblical man shaped his world, from the most intimate to the social and political. According to this version, the Jewish people is not a normal nation that developed organically, but the outcome of an alliance between God and the tribes of Israel. This is expressed through the slogan "God is King", whose aim is the transformation of the nation into a kingdom of priests. The Jewish nation is, therefore, both a nation and a church.

The positive interpretation of the theo-political principle is that the same moral principles that apply to individuals, apply also to the nation; i.e., removing religious acts from the restrictive domain of religious ritual and transforming the political field and all areas of life into arenas for their realization. The theo-political approach regards the political sphere as subject to the same moral commandments as are individuals. The negative interpretation of the slogan "God is King," is a renunciation of any human value which is absolute and supreme—the national state, the holy egoism of the latest idol, Mammon--a renunciation whose aim is to transform the Jewish people into a nation of priests. Just as the priest serves the tribes of Israel, thus the people of Israel have to serve humanity, by renouncing idols and presenting a shining example of a society in which God is king. On that basis, we can understand Zionism and its enterprise not as an attempt to resolve the "problem of the Jews" in the political sense, but as the renaissance of the Jewish people.

In addition to these two solutions to the issue of the link between Zionism, secularism and Judaism--characterized by a well-defined orthodox religious perception on the one hand and a theo-political one, on the other--the arsenal of Jewish history also contains a radical solution: a return to Spinoza's vision, the liberation of the Jews from Judaism as a religion within the framework of the modern discourse on identities and an attempt and to present secularization alongside Judaism, without a dash of attribution between the two words. In other words, to have a secularism and Israeliness that have no need for the particularistic charged symbols of Judaism, which as a religion should be restricted to the private domain and to the intimate experiences of the individual.

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On Gender & the Beginning of Secularization in Europe

by Shmuel Feiner

In 1772, renowned adventurer, Giacomo Casanova, had a stormy love affair with the daughter of a wealthy Jewish merchant from Ancona, Italy, whom he called "the beautiful Jewess Leah." *"In my company she ate shellfish,"* Casanova wrote, *"assuring me that this was the first time in her life that she was delighting in such (forbidden) food."* And, he added, *"A girl who breaks the laws of her religion so easily, also casts off the restrictions of her religion in the erotic realm. We made love every night, even on nights on which Jewish halacha excommunicates women who indulge in lovemaking."*

What is the historic significance of this story that peers into an 18th century bedroom through the keyhole? Is it a part of razing the walls of modesty that led to a crisis of tradition and paved the way toward assimilation? Is it an insignificant digression from religious norms, unsupported by ideology, one that does not signal a desire to rebel against religion? Is it additional testimony to substantiate the indictment against Jewish women, whose frivolity seemingly brought about the collapse of Jewish identity and totally disgraced Jewish honor? Or, perhaps it bears witness to the fact that the secularization of Jewish women was embroidered into dark corners of the canvas, behind the scenes of Jewish history as we know it.

In recent years, the question of secularization among European Jewry has become one of the foci of historic research that seeks to reconstruct and interpret processes of Jewish modernization. It is not easy to define the meaning of secularization, especially in an era in which doubt about the "doctrine of secularization" has almost become a convention and post-scholaric thought prefers to trace the strengthening of religions rather than their weakening.

Even without going into this debate, one can identify the processes of secularization in permissiveness and skepticism, in weakening personal and public religious practice, religious institutions and the authority of religious leaders; and in the growth of religious criticism. In this respect, Leah from Ancona was perhaps a Jew of her time, who without developing a critical approach to religion and without necessarily losing her religious belief, found an intimate way to express her desire to free herself from religious restrictions in regard to her body. In this respect, she

represents a little known channel of secularization, already evident during the early stages of the 18th century.

Overcoming the Narrative that Identifies Women

The history of Jewish secularization in the modern era, which is now being written, also calls for gender sensitivity. To this end, it is important not only to collect testimony about the secularization of women and to interpret it within its historic context, but to go beyond the narrative that identifies women as having been tempted earlier than men to violate the *mitzvot*; and the counter-narrative of women as the preservers of religion within the modern family.

It was not only the conservative seeking to defend Judaism from modernity, but also educated men, who accused women of secularization that undermined Jewish identity. When at the end of the 18th century, criticism of the Enlightenment in Germany focused with concern on the bourgeois Jewish family, among others, it pointed to young girls like "the beautiful Jewess Leah." Thus, for example, Jetchen, the heroine of the play "*Frivolity and Hypocrisy*"--written by the principal of the Modern Jewish School in Breslau, Aaron Wolfson--does not observe the Sabbath, has affairs with non-Jewish men, derives pleasure from reading books, playing music and listening to concerts. In her father's view, she is rebelling against religion. But, according to the moral of this Enlightenment story, Jetchen is a victim of unworthy secularization. Untouched by the educational transformation proposed by the Enlightenment, such secularization is bound to lead to the destruction of the family and the eradication of the Jewish identity of the new generation. The Enlightenment, whose sensitivity to women's distress was very limited, excluded modern women from the Jewish Enlightenment enterprise, regarding their secularization processes as assimilation meriting condemnation.

The accepted Jewish narrative of secularization appears mainly in the new Hebrew literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. The story of the deterioration and decline of the old *beit midrash* and the study of Talmud in Eastern Europe is clearly a masculine narrative. The yeshiva student's agonizing process of abandoning religion is the focus of the dominant tale of secularization--from a formative model, depicted in the story of Shlomo Maimon at the end of the 18th century, through the autobiographical "*Sins of Youth*" by Moshe Leib Lilienblum; to Nahman the heretic, in "*Le'an*" by Fireberg at the end of the 19th century. The "crumbling camp" of religious loyalists, as presented in the new Hebrew literature, is always that of Torah

students; and the crisis of secularization is a breakdown in transmitting the biblical ethos from father to son. Given the exclusion of women from the world of the *beit midrash*, it is not surprising that the classic secularization narrative of the yeshiva student's abandonment of religion, excludes them. Yet, a special place was reserved for women within the historic portrayal as we know it. Attention focused on the "salon women" of Berlin at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, depicting the way a group of Jewish women underwent a deep acculturation process, became alienated from Jewish tradition and ended up cutting themselves off from Jewish society through conversion and mixed marriages.

The gap between the two narratives is highly conspicuous—while the yeshiva student's abandonment of religion is depicted as a heroic step evoking respect and admiration and eliciting a great deal of identification, the "salon women" were subject to condemnation and contempt. They were perceived as women with an uncontrollable erotic urge, lacking in Jewish identity, and as traitors to their people. This led to the notion that Jewish women are weaker than men, possessing fewer defenses against the temptations of secular European culture in general and erotic temptation, in particular—a lure they were unable to resist.

However, new research on the "salon women" portrays these within a much more complex context. The motivation of Rahel Levin, Dorothea Mendelssohn and Henrietta Herz, for example, is depicted as the desire to achieve personal emancipation, self-realization and an elevated social position. Recently, Dr. Natalie Goldberg showed that these were not frivolous young women, but intellectual women, writers of books, articles and letters; women highly familiar with the culture of the Enlightenment whose values they internalized.

"I Cannot but Condemn Superstitions"

In order to become more familiar with women and secularization in the 18th century, one can, for example, take a look at the criticism of religion made by a woman who preceded the "salon women" by two generations, Abigail Levi Franks (1696-1756)-- who emigrated from London to New York with her husband. She perhaps better represents modern women who experienced limited secularization without suffering an identity crisis, than do the salon women. In letters sent to her son Naphtali, who remained in London, she offered strict instructions on his religious conduct, admonishing him to be more circumspect in the observance of some things, especially "your morning devotions"--to be sure to say the *shacharit* prayer every

day; and warning him that as her brother who lived in London no longer observed the *mitzvoth*, one could not eat kosher food in his home: *"I desire you will never eat anything with him unless it be bread and butter, nor no where else there is the least doubt of things not done after our strict judaical [kosher] method."*

Franks herself had experienced modern acculturation in depth, reading European Enlightenment books from which she absorbed something of the criticism of religion. Her religious views were particularly influenced by the critical and penetrating book, *"Persian Letters,"* by French Enlightenment philosopher, Montesquieu. However, it was one thing to be skeptical and quite another to maintain Jewish boundaries and identity. Franks demanded of herself and her son, total separation between criticism of religion and practical observance of holidays and *mitzvoth*. *"Whatever my thoughts concerning some fables and some other fundamentals [of religion], I look open the observance [of mitzvoth] conscientiously."*

In another letter, under the impact of a book whose title she doesn't mention, but with whose criticism about Jewish religion she seemingly identified, Franks wrote a sentence, astounding in its sharpness, which reveals her longing for a change in religious norms: *"I cannot but condemn the many superstitions in which we are imprisoned and hope with all my heart that a Calvin or Luther will rise among us....I will be the first to join those following in their wake, because I don't think religion should include only rites devoid of content and supernatural acts."*

Franks strenuously preserved her Jewish identity and network of Jewish familial and social ties. The most difficult blow she suffered was the secret marriage and departure of her daughter, Phila, with her beloved Oliver Delancey, who was a Christian. The pain did not lessen even after many years, and Abigail chose to sever her ties with her daughter who had chosen to rebel against her mother and her Judaism.

Indeed, contrary to images and conventions, and strengthened by the historiography of preceding generations--where women were as if responsible for some channels of radical secularization and ensuing Jewish identity crisis--research in the last generation has come up with new and contradictory insights that present Jewish women in the major locations of secularization of the 19th century, as "household priests" who staunchly preserved Jewish identity. Prof. Paula Hyman, one of the pioneers of historic research on Jewish women, wrote: *"The more life in the Western world distanced assimilating Jewish men from the traditional Jewish way of life,*

and restricted their religious life to a few appearances a year at synagogue and maintaining a limited number of community services, the more women fulfilled societal expectations and became the keepers of religion's confines."

Toward the end of the 19th century, the experience of a loss of God expanded from that of a few to that of many, including among Eastern European Jewry. It was not only philosophies such as materialism, Marxism and Nietzsche's Theory that affected this, but also significant changes in their lives. General education for boys and girls became the norm in many families, including among the millions of Eastern European Jews. Opportunities for abandoning tradition expanded through places of work and institutions of higher education. Many were lured by the temptations of secular culture in the large cities. In his novel, "*Hanidachat*," popular author, Nahum Meir Shaikewitz, made an extraordinary effort to present the narrative of the abandonment of religion from the perspective of a young girl from an established traditional home, rather than from that of a yeshiva student. This Enlightenment novel from the 1880's is seemingly a tale told through its heroine, Hannah. But, the book's readers will immediately glean that it is not the normal Enlightenment narrative with which they are familiar.

Hannah abandoned her parents' home to escape an arranged marriage and in hope of winning her love, the *maskil* Yaakov Rimon, who had repudiated many of the values of "backward" Eastern European Jewry. Her secularization did not emanate from ideas, religious skepticism, or intellectual criticism (Hana deprecates herself, saying that she has no knowledge of the Enlightenment or of Judaism). Rather, it stemmed from her heart and erotic desires. She did not achieve enlightenment, but ended up at the edge of the abyss. In a rapid process of deterioration, she rebelled against the tradition of her parents and Jewish community and was tempted to eat meat fried in butter. In the end, Hannah converted to Christianity, in order to survive the bitter fate she thought her parents had in store for her--only to be saved at the last moment by her *maskil* love, the educated teacher and intellect.

1881 saw the first Enlightenment novel written by a woman, Sarah Feige Foner-Meinkin. The unfinished book, "*A Righteous Love*," a feminine Enlightenment narrative of the life of its heroine, Finalia, is more akin to a masculine Enlightenment narrative, even if it too, focuses on an attempt to arrange a marriage between a young girl and a man from the Hasidic orthodox world of Galicia; and on the injustice merchant parents wrought upon their daughters. Foner-Meinkin presents Finalia as

someone who avidly reads European literature, especially Schiller, and squanders no opportunity to condemn the "righteous" and the Galician Hasidim for being ignorant and greedy. In the end, women of her generation had only one of two options: either to give into conventions and their parents' authority and have the fear of God instilled in them; or to engage in an all-out rebellion and sexual degradation, resulting in alienation from Judaism.

As early as 1873, out of deep concern, Peretz Smolenskin, one of the early fathers of modern nationalism, warned that women endanger national Jewish identity, because of the paucity of their Jewish education. He placed the blame for this, however, on the society of men. *"They will be considered strangers and the daughters of Israel are, indeed, alienated from their people and belief, for which they are not to blame. It is the sins of their fathers, who precluded them from knowledge of their forefathers' faith, torah and wisdom."*

Smolenskin, who was very permissive in his own life-style, and a staunch liberal, identified the depth of secularization of Jewish women, and sought, through a seemingly conservative step, to see to the Jewish cultural heritage of girls, in order to prevent the erosion of Jewish identity, as in his opinion, *"It is up to the mother to instill in him belief and a love of his people."* But, like his predecessors in the enlightenment movement, Smolenskin had difficulty seeing that it was also a matter of the liberation of women, rather than merely a frivolous desire to assimilate.

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The Secular Battle in the Knesset

Lior Tal talks to MKs Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz) and Shlomo Mula (Kadima) who established a secular lobby in the Knesset

Whether we fast on Yom Kippur, or eat meat and milk on that day; whether we act in accordance with the values of the Old Testament; or whether we are by worldview students loyal to Epikoros--we don't stop feeling Jewish, living Jewish lives, working and creating Hebrew labor, speaking our Jewish language, deriving spiritual food from our literature, laboring on behalf of our free, national culture, defending our national honor and fighting our war of survival, whatever form it takes.

These words, written by Y.L. Brenner in 1910, are part of the Zionist dream that aspires to crystallize a full Jewish secular identity, deriving the inspiration for its way of life, from both Judaism and Western humanism. Such secularism views Judaism as a culture, not as a religion, and seeks to create continuity alongside renewal.

Like all highly significant social issues, Jewish secularism, too, is a political issue *par excellence*. Education, budgets, the status of women, Shabbat, marriage and divorce, the status of courts--all these are political issues in which few Knesset members engage.

The exceptions are Nitzan Horowitz (Meretz) and Shlomo Mula (Kadima), who established the Knesset Lobby for Civil Equality and Pluralism.

I met with them at the BINA secular yeshiva to discuss their activities.

Why did you establish the Lobby?

Nitzan Horowitz: Because religious coercion and the insinuation of religion into politics have become intolerable; and most especially, because it has no worthy political representation, despite its being one of the most important issues for the public and also one of the most disturbing. There is an inverse correlation between the importance of the issue and the way it affects the public at gut level, and its political representation, or lack thereof.

Shlomo Mula: Our Lobby is not anti-religious. It does not aim to attack Judaism, but is intended as an alternative; a platform that tells religious coercion: "No more." In its original form, Judaism is on the whole, beautiful. Unfortunately, since the

establishment of the State, political *machers* have rendered Judaism a burden, by having it infiltrate people's life, through coercion rather than by choice.

In the previous Knesset, Yossi Beilin established the Lobby for Secularism and Pluralism. What made you decide to drop the word "secularism"?

Horowitz: We did not call our lobby "secular", because there is room in it for people who are not secular. It is not just a problem for secular Jews. As a matter of fact, I don't much like the word "secular". While we're speaking of secular Jews, we are appealing to all, including the ultra-orthodox.

Is the advancement of secularism as a way of life, a goal for you?

Mula: Certainly. Abolishing religious coercion means enabling secular people to live their lives in their own way. That is precisely our aim. We come and say: Reform Judaism does not get adequate expression, nor does Conservative Judaism. Free thinkers who want to marry or divorce in accordance with their own way of life, are not allotted sufficient resources to do so. We want to put an end to that coercion.

This is an internal Jewish debate. But, the problem of civil equality and pluralism is infinitely more difficult when it comes to the Arab and Bedouin publics in Israel.

Horowitz: When I go around Arab towns, meet with residents and raise the need for the separation of religion from politics, people's eyes light up. As much as we Jews suffer from the rabbinical establishment, in Moslem society and in other sects, they are victims of greater coercion. That is why, when you speak to them about secularism, about freedom from religion, about pluralism, it touches their heart.

Even if their Knesset Members often cooperate with the Shas Party?

Horowitz: This is where the nationalist issue comes in. Israeli Arabs view their religious establishments as expressions of cultural and national autonomy. Thus, in the non-Jewish sectors, the nationalist issue is a barrier to religious freedom and freedom from religion.

I have no doubt that the battle for pluralism, for religious freedom and freedom from religion, is critical, not only to all sectors in Israel. It is also critical for the Middle

East as a whole and can serve as an excellent bridge for dialogue between us and other societies in the region. Look at the couples from Israel that fly to Ankara to marry. Who is standing next to them? Lebanese couples, because they, too, don't have civil marriages.

Mula: The more we see religious extremism, the more society becomes unequal in Israel. In the guise of religiosity, Israel is becoming a racist society, one that sanctifies race and group unity. Where there is religious extremism--whether in Islam, Christianity or Judaism--extremists who wear religion as a cloak, impact democracy, freedom of thought and freedom of creativity. To some degree, religious extremism also hampers economic equality. One is prisoner to a given religious concept, living below the poverty line, creating poverty at home, without giving one's children a chance to break through, to achieve leadership and creativity. The disgrace and social destruction resulting from religious extremism cries out to high heaven. If you throw in Israeli nationalism, which is not prepared to give the Palestinians a state of their own and wants to sit in Hebron of all places, then you get a Baruch Goldstein.

This is also true in regard to the allocation of resources. If a secular child were to receive what an ultra-orthodox one gets, classes in Tel Aviv would comprise seven students. Ultra-orthodox schools don't teach core studies. The orthodox reach the age of 20 and don't serve in the army. They don't enter the workforce and we continue to fund them.

Horowitz: We have a basic problem of what's called "the source of authority." When we speak of religious sectors that don't perceive democracy, universal values, courts and the will of the people, as the source of authority; but regard that source as being other--Godly, Torah teachings, celestial, Messianic, you name it--we have a fundamental problem that affects every area of our life.

Mula: It's not just that. We lack a democratic wholeness. Religious parties don't put women on their slates, even when 51-52 percent of Israeli citizens are women. We, the parties that raise the banner of democracy, submissively accept that over 25 percent of the Knesset members are not prepared to relate to women as equal members of the Knesset.

How do people in your community regard the role you have taken upon yourself, to fight for the separation of religion and state?

Mula: No community is as open as the one that emigrated from Ethiopia--despite the fact that upon their arrival, they were all forced to study in state religious schools, until Shulamit Aloni became Minister of Education and abolished that. The religious have lost the Ethiopian *aliya*. But, I'm not crying over it; truly not. Those who were our religious leaders in Ethiopia are not recognized as religious leaders here. So, how can anyone complain when I am defending them?

In the formula "Jewish and Democratic," your "democratic" aspect is clear. Where does the Jewish State come in?

Horowitz: In my view, Judaism is all inclusive, tolerant and open. I see this in the history of my own family, environment and friends. In Jewish tradition, a Jew was someone who knew foreign languages, plied crafts and was proficient in the ways of the big world.

What distinguishes the Jewish State from other states? Or is there no point in a Jewish State?

Horowitz: Of course there is. Firstly, Israel is the national homeland of the Jewish people. That is the basis of it all. **How** are we Jews? By heritage, language, culture, the Bible we study in school, our holidays, our calendar and everything around us in this country.

In what way, if at all, should Judaism influence Israeli legislation and politics?

Horowitz: I would take the values which I consider to be the most Jewish, the universal values, and on the basis of these, introduce diverse legislation. For example, how many times does the commandment to have regard for the stranger appear in the Bible and in other Jewish sources? When it comes to consideration and tolerance, Judaism is a light unto the nations. It is something Jewish. Promoting education, the arts, the sciences—that is also Jewish.

This, you would also expect of Germany and Finland. What do you expect most especially of Israel?

Horowitz: That it do more as a Jewish State.

The Law of Return?

Horowitz: Certainly, there has to be a Law of Return. As I have said, the basis is Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people. That is how Shlomo Mula got to Israel. That's how my parents came here—they didn't come here by chance; no other state was prepared to accept them.

Mula: For me, a Jewish State is the Star of David; it's a monetary bill; it's the Israeli and Jewish holidays, when celebrated freely, rather than being imposed by the state. For example, I have no problem with Shabbat as a day of rest. But, people who want to go shopping should be able to do so using public transportation. During Pesach, those who want to eat *hametz* should be able to do so, as should those who want to eat matzah.

Horowitz: I am all for heritage and its cultivation, but in the spirit of institutions such as BINA, a secular yeshiva. There is an extraordinary richness of bodies, institutions and organizations that promote Judaism in a different spirit. There is no one way to be Jewish; there many ways to be Jewish, all legitimate. In the past, people might have asked how a yeshiva could possibly be secular, "can't be". Yes, it can!

Are you in favor of introducing Jewish subjects, taught in this spirit, as compulsory subjects in state-funded schools? Minister of Education, Gideon Sa'ar, is introducing Jewish Culture and Heritage as a compulsory subject.

Horowitz: In school, I studied the Bible, the history of the Jewish People and the Mishnah.

Today, Mishnah is not compulsory in schools.

Horowitz: Yes, but it also doesn't make sense that in a Jewish State, and I stress, a Jewish State, there are young people who have never seen a movie, or read literature --not a foreign book, but a Hebrew book, one by AB Yehoshua or David Grossman; or a song by Naomi Shemer.

I am interested in the construction of secular Jewish identity, not only in preventing coercion. Do we not need to fight for budgets and resources for the creation of secular Jewish content?

When our secular yeshiva was established, we wanted to be recognized as an institution in which people combine the study of Torah with full military service. We turned to the Ministry of Defense and were told that in accordance with the Tal Law, the Yeshiva would be recognized as a combined one, just like the *yeshivot ha'hesder*.

We sent Dov Elboim [author, journalist and television moderator, head of BINA's Center for Thought and Creativity], Muki Zur [Hebrew writer, educator and historian and senior lecturer at BINA] and Eran Baruch [BINA general-director and head of its secular yeshiva], the man behind the idea of a secular yeshiva, to the Union of Yeshivot ha'Hesder. As anticipated, in response the Union sent a letter to the Minister of Defense, recommending that we not be recognized as such, given that we don't act in the "true Jewish spirit". Thus, Religious Zionism's rabbis imposed, the minister gave in, and we are not recognized.

Mula: Did you appeal to the High Court? There was, for example, discrimination against the reform movement, excluding it from receiving Ministry of Housing allocations for the construction of synagogues. MK Meir Shitrit, then Minister of Housing, came and told me, "I will be the one to decide how to allocate the money." In light of a ruling which gave him legitimacy to do so, he allocated budgets for the construction of reform and conservative synagogues.

On this matter as well, I would appeal to the High Court. In parallel, it would be an excellent idea for our lobby to advance the issue in the Knesset.

But, how are you going to win, if most of your party (Kadima) members leave the Hall, when your proposals for enactment on these issues are raised in the Knesset?

Mula: In Kadima, there are people who think like us. For example, I know what Zippi Livni (Kadima leader) thinks. There is very little difference between Zippi and me [on these issues]. However, as she wants to be the largest party, she needs to be able to attract people.

Horowitz: This issue is very frustrating politically. Take something like free choice in regard to marriage: having equal choice between a civil wedding and a religious ceremony—just like everywhere else in the world.

For years, almost 80 percent of the public has supported the idea, across political parties and sectors, including among the religious. But, time after time, when I made these proposals in the Knesset, they exploded against the coalition wall, pressure from the religious factions, and lack of a firm stand by part of Kadima and members of the Labor Party, who left the Hall on these occasions.

Mula: When people vote, they think about the next prime minister, minister of defense, or foreign minister—they don't ask how they can stop the ultra-orthodox from having such an impact.

Horowitz: Change in this sphere is beneficial not only for the free-thinking public. It's good for everyone. I receive letters from ultra-orthodox Jews, asking me, a secular MK from Meretz, for assistance on integrating into the work force, education, discrimination within their community. They write me about humiliation they experience on buses and in schools; and about discrimination between oriental Jews and Ashkenazim and between rich and poor.

Do many ultra-orthodox turn to you?

Horowitz: Yes, a great many. I see the pressure cooker in which they live and sense their distress. They long for change. Someone needs to come and take the lid off that pressure cooker. Do you think endless study in a yeshiva, with no work, no income, lots of children and a life of poverty and ignorance in a crowded neighborhood, suits everyone? It doesn't. There are people who want to work. Do you know how many appeals I get from young religious girls who finished high school, but are not allowed to take their matriculation examinations, for blatantly irrelevant reasons?

We want every child in Israel to have an education that will enable him/her to work, acquire a profession and make it in this world. That is the most elementary human thing. It is the most elementary Jewish thing.

Mula: Last week, I returned from a trip to the US. Seated next to me on the plane, was an ultra-orthodox woman and her daughter. "*We live in Brooklyn,*" she told me. "*And we don't understand how your State knowingly allows the ultra-orthodox to be idle and unemployed, while expecting the State to fund them.*"

Horowitz: In Brooklyn, they wanted to run separate bus lines [for men and women]. The mayor told them, "*If you want lines like that, fund them yourselves!*" Here, in Israel, the Egged and Dan bus companies need to maintain and fund bus lines in which women have to sit at the back of the bus!

If you could get up tomorrow morning and change one thing in the realm of religion and state in Israel, what would it be?

Mula: I would want to have civil marriages in Israel. These go to the heart of a citizen's most basic rights. A person should be able to say, "I am going to city hall" and have the way he/she marries reflect the spirit of his/her way of life

I would choose to marry in a religious ceremony, but that's my free choice.

I would also want to abolish religious coercion in regard to public transport on Shabbat. In the end, it is the people who have no money and need public transportation, who are affected. Those who **have** money can take their car or a taxi.

Horowitz: I would go a bit further than Shlomo and do away with the system of religious courts in Israel—the Sharia, the Druze, the Christian and others.

Lior Tal heads BINA's Lova Eliav Mechina [pre-army program]

Book Review:

A Revolt Grounded in Tradition

Noam Regev

David Biale's book, *Not in the Heavens: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought*, has recently appeared in Hebrew translation. The book deals with the roots of secular Jewish culture. For Biale, Judaism as a religion is a modern invention, no less so than Jewish secularism. In fact, the roots of Judaism as a culture explain both religious and secular Judaism.

In his preface to the book, written with a grant from the Posen Foundation, Biale claims that *"Jewish secularism was a revolt grounded in the tradition it rejected."* He adds, *"In this book, I will argue that Jewish secularism is a tradition that has its own unique characteristics grounded in part in its pre-modern sources."* Biale concludes from Deutscher's book, *Non-Jewish Jews* that *"even the heretic remains somehow connected to that which he rejects, for the source of his heresy may lie within that tradition."*

Using fascinating dialectics, Beale cites sources from which one can conclude that the roots of Jewish secularism are to be found in the distant history of Jewish thought, from ancient times to the present day. One is not referring to secular thinkers who happened to be Jewish or came from Jewish origins; and one is not speaking only of self-declared heretics, such as Elisha ben Abuya, or Hiwi al-Balkhi, a ninth-century Persian Jew who came to the conclusion that the Bible's God is unjust, not omniscient, not omnipotent, changes his mind, and likes blood and sacrifices; and that the Bible is full of anthropomorphisms and contains many contradictions. And one is not talking only about philosophers like Spinoza, who because of his approach to the Bible and to the essence of godliness in Jewish religion--revolutionary for those days--was declared a heretic and excommunicated; one is also speaking of Talmud scholars.

In one the most famous stories in the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer finds himself in a minority of one in opposition to the other rabbis. He invokes various miracles on his side, but the majority is unimpressed. Finally, he insists that if the law is according to his opinion: "let the heavens prove it." Immediately, a *bat kol*, a heavenly voice, affirms that his reading of the law is the right one. Against this seemingly iron-clad defense, Rabbi Joshua, the majority leader stands on his feet and quoting

Deuteronomy (30:12) declares: "*It [the Torah] is not in the heavens.*" The Talmud asks: "*What does 'it is not in the heaven' mean?*" A later authority, Rabbi Yermiya explains: "*Since the Torah was given at Sinai, we no longer listen to a heavenly voice.*" In other words, consciousness, judgment, lifestyle – all these are not heaven-given, but in human hands; people are free to choose their actions.

"Not in the Heavens," was written by Los Angeles-born David Biale, Emanuel Ringelblum Distinguished Professor of Jewish History and Chair of the Department of History, at the University of California, Davis.

In his book, Biale accepts the definition of Judaism as being God, Torah and Israel. But, he infuses these with new, sometimes revolutionary, content. He demonstrates how even in the Bible, in the books of Ecclesiastes and Job, there is doubt about the omnipotence that religion ascribed to God. Biale shows how, many years before Spinoza (whom he dubs "Maimonides' step-son"), by separating God from the world, Maimonides paved the way to the autonomous realm of nature. Not that nature operates outside the Divine Providence, but it does so under what medieval scholastics called "general providence," or the laws of nature. In discussing the Bible (*Torah: The Secular Jewish Bible* is the title of one of the book's chapters), and "Israel", Biale cites sages of the Middle Ages, such as Moshe Ibn Ezra. In talking about the *Torah* and its commentators, he says: "*The Bible contains the seeds of its own subversion. If the word 'Torah' was meant to convey the word of God, some of its books disrupted this theological consistency.*"

Biale conducts a fascinating journey into Jewish aspects of the history of culture that includes Moses Mendelssohn, Moses ben-Maimon, Heinrich Heine, Sigmund Freud, Gershom Scholem, Albert Einstein, Chaim Nahman Bialik, Shaul Tchernichovsky, Micah Joseph Berdichevsky, Yosef Haim Brenner (who refused to use the word "Bible", referring to it as "Biblia"), Moshe Hess, Bernard Lazare, Theodore Herzl, Hannah Arendt, David Ben Gurion, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Chaim Zhitlovsky, post-Zionist thinkers, Israeli Hebrew writers, Jewish authors who write in English and recent American Jewish theologians. I have listed all these in order to demonstrate the breadth of the canvass which David Biale lays out before us in explaining the roots of secular Jewish culture.

The word "secularism," says Biale, "*refers to the political doctrine of separation of church and state.*" For the secularist, according to Immanuel Kant, law should derive

not from an external, divine source, but from autonomous human decisions. *"To remove religion from the state means to leave humans in full command of their political fate."*

Biale ends his book with a marvelous story. He recounts how his father, a disciple of the HaShomer Hatzair youth movement in Poland, who was secular, began going to synagogue a few times a year. *"On coming home from Kol Nidre, the evening of Yom Kippur, with an impish twinkle in his eye, he would call for tea and cake. As for myself, a different way of marking the holiest day of the Jewish year marks my own 'post-secularism.' With a minyan ('prayer quorum') of friends, my family and I repair to Muir Woods, where, I like to think, the Almighty himself (if he exists) must pray among the giant, ancient redwoods. A religious or secular ritual? Neither and, yet, both, a paradoxical hybrid only possible in the wake of a century and more of the tradition of Jewish secular thought that has been the subject of this book."*

Noam Regev is the pseudonym of a Hebrew writer, author of *The Penelope File*

A Lax Secularism: With No Battles

by Dr. Guy Ben-Porat

Broad processes of secularization have occurred in Israel within the last two decades. Thousands of couples marry without the intervention of the Rabbinate; hundreds are buried without the *Hevrat Kadisha* [orthodox organization charged with preparing the bodies of Jews for burial according to Jewish tradition]; hundreds of thousands frequent shopping malls every Shabbat; and every day, Israelis buy non-kosher meat in supermarkets, delicatessens and restaurants. On the other hand, the Jewish orthodox monopoly and the power of orthodox political parties have been preserved; many Israelis continue to define themselves in religious terms; and in their self-definition and very existence, the secular have a complex and ambivalent relationship with Jewish religion, usually in its recognized orthodox version.

Sharpening Confrontation – A Paralyzed Political System

These contradictions make it hard for those who want to analyze the position of religion and the chances of secularization in Israel. They are expressed in public opinion polls published from time to time, which further exacerbate the lack of clarity. Discussions of secularization processes in Israel and the position of religion in the country tend to focus on ideological confrontations between secular and religious, or on political battles and the declarations accompanying these. They paint a picture of an ideological confrontation that is increasingly sharpening and a paralyzed political system, unable to moderate the growing chasm.

This depiction, precise as it may be, is not complete, as it ignores important processes outside the political arena--economic, social and demographic processes of everyday life, devoid of secular or other ideology. Even if not bound together in a coherent belief system, such processes alter the face of the public sphere and affect the ideological confrontation and political structure. Thus, while agreements on religion and state and the orthodox stronghold remain without significant change, the secularization of the public arena in Israel during the last two decades is evident.

A more comprehensive view of relations between religion and state and an understanding of the secularization processes, call for three theoretical and empirical steps:

- 1) Per American sociologist Mark Chaves, shifting the object of secularization from religion to the religious authority - According to this definition, secularization is not measured in change in belief, or observance of religious customs--which remain stable and may even be strengthened—but in the erosion of the authority of religious institutions. A weakening in the position of the religious establishment, coupled with growing emphasis on freedom and choice, don't necessarily create a consistent and coherent secularism. Rather, they often form an individual cluster of secular and religious beliefs, behaviors and values which shift from time to time and from place to place;
- 2) Separation between secularization processes and a secular-liberal worldview - Secularization processes associated with economic changes and the culture of consumption are sometimes unrelated to any ideology or identity and can exist alongside religious identity and identification without a commitment to the values of tolerance and equality;
- 3) Changes associated with the process of secularization don't necessarily occur within formal channels, but rather through initiatives that bypass the political system and through daily personal responses to these.

Three Factors of Secularization

Secular struggles were already in existence in pre-State times. They combined liberal humanistic positions with a secular nationalism that sought to replace religion. During the 1990's, three secularization processes were added:

- 1) A non-orthodox Judaism that sought/demanded to ascribe a different meaning to Judaism that would be recognized by the State;

- 2) The immigration, under the Law of Return, of secular Jews from the former Soviet Union, including those not recognized as Jews by the orthodox establishment, who by their very presence challenged existing agreements;
- 3) Neo-liberalism and the growth of a hedonistic consumption society which sometimes ignored religious boundaries and authority.

Together, these formed a complex, multi-dimensional process of secularization in Israel with shifting aims, interests and commitments. This secularization process encountered a political system that has difficulty adapting to changes and to those opposed to preserving or strengthening the position of religion.

The standing of religion in Israel stems not only from formal agreements which give the orthodox, authority, but also from the ambivalence of the traditional and mainly secular Jewish public toward religion and the role it fulfills in Israeli-Jewish identity. The formal position of orthodox Judaism is preserved not only by virtue of the sometimes vague role of religion in establishing Jewish-Israeli identity, but also through the role played by the religious establishment in Israel as guardian of the Jewish national state's boundaries. Consequently, one can interpret the support of the secular public for the separation of religion and state not necessarily as liberalism committed to free choice, but as a more limited move that seeks to preserve Jewish boundaries and to render life within these, more flexible. The flexibility sought by that same secular public—which finds it difficult to cut itself off from "tradition", and whose commitment to liberal values is at times low--is often directed not toward a political struggle that demands enlistment, but toward individual solutions that avoid confrontation.

Secularizing the Public Space

Over ten years ago, writer and journalist Yisrael Segal, who was once ultra-orthodox, described what he terms secular defeat: "the overall war ended, to my mind, with the downfall of the secular....We are living under the occupation of an orthodox minority --an ever-broadening occupation."

The Israeli reality of the 21st century seems far removed from orthodox minority rule. In many respects, the impact of religious orthodoxy on everyday life in Israel is dwindling. In juxtaposition to the formal position of Orthodox Judaism in Israel and of religious institutions in the public arena, significant parts of the public space are being secularized. These two processes are seemingly independent: Laws which govern marriage, burial and commerce continue to reflect religious political power and have remained almost unaltered, despite the new economic and demographic reality. On the other hand, shopping centers open on Shabbat that cater to thousands, hundreds of shops and restaurants which sell non-kosher meat, non-orthodox weddings and secular cemeteries, are all testimony to the change taking place.

The paradox of a religious definition and a secular reality, is explained when research on secularization and religion shifts focus from the formal political arena and the organized intentional acts of political players, to new arenas of action. In these economic, social-civil arenas, the actions of entrepreneurs, both individuals and groups, sometimes unintentional, and usually without a guiding hand, contribute to the secularization of the public sphere. The secularization processes are motivated not only (or mainly) by a coherent belief system of liberal secularization, but by a secularization based on economic and demographic changes; one that does not seek to change the order of things, such as separation of religion from state, and does not enlist in broad struggles. This is both the source of its power and its weakness.

In face of the paralysis of the political system, the public space in Israel has become the central arena in which the lines of religious authority are being redrawn. These "secular" changes, expressed through the secular public's growing freedom of choice—where to marry, how to be buried, what to eat and how to have a good time on Shabbat—are not equivalent to an all out "secular revolution." The new secular range of possibilities did not spring from protest and struggle and is somewhat detached from any political commitment or ideological agenda. It has no need for these. Thus, the opportunities for secular Israelis to marry in non-orthodox ceremonies, or in "friendly" orthodox ceremonies, and of those barred from marrying, to wed abroad seemingly renders the principled struggle for the right to marry, superfluous. For those who can and are ready to pay, the possibility of purchasing a burial plot in a well-tended kibbutz cemetery renders the struggle against the orthodox

monopoly, superfluous. Through its consumer power, the economically and culturally well-established secular public has freed itself almost totally from the authority of the rabbinate. This lax secularism is based on personal choices and alternatives that bypass the religious authorities and negotiate with them, yet for the most part, avoid confrontation. The standing of women in rabbinical courts (in cases of divorce), the standing of non-orthodox rabbis, the right to free civil marriage and burial and the possibility of introducing new religious legislation, are examples of the tenuous position of these secularization processes and the shallowness of (some of) Israeli secularism. Protest against religious authority, by bypassing it, benefits mainly the strong groups in Israeli society and paradoxically ensures the position of religious orthodoxy. Secular-liberal struggles for minority rights, gender equality and freedom of choice, which do not derive from the market economy, or from demographic changes, and might violate the secular laxness, will it seems, be forced to wait for the rise of another type of secularism.

Guy Ben-Porat's book, *Between State & Synagogue: The Secularization of Modern Israel*, will be published by Cambridge University Press.

On Music, Psalms and God

by Doron Neshet

Let's talk about the transition from conceptual music (music that plays in a one's head), to actual music (as heard, for example, in concert halls), as I think it will clarify something of the age-old enigma regarding the transition from a conceptual God (that exists in human consciousness and imagination) to human society.

In order to be able to play music, we must tune our instruments. That's obvious. Every child knows it. If they are to make music together, musicians must agree on a single note, to which they tune their instruments. If musicians were each to tune their instruments to a different note, even if they all played the same notes, these would sound different. The "Do" would not be the same "Do" and the "Re" would not be the same "Re". The same goes for all other notes. The pitch of the note, according to which orchestra instruments are tuned, usually "La," is not absolute, but agreed-upon. It seeks to be absolute, it acts as if it were absolute, but only when it is unified and agreed-upon by everyone as absolute, does it allow the orchestra to play together and in unison express a common musical idea. It enables all instruments to be heard, not as a chaotic mix, but as part of something that is orderly, a logical construction, an internal structure, evolving, a direction, an exchange. Each instrument has a presence of its own, as well as a role in the larger array. There is harmony, even if the composition itself contains sections that reflect a lack of order and disharmony.

How did all this come about? Who gave the instructions? How was one note agreed upon? Was it imposed? Was it preceded by a war of independence by the other notes? Did some musicians protest against the lost dignity of the notes not chosen? Were there complaints of discrimination?

One might assume that the role of the almost absolute tuning note is technical, no more than that of "organizer." But, when you actually think about it, without the unified uniting note, we would find ourselves in musical chaos, in a Tower of Babel, in a situation in which "language" is impossible and there is no communication. The music would be unable to fulfill its mission: Every note and every utterance would be ejected into the air, devoid of context.

The philosopher Wittgenstein asserted that the limits of knowledge are determined by the limits of language. If language is fragmented, knowledge cannot adequately shift from the conceptual to the actual. Moreover, if this occurs, our perceptions and

awareness are affected, as is our moral conduct. Thus, the almost absolute role of the "La" is that of a dynamic key. Moreover, it is a kind of leader, whose very presence allows us not only to tune every note on its own, but to naturally organize the entire array. It then disappears without making claims to its kingdom. There are those who would say it is without parallel: A leader, devoid of ego, about which one can only dream.

Here, we need to say a few things about the Book of Psalms and the role of God within it. If we say that everyone has a God of their own, it is as if we were saying that everyone has a note by which they tune their instrument. God's role in Psalms is that of the almost absolute "La": It is aimed at having those praying not sound like an untuned orchestra; at having the communal utterance be meaningful, rather than sounding arbitrary or chaotic. Prayer has no guarantee and is not meant as proof of the existence of God. But, when the Godly idea is like the "La", according to which the orchestra is tuned, then prayer takes on meaning.

The question is, in what sense can God serve as the tuning note for believers, when each believes in something else. Every person, even a sworn atheist, has an inherent God concept, and even if he/she doesn't believe in His presence, she/he can answer the question, "What would God do in such and such a situation?" For example, let's assume that a 100 shekel bill fell out of a man's pocket. A man walking behind him picks it up, after the man who lost the bill has already turned the corner. The finder could continue on his way with the 100 shekel bill, without fear of discovery, or he could run after the man who disappeared and return the bill to him. The issue is not what is preferable in such a situation, but another: If we were to ask anyone, even a child, what God (if He exists) would expect us to do in such a situation, all in their right mind would know what God would claim was the right thing to do, as all of us can understand the Godly considerations.

That is how one should try to read the Book of Psalms: as an effort to determine criteria for the "La" that aspires to absolutism in music. It is clear to the authors of Psalms that our "La" is not really absolute. In everyday life, it would be considered naive and unrealistic, and there is the fear that the harsh reality would destroy it. *Entre nous*, if we were to formulate the role of the absolute "La" in a manifesto, whose role is to organize instruments to play together in unison, even then we would be full of doubts. The Book of Psalms seeks to be a collection of psalms, on the basis of which one can help people tune themselves by the absolute "La".

It is important to stress, however, that in itself, this guarantees nothing. One must remember that tuning the instruments does not ensure that this evening, the orchestra will give its best performance ever, not even that the conductor will be at his absolute best. Tuning the instruments does not render the composition better or worse. We are only talking about the pre-conditions. This is also the case of Psalms: to tune each person like a musical instrument, to enable language, communication, a moral basis, organization, evolution; in a word, meaning.

Doron Neshet is an artist and media person

Idealistic Teachers Open Student Minds

Doron Neshet interviews Prof. Ron Margolin

Ron Margolin is Professor of Modern Jewish Thought, the Study of Hasidism and Religions, and head of the Ofakim Program at Tel Aviv University, which trains excelling university students to teach Judaism as a culture in high schools.

What is the Ofakim Program?

Ron Margolin: The Ofakim Program is aimed at highly able, excelling students pursuing studies in the Jewish Philosophy Section of the Department of Hebrew Culture Studies, at Tel Aviv University's Faculty of Humanities. In addition to an undergraduate degree, at the end of three years, students emerge with a Teaching Certificate in Jewish Thought.

The field of Jewish Thought acquaints high school students with Jewish sources, not only from a biblical perspective, but also from a broader view afforded through exposure to sources of Jewish culture throughout history.

Which young people are suitable candidates? Who among them will say, "Hey, this is for me"?

Young people, who following their army service continue to be troubled by the question of how their life here in Israel connects to Judaism, and are concerned that in Israeli society, Judaism is associated primarily with the orthodox model as we know it; Jews who don't belong to one of the many streams of *halachic* Judaism, and are asking themselves: *What is our connection to Judaism? What does Israeli society have to do with Judaism? Is there only one model of Judaism, the rabbinical-halachic model?*

The program targets young people who pose such questions and want to engage in affecting Israeli society's future on these issues by teaching in high schools.

Are these people who regard themselves as future teachers?

Yes. These are people who think teaching poses a challenge of prime importance; young people who understand that within that framework one can deal with questions pertaining to the basic structure of Israeli society. These Israelis, usually referred to as "secular" or "traditional," want to play a role in constructing an Israeli-

Jewish identity, which is not based on uncritical commitment to the worldview and way of life of *halachic*-orthodox Judaism.

In short, they are educators: There are many teachers, but being an educator calls for special intent and suitable training.

In the field of education, there is a struggle waged in recent years on reformulating the question of identity. You say: "*We want to approach the formulation of Israeli-Jewish identity in a new way. We have noticed that there is something missing from Israeli secularism; that there is a vacuum or lacuna.*" I call it 'Jewish sources,' which are of relevance to anyone who is not from a religious background.

Facing the Challenges of Modernity

From its very inception, there was an important leadership group that perceived Zionism not only as a haven for Jews suffering in European or Moslem countries, but also as an opportunity for the Jewish people's renewal in face of the challenges of modernity. Some labeled that group the "spiritual Zionist camp," or "cultural Zionism." It was headed by a long line of people, among them, known figures such as Ahad Ha'am, Bialik and Buber and a whole list of writers, poets, artists, teachers and educators, who shared a view of Zionism as the great opportunity for renewal; a revival of Judaism for people living in the modern, secularized age.

How long has Ofakim been active?

The program has been in existence for seven years. This year, we opened our eighth class with fifteen students. Some of our graduates have been teaching in schools for two, three, or four years. Their work has been praised by both students and principals.

How do you measure success?

There is nothing simple about measuring success in education. But, there are various indicators--for example, feedback from our graduates' students. Some high school students describe our graduates as "teachers for life," idealistic teachers who open student minds, enabling them to become acquainted with Jewish sources--medieval or modern *midrashim*--from a new perspective, one with which the students are unfamiliar. For me, this constitutes great success.

Our students teach in high schools countrywide. Many of them have become key figures in their schools. Teaching Jewish texts from the *midrash* and medieval and

later Jewish philosophical thought, as a basis for open discussions on the fundamental questions of life, is not simply an encounter with the culture of the past, but a source of inspiration for shaping present-day culture.

Can one find this program in every high school in Israel? Does the Ministry of Education make the decisions on this? Does the school request it?

Over the past decade, the teaching of Jewish culture in junior high schools has been gradually institutionalized. That's a positive beginning. We believe the greater challenge lies in relation to high schools--grades 10 to 12--the stage at which students achieve intellectual maturity, a necessary condition for deeper learning.

In recent years, elective and sometimes compulsory study of Jewish thought in high schools, most especially in tenth grades, has expanded. The big question now is whether the trend that regards high school as a golden opportunity to broaden student horizons, will continue, or be stemmed as a result of tendencies to reduce the number of subjects taught in high schools, leaving little room for personal student choices.

Is there a parallel program aimed at introducing Israeli content into the religious education system, with an emphasis on Zionism and non-religious Jewish thinkers, such as Ahad Ha'am and Bialik, perceived by the religious education system as an "empty wagon?"

Our program disagrees with the "empty wagon" notion. On the contrary, it is based on a belief that the public education system has a "full wagon," with which one needs to get acquainted.

I think we need to distinguish between the national religious public and the ultra-orthodox one. The national religious public has a national agenda of its own. Its children are exposed to the complexity of cultural-Jewish-Zionist-Israeli existence—albeit, in my opinion, primarily in a one-dimensional and therefore, unsatisfactory manner. The big problem is, of course, the ultra-orthodox public, whose worldview is that of the Eastern European *shtetl*, i.e., a Diaspora mentality. That huge public is living here, yet as if in another land, certainly in relation to Israeli culture.

Do we feel we have failed; that we have thrown the baby out with the bath water; that in the name of the Zionist revolution that shaped a "new anti-galut Jew," we abandoned our original Jewish sources and are now trying to return to these?

Zionism never threw out all the water. Some Jewish components were pivotal to it. The most obvious example is that of the Bible, rendered central to Zionist culture, as opposed to its more marginal position in Diaspora religious Jewish culture. Leaning on the Bible alone, we were not able to get to know post-biblical Jewish culture, the culture that shaped Judaism during the thousands of years that have elapsed from biblical days to the present.

There were important attempts to fill in the gaps. Bialik and Ravnitzki's *Sefer Haggadah* was written at the beginning of the 20th century, against the background of Ahad Ha'am's call for spiritual Zionism. Jewish medieval poetry was presented in those years as a shining example of Jewish culture inspired by the Bible in medieval times. Until the 1960's, Talmud was taught in all Israeli high schools. But, there has been neglect, lack of sufficient understanding as to the problematic nature of a literal teaching of the texts, devoid of the broader context.

Do you need to be a believer to teach Jewish sources?

Our approach is based on one's sense of "belonging." I study or teach the Bible, the *midrash*, a portion of the Talmud, or engage in a philosophical discussion, or a kabbalistic idea, because these are all part of the Jewish culture which formed the Jewish people. It is a culture based largely on the Hebrew language, the language of the state, and for many, a mother tongue. These are the sources that formed the cultural-historic continuum on which our claim for national existence rests. The Jewish continuum was not created by a permanent presence in the Land of Israel, but by Jews rallying around the sources that shaped their way of life and the worldview of their sons and daughters.

This was the innovative claim made by Jewish historians of the 19th century, the most important of whom was, for this purpose, Zvi Gritz. On the basis of this claim, diverse figures were able to formulate Jewish national demands at the end of the 19th century. These culminated in the demand to establish a state for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Simply put, the claim asserted that we, too, have a history, even if we were not all present on the same territory, but dispersed throughout the world.

The cultural history, emanating from the literary sources of the Jewish people, underlie the claim of continuity. Those who ignore this fact will have difficulty explaining our claim to national continuity. The Orthodox Jewish claim that observance of *halachic mitzvot* is at the heart of this history, is a reduction of that

culture to an orthodox way of life—even if *halachic mitzvot* played a central role in this cultural history up until 200 years ago.

It is no secret that God is at the center of most of these texts. But, only those who oversimplify, think the concept of a Jewish God has one meaning only. It is patently obvious that the God of the biblical Jews cannot be the God of the Jew of 2011. Just as our sages altered many meanings in the *midrash* in this regard; not to mention Maimonides' God, or that of the Hasidim or Kabbalists.

Are you not, in any case, uprooting Godliness in your Ofakim Program?

When teaching these sources, you first have to emphasize the historic dynamics in relation to the concept of God. You then also naturally address the question of the relationship between one's own perception and diverse interpretations of the concept of God in Jewish sources.

Jewish creation in medieval times revolves largely around the question of God. The philosophical and kabbalistic structures try to come up with complex responses. We are now 66 years past the Holocaust—which gave rise to much sharper questions than those raised by Jews who underwent processes of secularization at the end of the 19th century.

How can one talk about Divine and personal Providence, or about the Providence of the Jewish people in such a simplistic way? It is important that students, who are exposed to a range of meanings, arrive at their own conclusions--after realizing that they cannot find meaning in the traditional concepts of God; and that their atheistic position be based on acquaintance and dialogue with the sources. When absolute atheism expresses sincerity and inner honesty, as a result of seriously tackling traditional beliefs, it can express a deep modesty—paradoxically, of greater religious value than religious belief, which is a reflection of indoctrination, ignorance and insincerity. For such people, God is truth.

Can Judaism exist without God? There is certainly also a Judaism without God.

There are Jews! Judaism is a highly modern concept. It is what Jews believe in and the way Jews live by virtue of being Jews. The claim that Judaism is solely the

observance of *mitzvot*, is as mentioned, a reduction sanctified by orthodox circles. But, it is clear that the belief in God had a central position in the historic Judaism shaped by our sages. Over the last 200 years, Judaism has taken on new and varied meanings. If Judaism is what Jews do and what they believe in by virtue of being Jews, then there is certainly a Judaism without God. Zionism is the best example of that. Most of the Zionist movement's leaders and thinkers were secular Jews, whose Zionism reflected a system of beliefs and deeds which emanated from their very Jewishness--independent of a belief in God. With the exception of religious Zionism and remarkable personalities, such as Martin Buber, Zionism reflected that Jewishness. The big question is not whether there is or isn't a Judaism without God--there is--but, the content which shapes that Judaism.

When you say, "I want to shape Jews to have broad Jewish perspective"--what are the critical building blocks toward that end?

Among others, that the historic literary sources of the Jewish people also belong to secular Jews and can be just as relevant to them as to Jews who observe *mitzvot*, albeit in a different way. The secular Jewish position is one of an openness that observes. It is primarily an ideological stand, in dialogue with the sources: *What can I derive from these? What seems unreasonable? Which elements stimulate new thoughts, by arousing opposition? With which values from the sources do I identify?*

Just as we talk about values pertaining to beliefs, we should also regard these from the perspective of our way of life: *What Jewish rituals do I observe? How?*

Zionism created a relationship with the traditional holidays. Some holidays, like Hanukkah, Pesach, Shavuot as the holiday of the first fruits, and Tu Bishvat, were strengthened; while others were weakened. Some of the holidays' significance dwindled, as a result of changes, like the decline in the centrality of agriculture.

Informed learning of Jewish sources also has something to offer on the issue of God. As a researcher of Hasidism, I find a great deal of sense in Hasidic interpretations of the concept of God, as they are much more relevant to the present--for example, the perception of God as vitality.

What is "vitality?"

Vitality is the concept used in Hasidic sources to express vividness. It is tragic that we have been cut off from this interpretation, which is much more interesting than other banal interpretations and also more relevant to the present. The perception of God as vitality can serve as a bridge for secular Jews when they encounter the concept of God in religious texts.

When you teach post-army students studying Judaism in the Ofakim program, how do they, for example, cope with the perception of the covenant with God, as expressed in the covenant of Abraham, i.e., circumcision? Do they ascribe a modern meaning to it? Do they relate to that issue, or do they ignore it?

We run an academic program. We don't deal in indoctrination. In an academic program, you expose students to different theories and ways of thinking, and offer diverse explanations.

You get to know that there is a difference between different historic periods. You discover the complexity of Jewish tradition and culture. And as a teacher, you provide students with tools that enable them to shape their own understanding, to find their way and worldview, in hope that they will act in a similar fashion with their students. That's the difference between an orthodox worldview and a free one; between state, religious and ultra-orthodox education. We seek expose our students to as many positions as possible. First, one introduces them to the texts and then to their differing interpretations. One exposes students to the historic and conceptual contexts and to whole systems of conceptual thinking that allow them to discover the variety that exists, after which they can try to crystallize their own personal views. We try not to approach things from a pre-determined position. For, the moment such positions are pre-determined, it will no longer be simply state education, but religious state education.

To sum up, what is the essential part of the battle over Israeli identity?

I think that if Israel society does not ascribe deeper meaning to our existence in Israel, beyond the claim that we came here as a refuge, to escape the hatred of other nations toward us; if we don't infuse our efforts to exist in our region, with a more

positive flavor, not only negative explanations, we will arrive at the dead end in which we find ourselves today.

The religious explanations, which impress part of the secular public--some of which is reverting to various gradations of religiosity--are based on a commitment to the Bible as Divine (*Torah mishamayim*) and the acceptance of *halacha*. Such explanations are not relevant to most Jews in Israel.

I believe the greatest challenge we, in Israel, face today, is the creation of a secularized Jewish culture that will form a natural continuum to the sources of the past, based not on a fundamentalist approach, but on a deep synthesis with modern life, science and technology and the globalization processes, of which Israel is a part.

That is the reason I so value training teachers-educators, who understand these problems and devote time and energy to dealing with them, both in their thinking and in educating their students.

Judaism as a Culture

by Dr. Ariel Picard

What do people who say that their perception of Judaism is "cultural" mean? What is the difference between the perception of Judaism as a national culture and its perception as a religion?

To gain an understanding of this, we have to look at the term "culture". In common usage, the word "culture" evokes associations pertaining to art, entertainment and leisure—like the cultural supplement of a newspaper, or the cultural corner on radio or TV. And while these are all certainly part of culture, the term "culture" is far broader and deeper.

Culture is the sphere in which human life exists. It is the intervening variable between man and nature, man and the world and man and society. Culture comprises oral and written language, symbol and rite systems, dress codes, eating habits, the world of images and emotions, and religious beliefs and rituals, as well as other human behaviors.

A social group is defined by its unique cultural codes. Human beings have a deep need to belong to a social-cultural group within whose framework their identity is shaped. Drawing on an analogy in relation to culture from the Kabbalah, we can say that, "There is no place devoid of God" (in the original Aramaic, "*leit atar panui minehu*")--there is no human reality that is purely natural, not cultural.

Between Religion and Culture

However, there is a significant difference between the perception of Judaism as a religious culture and its perception as a national culture. In the religious perception of Judaism, the source of authority is God and his messengers/interpreters on earth. Religious commitment means responding to the Godly decree. In contrast, in the national cultural perception of Judaism, it is the nation which shapes culture. The national cultural perception emanates from a modern worldview that regards humans as sovereign over their lives. However, unlike some modernistic perceptions that regard humans as free individuals who shape their own lives, it recognizes the fact the humans are born into given cultures and don't create themselves from nothingness. This does not mean that we are bound by the culture into which we are born and must accept it as it is. Indeed, we can affect that culture, shape it and even change it.

Throughout the ages, changes have occurred in very ancient cultures, such as Jewish culture--resulting from association with other cultures, or realities of life. This is how in the modern era, a modern national Jewish culture was shaped, derived from an encounter between traditional Jewish culture and western modernity. The cultural perception of Judaism is necessarily an active and dynamic one, whose roots are deeply entrenched in an ancient heritage which seeks to perpetuate and shape that culture in the present.

Jewish-Israeli Culture in the Public Space

The uniqueness of Jewish-Israeli culture lies in its being the central culture of the public space in Israel. In Jewish communities abroad, there is a gap between the culture of their public space and that of their personal and communal one. Their public space functions in accordance with the local culture, into which Jews usually integrate and according to which they conduct themselves. Their "Jewish life" takes place within their homes and in well-defined communal spaces.

In Israel, there is a continuum between the modes of existence of diverse Jewish communities and groups and the public space. Despite the fact that Israeli culture is part of Western culture, there are many expressions of Jewish culture in Israel. The new Hebrew language was built on the many strata of ancient Hebrew. The Zionist ideology present in Israeli culture is laden with traditional Jewish concepts. The Israeli calendar incorporates a Hebrew calendar of Jewish holidays and memorial days, which determines the work and rest days of the Israeli economy and the host of cultural activities which accompany them.

Art, music and literature in Israel are engaged in an ongoing creative dialogue with Jewish culture. Chaim Nachman Bialik described this in "The Renaissance of Culture in Eretz Yisrael," written in 1930. Indeed, the renewal which Eretz Yisrael introduced into the cultural field can only be described as "revolutionary." As Bialik put it, "The moment a Jew sets foot in Eretz Yisrael, the term 'culture' becomes immeasurably wide and all encompassing...taking on the same content as in all the other normal nations." Israel as a sovereign state enables the flowering of Jewish-Israeli culture in all spheres of life.

The Weakness of Jewish Culture in Israel

If culture is to function meaningfully in the lives of individuals and society, there must be awareness of its place, and commitment to cultural patterns, learning, education, and cultural endeavors. Choice of Jewish Israeli culture as the central component of our lives requires investment and loyalty, if the language and symbols of Jewish culture are going to function and provide meaning. Moreover, the perception of Judaism as a central component in Israeli culture requires assumption of responsibility, as well as cultural creativity.

One of the characteristics of the post-modern era—thanks to rapid communication, transportation and personal liberty—is the sense of cosmopolitanism and the lack of a stable cultural anchor. In order to cement the core of Jewish culture in people's awareness and way of life and prevent assimilation or dilution in a free, multi-cultural atmosphere, Jewish Israelis, who believe in open cultural perception and dialogue, need to engage in intensive study and make significant efforts. Pluralism, aimed at enabling the flowering of cultures can also be a recipe for spiritual dilution and cultural superficiality. That is why the post-modern condition calls for great investment and commitment to culture. One needs to strengthen the communal dimension, the basis of existence for culture, and to have the dissemination of Jewish Israeli culture be a central part of the educational core in Israel.

For many years, Jewish-Israeli society left the definition and realization of its Jewish identity in life and in rites and symbols, to the orthodox rabbinical establishment. By so doing, it avoided taking responsibility for crystallizing Jewish culture. There are, of course, political reasons for this. But basically, there is bewilderment and a feeling of helplessness in face of the clear and solid definition of Orthodox Judaism. A situation in which there is no meaningful alternative to orthodoxy results in growing alienation among Jewish groups in Israeli society, and from Judaism.

From Agada [Legend] to Halacha

Cultural identity cannot exist within the realm of ideas alone. It lives in the world of deeds, in life's realities. It is what endows life with its vitality and existential meaning. In "*God in Search of Man*," Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "the dimension of inwardness never exists disconnected from external activity. Deed and thought are bound together...like a work of art...Is it the artist's inner vision that gives birth to the sculpture, or is it his struggle with the stone?"

Real life is like a work of art, the product of both vision and struggle in a concrete situation. Life in a cultural system resembles a work of art. The art is the "struggle with the stone," the encounter between vision and deed. This is also true in regard to Jewish cultural heritage. It cannot exist only in a world of ideas and study. Its existence must also be in the world of deeds, in the realities of life. That is what imbues it with its vitality and existential significance. As Bialik wrote: "*Agada [legend, story] which leads to halacha [practice] is great...and he who says 'I have only an agada'- one should examine his agada, lest it prove to be only an empty shell.*"

Culture requires rituals, norms and values and a system of symbols, ceremonies and experiences, which endow life- and year-cycles and personal and social existence, with meaning. There is importance in regularity and loyalty to repetitive actions, without which culture wouldn't exist and would be devoid of significance. Culture acts and provides meaning only when it has a firm existential basis in reality. While that base is given to change and variety over time, it must nevertheless have a dimension of regularity and stability. Toward this end, we need to derive inspiration from cultural tradition and adapt it to modern human existence.

While the traditional Jewish cultural way of life has undergone many changes throughout the generations, it always included awareness of the *mitzvah* [Jewish injunction], the obligation. Today, many Jews no longer identify with the heteronymous concept of obligation, having adopted an approach of dialogue to Jewish practice. Ceremonies, *mitzvot* and customs are not practices frozen in time, which need to be observed in accordance with precise instructions. We need to reshape them creatively, so that they will reflect our lives, our needs and our feelings. There are already quite a number of examples of creativity in Israeli culture, in relation to Jewish ceremonies which conduct a dialogue with Jewish tradition and constitute a successful expression of the fruitful encounter between tradition and the present; leaving ample room for creative and varied development. Berl Katznelson formulated this well: "*A generation of renewal and creativity does not throw the heritage of generations into the waste bin. It observes and examines, pushes away and brings near. It sometimes holds on to an existing tradition, on which it expands. And it sometimes looks through the scrap piles, exposes things forgotten and cleans off the rust, reviving an ancient tradition that can nurture the spirit of the generation of renewal.*"

Communality and Pluralism

Modern cultural perception must be essentially pluralistic, in relation to both sub-groups within the majority society and cultural minority groups. The perception of Judaism as a culture should be expressed in the national and communal public sphere, in which a unique cultural existence is enabled and blossoms--so vital to shaping identity and crystallizing cultural patterns. In a culture, in which large parts of it find expression in a shared public space, there must be general agreement in principle about its norms. At the same time, general society must recognize the variance among people and the existence of communities and societies with unique characteristics. A multi-dimensional cultural perception calls for dialogue among different cultural communities, on the basis of partnership and mutual respect.

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Secularism and Me

by Miriam Kainy

Every time I'm very politely asked to take a few minutes to respond to a number of questions in a survey conducted by some institute, I know what the last four questions are going to be: age, education, country of origin and...last and least favorite—are you orthodox, traditional, or...secular? The last four questions are always the same, regardless of whether the survey is looking into the popularity of a detergent, a politician, social justice, or tuna fish.

When surveys first began here, I used to get into an argument with the interviewer—in an attempt to explain that the term "secular" is not relevant; that it antagonizes me. When I finally gathered that the interviewer could not effect the questions being asked, I changed tactics. Before he could pose the first question, I asked him whether the questionnaire included that question. If the interviewer's answer was positive, I hung up. In vain, I hoped that my objection to the question would somehow reach the survey's formulators, who would then change it. As I believe that surveys, especially political and social ones, **are** of significance, I decided not to respond to the question. It worked. From time to time, I get asked "why?" If there is a bit of time, I drive the interviewer crazy. Sometimes an interesting conversation ensues.

I have no idea when precisely "secularization" entered the Hebrew language. To the best of my memory, it was not in use during the first decades of the State. If it did exist, it did not appear in the literature, or in the press of those years. It snuck into the spoken language and from there, spread into our existential-intellectual space, swallowing up all other definitions of a person who is not orthodox/religious/traditional.

In 1967, I visited a *rebbezin*, for "pre-wedding guidance." I tried to save her the superfluous chit-chat. I clearly remember telling her that "I'm a free thinker."

"You don't believe in anything?"

"Nothing," I replied.

Horrified, she tried to convince me to at least observe the *nida* [prohibition from engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman who has menstruated and not yet

completed the required immersion in a *mikveh* ritual bath], otherwise I would give birth to deformed children.

I lost my patience and got up to go. I told her I could live without a *chuppah* [bridal canopy] and a Jewish marriage ceremony (*kiddushin*). Besides, Judaism recognizes a marriage resulting from a sexual union (*nisu'ei bi'a*). She signed some document and authorized the wedding date I had requested.

I assume that these days, women might hesitate to act as I did. It is not only the language that has changed, but also social mores.

The word "secularization" derives from "*chol*" or "*chulin*", as in "who distinguishes between the sacred and the mundane" [from the *havdalah*]. A seemingly insignificant word determines that my life is "*chulin*", secular or mundane, in contrast to the "holy" occupation, in which yeshiva students engage. This combines with the "empty wagon" concept—referring to the non-believers, the free thinkers, the doubters, the critical ones who are not seeking a response from "the Shem [God] who sits up on high." Using the word "secular" to define a non-believer is part of the revolution the State's thinking has undergone.

This tendency is strengthened and maintained by television programs on religion, mislabeled "Yiddishkeit – The Jewish Home" and various Kabbalot Shabbat. There is no serious discussion on the essence of Judaism; no effort to open the Bible, the Mishnah, the Talmud, Maimonides and others, to critical debate. The public gets only traditional interpretations, pleasant *agadot* and psalms—all of which have little to do with Judaism.

My life is not mundane. There **is** secularism in my life, but its essence is reading, study and creativity; an attempt to understand our life on this planet and human development and behavior throughout the ages.

There was once a movement against religious coercion, which has more or less disappeared. The orthodox establishment—in all its variations and institutions—won out and we capitulated to it.

I have no intention of going to war, which at the moment, seems a lost cause. Only one little battle, perhaps not even an important one: I am a free thinker. I am an

atheist. I am a doubter and/or critical. I am each of these things and a combination of them all. And I don't want people to label me in any other way.

My life is not secular. It never was.

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Secular Israeli Identity: No Apologies Needed

by Dr. Ela Bauer

At the end of October 2011, IDF radio listeners were informed that *The Lives of Others* program would be staging an evening at the popular Barbie Club in Tel Aviv, honoring Aaron David Gordon.

The initiative to dedicate an evening to Gordon, not on his birthday or on the anniversary of his death, not at the Tzavta Club [known for its progressive cultural ideas and programs], and not under the auspices of the Kibbutz Movement or similar body, is noteworthy. Let's hope that the effort to extract A.D. Gordon from oblivion and turn him into a cultural hero for the public that frequents the Barbie Club, will succeed. And let's hope that such events become important milestones for the Jewish secular public in Israel, as they contribute significantly to that public, if only as a reminder that there are still figures stashed away in the Israeli attic, who could become contemporary cultural heroes, as their contribution to new Israeli culture is worthy of esteem.

Much has already been written about the 1952 meeting in Bnei Brak between David Ben-Gurion and Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, known as Hazon Ish: ["vision of a man", the name of his magnum opus on religious law]. That meeting introduced a conceptual distinction between the "full wagon" of traditional Judaism and the "empty wagon" of secular Judaism, a distinction that has remained with us ever since. Yitzhak Navon—then the Prime Minister's personal secretary, later to become the Fifth President of the State of Israel—is the only one present at that meeting who is still alive. Consequently, we have to accept his testimony that the meeting was warm and friendly. Yet, even after all these years, a number of questions remain in regard to what actually transpired there.

Did Ben-Gurion (a person whose words and actions were one and the same; who chose to change his family name, "Grün", which "smacked of Diaspora mentality"--as we used to call it--to one reminiscent of the Hebrew name of one of the great creators of new Hebrew culture, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky Bin-Goryon) accept Ish Hazon's demand that the new Hebrew creation's "empty wagon" make way for the old Judaism's "full wagon"? Or, given the aim of the meeting in Bnei Brak, which was to achieve a *modus vivendi* between Jewish halacha and Israeli civil law, did Ben-Gurion, the politician, choose to avoid a confrontation with Ish Hazon? After all,

during his lifetime, Ben-Gurion ensured that the new Israeli wagon would not be empty. It was thanks to him and to others who came to Israel at the beginning of the 20th century that Israeli-born Jews were able to connect to the Bible in ways other than those of the traditional Judaism of *yeshivot* and religious institutions of learning. The Annual International Bible Contest on Independence Day and the Bible Study Group at the prime minister's official residence, have each made an important contribution to the type of dialogue contemporary Israeli society has been conducting with the Bible. Partners to this dialogue are writers such as Meir Shalev and Ephraim Sidon, known for their secular approach. Conducted with great love, the dialogue is based on biblical proficiency and an approach that does not belittle itself in face of the text, but examines, critiques and recalls that biblical heroes are of flesh and blood, not saints, or flawless righteous men. Shalev and Sidon's ability to conduct this dialogue, and even inject a modicum of humor into it, results from the path pursued by those who educated and taught the new Hebrews, i.e., the native-born Israelis--who became acquainted with the Bible, not necessarily within the confines of the Torah's traditional tent. This egalitarian, non-traditional dialogue should remind each and every one of us that the right to "speak" the Bible belongs to us all, not only to members of a particular sector. That dialogue should also remind us of other things.

Without our having taken note, questions regarding the essence of Judaism have been hovering over the Jewish space for nearly 300 years. Dilemmas and statements on this issue have preoccupied many Jews in many places. They have evoked challenges, wavering, and inner struggles for those seeking to integrate modernity into traditional Jewish existence, into a new Jewish way of life. By 19th century definitions, these were "free Jews." Today, they would be called "secular Jews". The search for new content and definitions for Judaism did not necessarily pertain to non-believers, or to the abandonment of Judaism, but to the search for new ways that would enable such Jews to remain within the confines of Jewish society.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the new Hebrews--who sometimes fended off traditionalism and the "Diaspora mentality," in blatant and unjust ways—joined a long and impressive list of figures that had preceded them. They began to pour new content into the modern Jewish wagon, in diverse locations throughout Europe. In locations outside Eretz Yisrael, their actions led to the creation of opportunities to redefine Judaism, by applying not only traditional Jewish tools, but new tools with an

emphasis on modern culture and literature. Many of these figures did not ignore the fact that the search for a new way might be a painful and complex process.

A varied list of personalities--many of whom were later to become the names of streets all over Israel--proposed new ways of relating to the old Judaism. Thanks to them, Judaism took on new content. As we cannot list them all, two names will suffice. One already mentioned is Micha Yosef Berdichevsky. Berdichevsky was one of the first to distinguish between Jews and Hebrews. He was one of the first to understand that the creation of a Jewish existence based on new foundations would always be accompanied by heartbreak with which one had to come to terms. The other, was Yosef Haim Brenner. A controversy, in which he was involved in 1911, should light the way for Israelis today.

In a column entitled "*From the Press & Literature*," published in *HaPoel Hatzair* ["the Young Worker"], Brenner expressed his extraordinary positions on religious conversion, claiming that for free-thinking Hebrews, "the question of Jewish life is not a religious issue....We living Jews, whether we fast on Yom Kippur, or eat meat and milk on that day; whether we act in accordance with the values of the Old Testament; or whether we are, by worldview, students loyal to Epikoros--we don't stop feeling Jewish, living Jewish lives, working and creating Hebrew labor, speaking our Jewish language, deriving spiritual food from our literature, laboring on behalf of our free, national culture, defending our national honor and fighting our war of survival, whatever form it takes."

Brenner's position stimulated public debate which transcended borders and elicited many and varied opinions. His stance also provoked a response from the leadership of *Hovevei Zion* ("the Lovers of Zion") in Russia (whose full name was the Society for the Support of Jewish Farmers and Artisans in Syria and Eretz Israel). That leadership informed the *Hapoel Hatzair's* editorial board, that as a result of Brenner's article, it would withhold its financial support of 100 francs a month to the paper. In response, *Hapoel Hatzair* readers, identified with worker circles in Eretz Yisrael, embarked on a fundraising campaign to garner support for the paper.

Much has been written on that controversy, the diverse opinions expressed and the battle over freedom of expression which it incorporated. It is important, however, that the secular public note the response of *Hapoel Hatzair's* readership; that a silent

majority should not adopt a defensive or inferior posture in face of other sectors of Jewish society.

For political reasons, seemingly, Ben-Gurion chose not to enter into a confrontation with the hierarchical determination pertaining to the notion of the empty wagon and the full one. But, this should not lead us, the silent secular majority, to adopt the hierarchy determined by Hazon Ish. The processes of developing and crystallizing modern Judaism have left us with wonderful content which has enriched our world; one that has stimulated inner struggles accompanied by new answers. It is important that we learn from these and remember that this content is not inferior to traditional religious content.

The story and actions of diverse personalities, who sought to maintain a Jewish way of life without religious supervision, should be part of the Jewish heritage of renewal; a heritage of which we should be proud, and which we should certainly not regard as one that is inferior, one that needs to be defensive in face of religious heritage.

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What Appears on the Price List is Holy

by Dr. Zvia Valdan

On the secularization of Hebrew: secularization, or transition from the use of a word in a sacred context to a mundane everyday context - a recognized phenomenon which is not unique to Hebrew

I looked at the ad spread across the last page of the weekly supplement of a respected newspaper which caters to serious people, the type who can afford a Subaru:

Big trade-in offer at Subaru/ What you see on the price list is holy!

It was written in the usual large font--so that one didn't have to put on one's glasses to read it—with the word "holy" in particularly large letters, known in Hebrew, as "letters of the sanctification of the moon" (*otiyot kiddush levana*). As the blessing over the moon's renewal is recited out-of-doors, by the light of the moon, it is written in particularly large letters, which everyone can read.

I thought about the Hebrew phrase of "give & take" as an alternative to the American "trade-in".

I wanted to rush ahead and buy a vehicle whose price is holy. Holy! Holy! Holy! I said in my heart. I suddenly shuddered...Armies of words flew at me from all sides. I remembered how the prophet Isaiah describes the chorus of Seraphs that surround the Throne of Glory, "*And one called unto another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.*"

But, I immediately calmed down. Hebrew speakers don't care – not about God and not about words. When we win a soccer match – there is a God. This, too, is a way to make Him present. When something is of such importance that we won't budge from it, it gets to be labeled "holy." No one is better than advertising people at making a connection between people and a God of some sort.

"Holy" has known many transformations. In Biblical language, it served to distinguish something as being different, apart, lofty, distanced from, and unrelated to the impure. In modern Hebrew, the word "holy" also describes something one should not touch.

It is easy to say that the opposite of "sanctity" is "secular". But, what is the opposite of "holy"? If, in the past, words like "dedicated" or "sanctified" were associated with God, or Service in the Temple, today, we devote our time to "holy work", such as for example, the struggle for battered women. We sanctify [make a blessing] during the Kiddush on Friday night and we "sanctify" secular civil values.

For Native Speakers, Hebrew is a Language They Take for Granted

Secularization, or the transition from the use of a word within the context of holiness, to mundane everyday contexts, is a recognized lingual phenomenon, which is not unique to Hebrew. We eat "breakfast" and in essence, "break the fast". We enjoy a day off, or more precisely a "holiday", which is none other than the transformation of a "holy-day", or simply put, a "sabbatical". Yet, Hebrew speakers always believe that things are different here.

The complex approach to Hebrew results perhaps from its being the language of the Bible—which may be why there is greater preoccupation with "holy" and "secular". But, it is also possible, that this attitude, which is part anxiety and part a deep feeling of uniqueness, stems from its history. Not every language rejuvenates itself, as did the Hebrew language, graced by once again becoming a mother tongue.

Hebrew and Zionism are interlocked. It is, therefore, of no surprise that the place of language in our national identity dominated the thinking of major figures of Jewish thought at the beginning of the last century, prior to the establishment of the State.

In 1926, Gershom Scholem wrote a letter (in German) to Franz Rosenzweig, entitled "*A Confession about our Language*" ("**Bekennntnis über unsere Sprache**"). In it, Scholem sums up his fears of the "actualization" of the Hebrew language. "*Must not this abyss of a sacred language, handed down to our children, break out again? People here...think they have secularized the Hebrew language...the secularization of the language is on a facon de parler, a ready-made expression.*"

The anxiety emanating from Scholem's words is present, albeit unconsciously, in many Hebrew speakers. This perhaps explains, at least in part, their defensive attitude toward the language. When Hebrew reverted to being a mother tongue, only a few of its speakers had been born into it. They treated it with caution. They were unsure of themselves and clung mainly to the grammar found in books.

Today's native speakers take it for granted. They're not necessarily moved by its renewal and they do anything they want with it—eat and drink, bless and curse, love and hate, lust and annoy. This attitude toward Hebrew—mixed, in the past, with a great deal of reverence mixed in—is healthier and more natural; some would say, "permissive and derisive"; while others might call it, "liberated and direct".

Does secularization empty words of their original meanings, or add new shades?

Secularization is expressed, for example, in cases in which the religious sense is thrust aside and its everyday usage becomes the first interpretation people conjure up:

Does your grandmother have her period [a play upon the Hebrew word, *machzor*, which has the double meaning of 'prayer book' and 'menstrual cycle']? *Are you kidding me?*

Does your synagogue have ma'ariv? No, only *Yediot* [a play upon the Hebrew word *ma'ariv*, which is both "evening prayers" and the name of a Hebrew afternoon daily. *Yediot* is short for another afternoon daily, *Yediot Achronot*].

There are many instances, however, where the seemingly secular meaning is added to, and enhances the original meaning. In this vein, a *musaf* (supplement) is an addition to a newspaper, not only to a prayer; and Shabbat *shacharit* denotes the time of a concert or cultural event, not only that of prayer. Those who read the Pesach Haggadah, ponder aloud "*What is all this labor* [worship service] *for you?*" What "labor" are we talking about? Holy work in the Temple? The Labor Party emerging from its hibernation? Important work? Father's work--the place he goes to everyday to earn his wages?

Perhaps we are speaking about "Torah and work." What Torah [also 'theory' in Hebrew] are we talking about? The Theory of Relativity? Game Theory? Perhaps the Theory of Racism, God forbid?

And just maybe, we are talking about the three things upon which the world collapses: Torah (teaching, study), Worship, and Deeds of Loving Kindness (*Torah, avodah ve'gmilut chasadim*).

Examples of secularization are usually taken from words and concepts with which the public is familiar. There is a tendency to give examples of the change in meaning of words such as *mishkan* ['portable dwelling place for the divine presence' and 'residence'], *slichá* [*forgiveness* and *pardon*], *korban* [*sacrifice* and *victim*] and *truma* [*donation* and *contribution*].

Michal Efrat cites two unexpected, instructive examples. The word *shofar*, for example, appears within the context of war, not ritual. Thus, in the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, "*Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry aloud and say? Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fenced cities.*"

The transition in the meaning of *shofar* from one semantic field to another--transforming it from an animal horn to a means of voicing an opinion--is presented as if one were shifting from holiness to the secular.

The word *mazleg* (fork), on the other hand, appears in Samuel I, in a clear reference to ritual: "*Now it was the practice of the priests with the people that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice and while the meat was being boiled, the servant of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand.*" However, the fork's transition to the table is not usually cited as an example of secularization.

Secularization is, in fact, not an adequate term. It captures only part of a broad linguistic process, so wondrously described in Bialik's essay, "*Revealing and Concealing in Language,*" on the rise and fall of words. As a cultural phenomenon it is testimony to growth and creation, about which one gets no hint from the word itself [i.e., secularization]. The beauty and richness of the language emanate, among others, from the multiple meanings its words can connote; and no less so, from the transitions and contexts it creates in different fields--between "holy" and "secular", for example.

Hebrew culture has developed from the convergence of three elements: Holy Jewish Scriptures, general, universal culture, and our social reality, evolving at an accelerated pace, with language being, at one and the same time, its foundation and the underpinnings which sustain it. Gershom Scholem was right when, in the above letter, he said of our generation "*that takes upon itself the most fruitful in our sacred traditions--our language, even if, in his opinion, this generation "cannot live, were it*

to wish it a thousand-fold, without tradition." This generation speaks in a language in which "Each word which is not newly created, but taken from the 'good old' treasure, is full to bursting."

Is Hebrew really a ticking bomb?

The prophet Isaiah turns to Jerusalem and says: *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you."*

And I turn to Hebrew and say: "Rise and shine, because your day has come, and the glory of your words has been uncovered...Wake up, beloved language in the Land of the Bible and discover how words have amassed new energies, at times ridding themselves of old meanings and at others, adding new meanings.

I propose the adoption of Ari Elon's interpretation of secularization: opening windows to the world, so that we can enjoy both the wind outside and the sunlight. Such an interpretation will lead us to express thanks for the shining hour of the Hebrew language we speak, and to continue to develop it—on condition that we don't give up the link to ancient texts, and look out onto the outside world, from our rich, inviting and embracing inner world.

Dr. Zvia Valdan is curator of the forthcoming exhibition, *Hebrew Space*, in Rishon LeZion

Women's Singing: *Her Lips Move, But Her Voice Will Not Be Heard?*

by Eli Bareket

Over a decade ago, at the outset of the journey to bring the world of *piyut* [poetic liturgy] back into Israeli culture, dozens of students—secular, traditional and orthodox—got together on one of the Beit Hillel Sabbaths, in kibbutz Ein Harod, for an initial *piyut* experience.

To our surprise, a *piyut* singer, clad in full orthodox garb, asked the women to abstain from singing during his workshop. Our reaction, as the organizers, was based on the tradition of Beit Hillel: a girl's singing should be heard, and the people present should not be shamed.

The orthodox man had been surprised; he hadn't imagined that he would be invited to a Shabbat of *piyutim* that includes young men without *kippot* and young girls in T shirts. But, as he had agreed to come, and given "*kvod hatibur*" ["*the dignity of the congregation*"], "*gadol hashalom*," [peace as the highest value] and "*sheyihe shem shamayim mitahev al yadcha*" [instilling a love of God through personal example], he remained and simply requested that women not sing during his workshop.

The students' reaction was much more complex. Some of the female students became silent—in empathy with the rabbi's distress; while others kept quiet out of respect for him. This tends to happen, mainly in cases where *halachic* law is unclear and we are unable to distinguish between truth and fiction, and between severity and contempt.

There were female students who sang – some did so, as they did not want to let the rabbi mar their encounter with the *piyutim*; others did so, because they were acquainted with the moving message of the Rav Hai Gaon in his *piyut* which opens the Yom Kippur prayers, "*Shma koli asher yishama bekolot*," "*my voice is heard only when surrounded by other voices.*" Still others asked the rabbi about the young daughter who was with him chanting in a pleasant voice. He painfully responded that he would be very sad when she grew up and her voice was silenced, because he had no sons and she was so talented.

The head of the Gender Department at one of the important universities in Israel was also present. She asked the female students to attend the rabbi's workshop and remain silent, in order to experience what it meant to be silenced.

The thunderous silence of the head of the Gender Department was shattered during one of the meals, when she bluntly said to the rabbi: those who claim that *kol isha be'erva* [*the voice of a woman is nakedness*] - the nakedness is in their minds, not in the woman's voice. "Vehu parash ve'bacha al she'chashduhu" [*And he withdrew and cried of being suspected*], but she stood her own, having a source on which to base her argument: "*The Trove of Letters*," by Rabbi Yosef of Sass, who wrote that one should not oblige women to cover their heads, positing that seeing a woman with an uncovered head should not necessarily trouble a man, i.e., it depends on the attitude of the man, rather than on the woman's uncovered head.

The debate on the singing of women in the public arena has arisen anew because of a few religious cadets attending officers' training school, who in the midst of a battle heritage ceremony, withdrew from the hall because of the singing of women, in breach of their commander's orders. They claimed that their belief forbids them from hearing women sing. Their commanders should, therefore, excuse them from tasks or events which conflict with their belief.

Jewish tradition has enough conflict-avoidance "tricks" that enable those who so desire, to maintain their belief while pleasing their creator, without making a big fuss. As Rabbi Moshe Feuerstein has written in *Igrot Moshe* [*The Letters of Moshe*], one should allow use of mixed [men and women] public transportation: "*There is no taboo in touching and pushing women, as this is not the way of lust or like...if the thought comes upon him, his heart will assist him in shifting to biblical references, such as 'a loving doe, a graceful deer'*" [Proverbs 5:19].

The real question is whether the soldiers' right to safeguard their belief supersedes the right of women to participate fully in the public domain. Their declared abstention from women's song incorporates within it the following equation: the integration of the *hardalim* [*haredi dati leumi* - ultra-orthodox religious nationalists] vs. the exclusion of women from the public domain. Should our desire to include the religious public, which is becoming more orthodox and nationalistic, be at the expense of the integration of women as equals? The answer is a resounding "no". If that is the price, the *hardalim* can respectfully sit home.

Growing orthodoxy and nationalism among the religious public is akin to creeping annexation of all areas of our lives. Yizhar Hess, the head of the Mesorti [Conservative] Movement in Israel has said that if we want to have an event for the general public and if more than a small segment of the national-religious public regards women's singing as improper, in order to stage a mass event that will attract a varied crowd, women should not appear on stage. Very simple! That's the way Jewish women are gradually excluded from our public platforms.

We should not content ourselves with a discussion of rights, as *de jure*, the right of women supersedes; but *de facto*, the right of the orthodox religious nationalists has the upper hand. That is why it is important to know how to respond using Jewish sources.

Hana Kahat, founder and general director of the religious feminist forum, *Kolech*, provided an important response, in explaining that the context in which "*a woman's voice is nakedness*" appears, is a taboo linked to the manner in which a man looks: a sexual look is a penetrating stare, defined these days as "a look of desire" that relates to women as sexual objects—it is forbidden for a man to look in that way even at a woman's finger. It is forbidden for a man to look at a woman as a sexual object. It is not the voice itself which is nakedness, but the man's own thoughts and musings.

An additional interesting response is the brief one given by Rabbi Yosef of Sass: "*Know, my son, that there is great perplexity on this...according to most rabbinical poskim [arbiters of Jewish law], it is only derabanan [a decree from the rabbis], and the voice of a married woman. and on the radio is allowed, if he does not know her; and if she is dead, then one can even sell it...these days, it is difficult to take precautions on this...a blessing upon those able to take precautions.*"

In his "*Trove of Letters*," the Rabbi of Sass tells us that a woman's voice is not an open and shut case, as there is great perplexity surrounding it; it is not a taboo from the Torah, only a rabbinical warning; and only under special circumstances "and it is now difficult to be cautious in this regard." Hence, the question reverts to the cadets who left the hall, or anyone else who acts in such a demonstrative way.

The first question regards a sin we have committed through arrogance. Arrogance is a righteous act, or a precaution that the public does not take. It should not be done openly, but modestly, i.e., those who want to safeguard their modesty, need to do so

quietly, without drawing public attention. Following the expression, "*you are not important enough to be modest*" - you are not sufficiently righteous to inform the world that you are being cautious in regard to the singing of women.

The second question: if you have already decided to be strict and meticulous, and to take the direct lane to righteousness, why pick on the song of women? Do we lack more important stringent rulings? We didn't see the soldiers demonstratively leaving a unit discussion when the commander engaged in *lashon hara* [bad-mouthing]. *Lashon hara* is much worse and more damaging than the song of women. It is a taboo from the Torah. *Lashon hara* is equivalent to idol worship, incest and spilling blood—whether one engages in it or listens to it. So why pick on the song of women?

Beyond the relevant gender questions of whether your blood is redder than that of your friend, it is easier to be strong over the weak and righteous at the expense of women. It is important to understand that the religiosity of the last generations shifted Judaism from its essence, from what we call "social Judaism," to a "Judaism of boundaries," that focuses on who is "in" and who is "out"; and on what distinguishes the "insiders", those who call themselves "religious" or "haredim", who must observe three major *mitzvot*: Shabbat, kashrut and modesty. It seems as if for the last generations, the entire Torah rests on these three *mitzvot*. The "insiders" feel they need to distinguish themselves as a separate group, in regard to women's song, and to strengthen the boundaries that separate them from the Jewish people. The more the religious public becomes ultra-orthodox and nationalistic, the more it needs to raise the wall dividing it from the Jewish people.

One must not accept this tendency. Jews should not be divided between those who observe the Torah and those who don't. Judaism must not be reduced to Shabbat, *kashrut* and modesty. We cannot accept a reality in which the song of Miriam is silenced. We cannot accept a situation in which Rachel's voice is not heard up on high.

Eli Bareket is the general director of Mimzrach Shemesh, a *beit midrash* for social leadership. He is one of the editors of the book, *A-Mythical: Social Justice, Gender & Midrash*.

ON MODESTY, PERMISSIVENESS & SECULAR SILENCE

By Galia Oz

We abandon our language and let our eyes (and other organs) be covered up and are then surprised when it ends in violence. Of all the words and concepts attacked and trampled on here in recent years, modesty, in its secular sense, has been run over in the most touching way and lays bleeding in the public arena.

If you do a Google search on "modesty", among others, you will find the following text that will challenge you beyond its grammar and syntax: "Women who wish to engage in sports in a closed space, are permitted to wear jogging [loose] pants. In winter, women may also wear pants under their skirts, to keep their legs warm" (Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, www.yeshiva.org.il).

How did we miss the true meaning of Proverbs (11:2), that: "*with humility comes wisdom*," by mistakenly assuming that wisdom relies on modesty, when it really hinges on loose-fitting pants?! And how could we have assumed that modesty is somehow associated with humility, recognizing limitations and understanding that there is more than one truth in the world? From now on, let us all agree that modesty is the intrusive rabbinic preoccupation with other peoples' bodies.

Sexual permissiveness, too, has fallen victim to a systematic campaign that links it to disease, an absence of values, violence and rape. Those preaching against it are, in fact, attacking people's very right to autonomy over their bodies.

There is a roaring, neo-conservative silence among secularists. There is almost no one to remind the average newspaper reader that the situation of women in the most permissive societies, such as in Scandinavia, is the best and most secure in the world; and that there is no statistical correlation between permissiveness and a profusion of acts of rape. There is no one to tell high school students that women wearing balloon-style (and rather ridiculous) shorts, fought on all fronts to establish the State. There is no one to expose them to the possibility that sexual permissiveness is a form of individualism, and that sexuality and the nature of a person's dress can be a form of personal expression, much as in art: open or closed, provocative, defying, or introverted. And that permissiveness does not necessarily imply promiscuity, as in

the fantasies that both scare and turn some people on. Rather, it allows each of us to give true expression to who we are.

There is certainly no one to show high school students, paintings by Francisco Goya, because, in contradiction to what our religious sages tell us, those who look at Goya's "Naked Maya" are apt to see that nakedness does not diminish the mystery and Eros. They might even conclude, God forbid, that what reduces women to the level of an object, is the obsessive need of humorless men to cover women up at all times.

From here, the way to censoring art is short; to erasing women from billboards, to silencing women's singing, to the foolhardy, vicious, fundamentalist festival, in which most of us are taking part in silence, with our eyes closed; because we, the secular, clearly do not suffer from a lack of modesty, as is alleged against us. On the contrary, we are overly modest (not to say, passive, or ignorant). Because of that modesty, we keep silent, when words, ideas and concepts are expropriated from us, followed by our faces, bodies and the right to have our voices heard.

Women are the prime focus of this attack. The fanatics who are threatening MK Zahava Gal-On of Meretz and Hagit Ofran of Peace Now, primarily seek to scare the silent majority, so that it won't dare identify with them. To go out into the streets and protest against this terror, one need not be a woman, or a secular person, or a leftist, only a decent human being.

So where are the hundreds and thousands of good people who filled the squares this past summer? When it doesn't affect the price of cottage cheese or housing, they are at home. They don't want to know who Hagit Ofran is. Seemingly, most of them will continue to sit at home, even after the next political assassination.

The campaign against democracy and civil society is complex: it comprises a war of cultures, Knesset enactment and street violence. An enterprise of such magnitude can only exist when decent people remain silent.

And we **are** silent. Perhaps out of excessive modesty.

Galia Oz is a children's author and a director of documentary films

The Secular Yeshiva's Fringe Theatre

by Ariel Levinson

In recent years, a group of literature and Bible teachers encountered two problems which troubled them and motivated them to come up with a solution in the form of a secular yeshiva in Jerusalem.

The first problem was that many young people in Israeli society feel cut off from the rich Jewish culture. They have a sense of alienation and feel abhorrence and even rage toward it. The second was the disadvantage in having a young and intensive post-army framework for the study of Judaism from a secular perspective; i.e., lack of readily available materials.

Jerusalem is losing its secular young people, in what has been described in recent years, as "negative immigration," resulting from a shortage of work places and the growing orthodox character of the city. Jerusalem suffers from a negative image and social processes which prompt many young people to leave the city. Today, Jerusalem has a population of 765,600, of which 35 percent are Arab and 65 percent, Jewish. Of the Jews, 28 percent are ultra-orthodox, 30 percent are religious of all streams, and 42 percent are traditional or secular. Jerusalem is losing its character as a varied and pluralistic city. Unable to find a cultural or economic anchor, many secular young people leave after completing their studies there. According to a report entitled "*Jerusalem and the Younger Generation*," written by Uri Strizover in 2010, for the Jerusalem Foundation, between 1996 and 2007, the number of non-orthodox Jewish young people in the city plunged from 53 to 43 percent. It is forecasted that in 2020, that trend will continue, dropping to 40 percent.

The secular yeshiva in Jerusalem was established out of a desire to offer young people content that is not disconnected from their lives and needs; a community that would be a part of their lives. Its founders believe that the creation of a meaningful anchor for the city's young people and a community to which they can belong, can take the form of an ideological alternative to the traditional *beit midrash*. They discovered that the plethora of pluralistic *batei midrash* in the city have trouble attracting young people. Consequently, they shaped events of a different kind that attempted to crack the genetic code of young Jerusalemites and to construct Jewish cultural content for them that speaks their language and enables them to feel at home, both at the events and in their encounter with the texts.

Secular, Religious and that which is Between Them

Hundreds of people—secular, religious and all the variations in-between (per the highly diverse Jerusalem crowd) took part in these events. The overwhelming majority were young people. The series of events exposed the need, curiosity and desire of many young people in Jerusalem to take part in Jewish cultural events of another kind; as well as the absence of a cultural center that can create such events.

The initiators of the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem ran the cultural events in clubs and in other locations where young people hang out. Collaboration with cultural and entertainment institutions in Jerusalem (from pubs to theatres and recognized cultural institutions) created a new formula that challenges the boundaries of the *beit midrash* and renders studies, contemporary and relevant.

The secular yeshiva began its activities in October 2011. Its first class comprises 15 students engaged in four months of study, in a beautiful guest house situated in the pastoral atmosphere of Ein Kerem and dedicated to encounters and rapprochement among the three religions. The yeshiva's program is intended for young men and women—20 to 30 years of age--after army service, who want to devote their time to studying. At the yeshiva, students delve into the Jewish world throughout the ages and are exposed to the new Hebrew culture. They also encounter other worlds: philosophy, Christianity, Buddhism; and take part in community social activities, go on tours that acquaint them with the special characteristics of Jerusalem and meet local artists, intellectuals and social activists.

Most of our students are going through a transition phase of searching, during which many questions arise: where they should live and with whom; what work they should undertake; what they should study; and whether they should go abroad to refresh themselves after their army service and prior to embarking upon "life". The program at the secular yeshiva strives to be part of this process and to become one of their options – prior to their "big trip" abroad, or after it; and before or after their higher studies.

Why a Yeshiva and Why Secular?

The question arises as to why a secular yeshiva? The word "yeshiva" can cause the average secular person discomfort; whereas the word "secular" might repel young

religious people, even traditional ones. While this is all true, the combination of these two words incorporates an important oxymoronic tension, a challenge to Israeli society; tension which has the intensity of traditional yeshiva studies coupled with new worlds of knowledge, absent from (or even taboo) traditional yeshivas; a yeshiva in which one studies poetry and theatre; one in which there are lessons on the foundations of Christianity and Islam, and in which one also engages in neighborhood social action. The secular yeshiva is a *beit midrash* in which doubt and question mark nest; one which offers a spiritual voyage, intellectual honesty, and more than a modicum of critical thinking. It is a place in which secular young men and women - whose worldview is liberal and humanistic and who believe in equality of the sexes - can sit together and learn about their culture.

The secular yeshiva considers in-depth exploration of the roots of secular identity a must--beyond the Bible, the Mishnah, tractates from the Talmud and stories of our sages; as it does study of formative European and Jewish enlightenment texts and literary works of the new Hebrew culture, such as Spinoza, Mendelssohn, Ahad Ha'am, Bialik, Berdichevsky and Brenner.

In addition to studying the Bible, the Talmud and the *halacha*, today's secular young people must also study the development of secular Jewish identity, so as to fully appreciate the depth of the process of their own identity building. The emphasis on "secular" is less as a definition, and more as a challenge.

The greatest challenge in establishing a secular yeshiva is that of freedom. A secular yeshiva seeking its place in a period of Jewish renewal must ensure a product which is revolutionary, which has no interest in preserving the existing. Perhaps the best analogy for the secular yeshiva's creative world is that of fringe theatre.

The creators and participants of fringe theatre see themselves as paving a new way, an alternative to the establishment. That perception enables them to introduce structural changes into their work space, processes and means of transmitting messages. Difficulties in fundraising and paucity in technical means usually requires fringe theatre creators and artists to improvise and to be thrifty. This leads to a different type of experience, an affinity between life and the world of creation. Lack

of resources results in the creation of a smaller group of artists--an intimate quality group with a sense of a shared fate and mission; and stimulates an intensity of activity which is not always present in such constellations.

Fringe theatre projects are usually of shorter duration. Similarly, the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem has an intensive four-month program, a compressed experience, capable of changing lifestyles and thinking. Unlike repertory theatres, fringe theatres are not obliged to cater to public tastes and accepted aesthetic norms. Their prime mission is to stage shows, or new, unconventional, thought-provoking, revolutionary texts which question existing realities.

A secular yeshiva seeks to establish a "laboratory for experiments in Judaism," whose aim is to create a new cultural and spiritual center for young people looking to re-examine the accepted truths of our age about Judaism and Israeliness; a center, with whose help these young people can create a revolutionary community that regards itself as an avant-garde new Jewish creation. There is no place more suitable as an umbrella for this, as raw material and a source of inspiration for a secular yeshiva, than the city of Jerusalem.

Ariel Levinson is one of the founders of the secular yeshiva in Jerusalem and a doctoral candidate in literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem

How Secularism Affected My Life

by Shlomit Naim Naor

For a person entangled in a net of identities, this is an excellent question.

Who am I? A woman, religious, a feminist, a Jerusalemite. I am a wife, a daughter, a sister and an aunt. I was a granddaughter and one of these days, God willing, I will be a mother and a grandmother.

What in my personal, religious, familial, female, professional identity is influenced by secularism?

Secularism gave me my "otherness", the world in light of, and the basis of which, I crystallized my identity, as a religious feminist woman, who focuses on Judaism and literature. It gives me freedom. It is my America.

I grew up in Ra'anana of the 1980's, a secure and protected city. Father was religious-- of the Beitar variety, not a Mafdalnik. Mother was raised in a secular home. After marrying my father, she took it upon herself to observe the *mitzvot*. My uncle and his wife on my father's side, were secular. My aunt and her family on my mother's side, were also secular. We all conversed with one another. We are all close; a family.

Philosophy books line our walls at home. Rene Descartes cast a doubt on everything and thereby, achieved certitude. At the Bnei Akiva religious youth movement, the process is the reverse. We studied the Khuzari [Rabbi Yehuda Halevi's famous book], before the Shabbat roll call. As the tone used was absolute, certain, the doubts within me, grew. Where does the certainty come from? How do people know that's how it is, if we haven't examined other ideas? How can everyone's thinking possibly be the same?

Later on, at the Department of Philosophy at the Hebrew University and Jerusalem's Beit Midrash Elul, I was to experience a major *tikkun*. I understood that it wasn't just me, but hundreds of other people--wearing different types of *kippot*, skirts, slacks and head covers—who believe there is more than one possibility; that one needs to probe deeper, to study and to raise doubt. From my parents' home, I am highly familiar with the exchange being spun among the different worlds.

In the years of the great upheaval, in the wake of Rabin's assassination, in which the rift deepened, that the connection between the voices that insisted on continuing to talk with each other, was strengthened. It was there that I found my world, on the border between religious and secular; with infinite possibilities for constructing a new identity.

I am an immigrant in a new world, in which freedom has been given to all. I can make my voice, which is equal to other voices, heard. I am free to choose and to rebuild myself.

I sought to study with those who are different from me, as I had already heard those like myself. In the mixed [secular and religious] Batei Midrash, I learned to identify voices hidden from the ear, to look in the sources for answers to present-day life; and to take part in the revolution of Jewish Studies in Israel, in part, a feminist revolution.

I grew up in a feminist home without knowing that it was such. My grandmother is a member of Knesset, my aunt, a judge. My mother works full-time. Father is a Doctor of Philosophy, who irons his clothes and washes the dishes. At university, I studied Hebrew Literature, Philosophy and also Talmud. More than once, I was told that "Philosophy is okay. But, what have you, a woman, got to do with the Talmud? Teach the Bible, Jewish legends. But, why do you need the Talmud? You won't be determining *halacha*."

I didn't understand how my grandmother, my aunt and my mother could be doing what they were doing, while I, as a woman, shouldn't be studying something, simply because it was considered to be within the male domain. Later on, at a course on poetry and gender, given by Dr. Hamutal Tsamir of Ben Gurion University, I was able to identify oppressive, hierarchical patriarchal mechanisms.

Today, when I get on a "segregated" bus, like line 402 from Givat Shmuel to Jerusalem, and an unknown man asks my spouse to have me move to the back of the bus, I am the one to respond. I don't cite the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the greatest rabbinical authority of the last generation who lives in the US, that a man and a woman can share a bench on a bus. I draw on my secular language for aid: "Israel is a democratic country and it's my right to sit wherever I want." I suggest to the man that he go sit somewhere else if he so desires.

Secular language gives me power. I am in control of it. The fact that I am a woman will not serve as an argument against me. It will only make it easier to reduce my salary!

My students compare the story of the segregated bus lines to that of Rosa Parks.

Did I already mention "America"?

Shlomit Naim Naor is chairperson of the Network of Batei Midrash in Israel and associate-director of Melitz

BINA – The Posen Foundation's Link to Young People in Israel

Gal Brozin interviews Eran Baruch, BINA general director

BINA - *Beit Hayotzer leNishmat haUma* [literally, "*Home for the Creation of the Nation's Soul*"], a term coined by Hebrew poet Chaim Nahman Bialik, is an educational-social organization, unique to the Israeli scene. BINA endeavors to work toward Jewish renewal with a pluralistic perspective. Its aim is to link secular Israeli society to sources of Jewish culture. BINA works mainly with young people. It operates through Merchavim, a Kibbutz Movement NGO, with support from the Posen Foundation.

The initiative to establish BINA came from intellectuals and educators both within and outside the kibbutz movement. Their aim was to connect and to engage in *tikkun*: *tikkun* of individuals, *tikkun* of society and *tikkun olam*, through narrowing gaps and striving for social justice, in the true Jewish spirit.

Eran Baruch, BINA's general director, is one of the organization's initiators and a founder of its secular yeshiva. He has an MA from Bar Ilan University's Program for Hermeneutics & Cultural Studies.

Eran Baruch: BINA is one of the diverse Jewish identity groups vying to shape the nature of Israeli society. We seek to create a free and sovereign Jewish public and community in the State of Israel that regards Judaism as an open, renewable culture and tradition; one that is a source of inspiration, rather than of authority.

BINA was established in 1996, several months after the Rabin assassination, when polarization between secular and religious was at its height. We regarded the assassination as the murder of a Jew. It was not simply a case of a Jew who assassinates another Jew, but of an assassin who seemingly drew his inspiration from Jewish cultural heritage. He spoke about *din rodef* [literally, "*law of the pursuer*" or the right to self-defense] and consulted with rabbis. Despite the fact that this may be a warped perception of Judaism, it is nevertheless a Judaism that is alive and kicking.

The situation today is no better than it was 16 years ago. We haven't learned our lesson. On the contrary, things have deteriorated. Since publication of the book *Torat*

haMelech ["*The King's Law*," written by (politically) right-wing Rabbis Yitzchak Shapira and Yosef Elitzur, who argue that the Biblical prohibition "you shall not murder" applies only to a Jew who kills a Jew]; and the appearance of *Tag Mechir* [literally "price tag," referring to reprisal attacks carried out by extremists in Israel], we decided to establish a *beit midrash*, or yeshiva, that would speak Judaism; one whose teachings could never be misconstrued as "let's murder."

Natural Basis for Joint Work

There are few organizations of Jewish renewal, on whose Websites or in whose discourse, you will find the word 'secular'. Most of them use the word 'pluralism'. BINA is not ashamed to speak of secularization. This says something about our attempt to pour positive and meaningful content into a secular Jewish community that does not regard itself as inferior or "empty," in face of the seemingly "full" religious content.

In recent years, BINA has grown. It now caters to a broad range of Israelis – school students, young people in Nahal groups [an IDF program that combines military service with the establishment of new agricultural settlements, often in outlying areas], participants in its pre-army *mechina* [preparatory course] and young people after army service. BINA also runs an extensive social program. It collaborates with the IDF, works with highly varied adult populations in *batei midrash* and hosts encounters in the business community, moderated by Dov Elboim.

It is only natural for the Posen Foundation--established with the aim of advancing the perception of Judaism as a culture and an historic civilization, not only as a religion—to have found a common language with BINA. Foundation program director, Yael Nachon-Harel, who is actively involved in joint BINA-Posen Foundation activities, observes: "*The two bodies perceive Judaism, beyond being a religion, as a culture that can inspire; a source for personal expression and for a rich cultural life. Now all we need to do is spread the message to as many people as possible.*"

I think the Posen Foundation is highly committed to disseminating the idea of Judaism as a culture, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. There is a rare, respect-evoking collaboration between father, Felix and son, Daniel, who is carrying on with

his father's tradition in the field. The Foundation's personnel, with Yael Nachon-Harel at its helm, is involved in the content and are partners to shaping the way.

The BINA-Posen Foundation collaboration comprises three major projects: activities with youngsters in local authorities, as well as in the IDF, and a secular yeshiva. BINA's Education Department offers both high schools and the IDF, programs for the study of social Judaism and Judaism as a culture. Workshop and *batei midrash* activities combine issues of Jewish identity and social justice. The Department also runs seminars whose participants undergo a significant clarification process regarding their own Jewish identity and the connection between that identity and a just social perception; study and enrichment days, and social tours, focusing on Jewish identity and social Judaism. "Roots of Israel" is BINA's collaborative program with ORT that trains and supervises teams of teachers. BINA is also involved in the Municipality of Rishon LeZion's *Am Olam* Project and the *Judaism as a Culture* project, run with the Posen Foundation in Kfar Saba.

Talking at Eye Level

Eran Baruch: BINA is working on Jewish identity in elementary- and high-schools, within the framework of municipal projects, run in cooperation with local authorities and the Ministry of Education. We are currently operating in all high schools in Rishon LeZion, Kfar Saba and Tel Aviv and in the ORT network of schools which constitute ten percent of all educational institutions in Israel. We offer high schools a range of activities that bring together students, teachers and parents, enabling them to have exchanges at eye level. We organize lectures on Jewish thought and informal activities that include tours and seminars. On Tu Bishvat and Shavuoth, we create communitywide events, through *batei midrash* which we run in schools.

In recent years, there has been greater interest in the subject of Jewish-Israel identity, especially among Israeli youth. In the IDF, we work a lot in the field of identity, in cooperation with the IDF's Education Corps. There, we bring the message of Judaism as a culture to an arena which is usually not receptive to it. We offer a wide range of activities, such as educational Shabbatot, study days on Zionism and social Judaism; lectures and seminars; and an academic program for senior officers. We work among

both cadets and officers, in hope that the impact will filter down through the command and through personal statements made by the officers.

BINA's secular yeshiva, of 200 students, has been operating for five years in southern Tel Aviv. The yeshiva seeks to reinstate the standing of study and engagement in Jewish culture as part of a comprehensive Jewish cultural perception and the construction of a value-laden worldview that regards study as a core commitment, leading to social commitment and directing toward action.

We hope engagement in Judaism, with social-humanism at its core, will stimulate identification with a common culture and have the values of mutual responsibility and social solidarity in Jewish society, once again take center stage.

In-Depth Learning & Social Engagement

BINA has a new extension in Ein Kerem, Jerusalem. Studies there include a pre-army *mechina* (preparatory course), pre- and in-service army Nahal groups and groups of army graduates, aged 22-30. Most of the yeshiva students are secular. Studying together, boys and girls engage in intensive, in-depth Torah study, coupled with involvement in local social action. The curriculum enables a combination of studies and work. In the pre-army *mechina*, for example, students study two to three days a week and are then involved either in social action or work.

Loyalty, Flexibility, Mission: The Challenges of Secular Judaism

By Dov Elboim

What does it mean to be the son or daughter of the Jewish people and culture? There are Jews who believe this is first and foremost adherence to the traditional Jewish way. They perceive their lives as a race along an obstacle course, where the only way to complete it safely and to reach the finish line, is to run the course according to a detailed map passed down to them by their fathers and mothers. They further believe that past generations were closer to the sources and, therefore, remembered better than we do, what God asks of us and precisely how to serve Him.

In contrast, others have no need to adhere to this traditional way of life. Their membership in the Jewish people is expressed primarily through concern for its physical existence and the existential welfare of the Jewish people worldwide. For them, the instinctive fraternal feelings for all Jews, translates into a sense of responsibility and loyalty to the unwritten alliance among Jews--"*kol yisrael arevin ze leze*" ["*All of Israel are responsible for one another*"].

There is no reason to repudiate the right of these perceptions to exist. Moreover, among Jews today, the division is usually not so sharp. Most Jews maintain both two types of loyalties--the intellectual and the emotional--albeit to differing degrees.

I cannot adopt either of these approaches with any measure of satisfaction. I don't accept the central argument of the *halachic* stream of Judaism that regards the *halachic* system, passed down by my forefathers, as the recommended way of life of the God who created all. On the other hand, I am not satisfied with having a fraternal instinct among Jews wherever they may be. Sweeping reliance on such an ethereal fraternity can very easily become the basis of a racist Jewish doctrine.

What are the foundations on which I can establish my Jewish identity? How do I relate to the culture of past generations? What do I apply from it, to my life and what do I leave to others? Can I find a deep internal compass that will direct me? What anchor will ensure that I don't get lost; that my way will not lead me to stray from this culture? How will my children know where home is, so that they can always return to it?

To answer these questions even partially, I crystallized three basic principles for myself that can, in my opinion, point to the beginnings of another way; principles that offer tools for developing broad new horizons for contemporary Jewish culture.

A. Loyalty

We must approach the issue of Jewish heritage out of loyalty to it. This can be likened to a large, multi-room house, full of books and objects which I inherited from my parents and they from theirs over many generations. How do I relate to that inheritance? Must I live in the house and never leave it, never change any of its furniture or objects, even when these break down or erode with time? Of course not. Such an approach creates a process in which every generation further narrows the sphere of alternatives for the coming generations.

In taking this inheritance into my hands and responsibility, I feel deeply grateful to past generations in my family who bestowed upon me the right and honor to look after their heritage. I don't disregard anything bequeathed to me, even the most neglected, trivial item. I then move on to examine the inheritance they left me – the treasures of wisdom, knowledge, art and property. I accord each item, even objects I don't want or cannot use, due respect and a personal touch. Even if I never have the occasion to use it and it is of no monetary value, I will put it in one of the rooms and continue to be loyal to it. As the object received the attention of generations which preceded me, subsequent generations may also find it of interest.

Loyalty in this case, is the bestowal of respect upon my past. I do not belittle any part of the Jewish past, especially not the parts graced with the status of sanctity or canonization. So far as I'm concerned, that is the meaning of the commandment, "*Honor thy father and thy mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you*" [Exodus 20:12]. It is a special and exceptional commandment, both in terms of its formulation and the remuneration it promises. There are some who interpret this commandment as offering longevity to all who honor their parents. Such interpretation suffers from a number of problems, the major one of which is the emphasis at the end of the verse, "*in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*" One should not interpret this commandment only in the practical sense of "helping an elderly mother and father." One needs to interpret it as allowing the past a presence and attributing weight to it within our lives; i.e., if we want to live

a long time on this earth in this conflict-ridden place, where we are faced with the question of our existence in it daily, we must accord our past respect.

The commandment to accord respect to the culture of past generations means having my cultural heritage present in my life and being loyal to it. I don't have to live by it fully, or even partially, but I must accord it respect and meaning and have it present in my life; be well-acquainted with it and be comfortable in its rooms.

This is our initial challenge: how to create a democratic, secular Israeli society that accords our heritage a position of honor in our lives.

B. Flexibility

The second principle is flexibility and an ability to interpret. If we want to create respect for, and a deep presence of, Jewish culture in our lives, we are charged with the momentous task of translating and interpreting our sources. I don't mean translation from one language into another, but translation in the deep sense of the word; working with Jewish sources and finding a way to bring these to their next level of development.

Transitions of this sort require great flexibility and also a lot of knowledge and loyalty. The major model for flexibility, so far as I am concerned, lies in loyalty to the sources, in the pulsating Jewish heart of Jewish culture--the ability to change and to renew. Jewish tradition always upheld the ability to be flexible. While this appears already in biblical times, it was also expressed during three transition periods: the transition from the biblical to the Talmudic period; the transition from Talmudic culture to the creation of kabbalistic Jewish culture; and the transition from traditional Judaism to secular Zionist Judaism and the Enlightenment. These three transition periods created a significant much needed change in the worldview of Judaism and its core values.

In my Jewish story, the power of Judaism has always stemmed from its ability to be flexible. This is expressed in *midrashei halacha* and *agadah* and in Talmudic literature, in the Torah of the Kabbalah and of Hasidism and among the messengers of Zionism. Contrary to the well-known phrase, "*More than Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept Israel*," I believe that what kept Jewish culture from degeneration and extinction is the inner flexibility of its major mechanisms, in the form of the *midrash* and the duty of ongoing interpretation.

Today, Israeli Jews are without a doubt, in the midst of a transition period that will lead them to redefine Judaism. We are fortunate to live in times that force us to call upon, shape, reinterpret and translate our sources. One is not necessarily speaking about tendencies of the Reform Movement type--attempts to adapt the *halacha* and rituals to an edict of progress. On the contrary, we need to add a new and refreshing layer to our culture of origin, to strengthen and expand it, so that it will respond to many more questions than our predecessors had about the meaning of being Jewish. We must understand the link between our Jewishness and being a sovereign, democratic state. Loyalty to our heritage imposes upon us a momentous task, to be performed out of love for the heritage of generations and an understanding that without flexibility our existence on this earth will not be prolonged.

C. Mission

Jewish culture generally, and most particularly in the State of Israel, is perpetually grappling with weighty existential, moral, security and political issues. However, we will not be able to cope with issues of this magnitude without having secular Jewish culture redefine its Jewish vision for the State. Secular Jews in the State of Israel are the broadest and most central force. However, they are for the most part, also the least influential. The reason for this is not only political, but emanates primarily from a serious lack of vision and purpose.

One can try to understand how such a vacuum of vision came about; and ascribe its cause to the depletion of Israeli spiritual resources, as a result of the alienation of Israelis from fields considered to be the domain of the "religious." One can explain it as part of the educational crisis with which Israel has been grappling in the past decades. And one can also explain it as a desire of many Israelis to differentiate themselves from the religious Zionist camp, whose vision is perceived as "messianic." The latter issue carries a lot of weight – secular Israeli Judaism has stopped engaging with a potential vision for the State of the Jews, as it regards vision and mission as a recipe for political extremism, identified with the messianic vision of the new religious Zionism and the settler movement.

At the same time, renouncing the principle of a Jewish mission means giving up one of the most powerful stimulants for growth, bred and developed in Jewish culture. The perception of Judaism's mission--of the "*kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" in Exodus and "*A light unto the nations*," of the prophets--acts as a motor for the growth and development of Judaism, beginning with the exodus from Egypt,

described in the Bible, and up to A.D. Gordon, Y.H. Brenner, Berl Katznelson, Achad Ha'am, Zeev Jabotinsky and David Ben-Gurion. The story of our presence in Israel can no longer use only on the Holocaust to justify the existence of the State of Israel as a refuge for the Jews.

We will not be able to lead a qualitative life as Jews in the State of Israel, which is situated in the Middle East, without a vision and a mission. The political and security paralysis of Israel's leaders in recent years emanates mainly from a serious lack of vision and mission. How can one make decisions on difficult and complex issues of religion and state, peace and security, law and morality, without clarifying the objectives, or point on the horizon, which the State of Israel in Eretz Yisrael wants to reach? This is also true within the familial and private spheres. It is difficult to create meaningful educational values in the family or school, without a vision and a mission. It is like people who erect a house under the crater of a volcano and don't know how to explain to their children what they are doing there.

Our generation deserves a meaningful value-filled response to the question of why it is good both for us and for the world that there be a democratic Jewish State here. Our generation is waiting for a vision of challenge and purpose, a vision that will include loyalty to the past, flexibility in the present and a future mission.

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Dubnow & Kalish: Personal Stories of Secularization

by Dr. Avriel Bar-Levav

Secularization is a modern phenomenon in Jewish culture. In the personal writings of Jews one can find many references to secularization, yet only a few detailed descriptions of the process inherent in the transition from a religious to a secular identity. The paucity of such descriptions may be due to the fact that the transition involves resistance to the past and its abandonment, and a blurring of the significance of the old source by the new perspective. Those who describe the process they have undergone in detail are able to maintain close affinity with their past, an affinity that is not to be taken for granted. Historian Simon Dubnow (1850-1941) and writer Ita Kalish (1903-1994) are two such examples.

Dubnow's story appears in his autobiography, "*The Book of Life: Reminiscences & Reflections, Material for the History of My Time*," written in Russian. In it, Dubnow tells of his gradual distancing from the religious culture in which he was raised, which began with an Enlightenment Movement [*maskil*] book, "*Shulamit*", which he read at the age of 11. Written by enlightenment writer, Kalman Schulman (1819-1899), the book includes a description of travel to Eretz Yisrael and its neighboring countries. The booklet, which he got from his older brother, made a huge impression on the boy who read it over and over again. Dubnow was attracted to the new ideals of the *maskilim*: Jewish nationalism and an affinity with the physical Eretz Yisrael. Along with his brother, he was soon engaged in intensive reading of enlightenment books. Dubnow began to feel that Jewish life was in a state of disrepair and in need of *tikkun*. He said that at first, his religious feelings intensified, although he aspired to be religious in his own way. Following his Bar-Mitzvah, Dubnow began to study Talmud with his grandfather, Ben-Zion, a scholar and the central religious figure in their small community. However, Dubnow was attracted not to the ancient tractates, but to new Hebrew literature. One of his grandfather's students told him about a *maskilim* library, in the house of the local miller and it was there that Dubnow embarked on intensive reading of the new Hebrew literature.

Dubnow then started to learn languages, which opened up new books. He studied Russian, through which he became acquainted with the rich European literature in Russian translation. A conflict arose between his spiritual world-in-formation—that included the values of liberty and a critical approach--and the old world represented

by his grandfather, the Talmud scholar, who threatened in vain to take away his "impure" books.

The final about-face, in the wake of which he lost his belief and began to reject the observance of *mitzvot*, occurred following Dubnow's exposure to 19th century scientific and philosophic-historic positivist literature in German and in Russian. When Dubnow moved to St. Petersburg, (where he would avidly read in the city's public library), he began to publish articles on the *tikkunim* Jewish religion required.

At age 24, he returned with his wife to the city of his youth. While in St. Petersburg, the couple preferred living together without a marriage license. However, they understood that for social reasons, upon their return to their town, they would have to marry. Practical aspects and rituals of the Jewish religion necessarily meant that the town's curiosity seekers were able to follow the degree to which the young couple observed *mitzvot*, which is why the couple sought an apartment as isolated as possible.

His whole life, Dubnow had difficulty adhering to religious symbols. The late Prof. Shmuel Verses [Professor emeritus, Hebrew Literature, Hebrew University, Jerusalem] told me about a Jewish funeral in Vilna, which he attended along with Dubnow who insisted on coming bareheaded.

Before the *yamim hanora'im* [Days of Awe, or ten days of repentance], Dubnow's grandfather invited his grandchild for a chat and asked him where he would be praying. Dubnow rose and paced the room without uttering a word. The heavy silence lasted several minutes. *"He suddenly stood opposite me and in a heart-piercing voice filled with infinite sadness, said: 'Shimon, the day will come when like the prophet Hosea, you will say, I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now' [Hosea, 2, 7]."*

Despite the gap, Dubnow felt a parallelism between himself and his grandfather:

One could thus see the following picture in our quiet provincial town following the fall of 1884: on two parallel streets, each in his study, surrounded by books, sat grandfather and grandson. One cultivated the wisdom of the Talmud and the rabbis and transmitted it to his hearers; the other dug just as assiduously into the new wisdom of the century and also had his auditory, a numerous but distant one, with which he could communicate only through the printed page. Both grandfather and

grandson lived as hermits fulfilling a solemn vow. Intellectually, the meaning of life was different for each, but ethically, it was the same. This situation whose tragedy I now understand, more than I did then, lasted six years."

In the words of historian Shmuel Ettinger, *"If tradition, the historic continuum, is to have broader significance, it must include new forms of identification with the past, a continuation of tradition coupled with renewal."*

Ita Kalish was the granddaughter of Rabbi Simcha Bunim, the Admor of Varka and daughter of Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the Admor of Otvotsk, Poland. Her memoir, *My Yesterday* [an expanded Hebrew version (1970) of the 1963 original Yiddish version entitled *A Rebbe's Home in Long-Ago Poland*], is of particular importance because of the rare testimony it contains on the inner life of small Hasidic courts between the wars.

It also illustrates the process of secularization the Admor's daughter underwent, after a family member introduced her to art and aesthetics. Her exposure to the outside world, notes Ita Kalish, was not through books, but through the fine arts. In contrast to Dubnow, whose description of secularization, at least the verbal one, was mainly intellectual, Kalish talks about secularization also as an emotional experience: *"Events of despair in my youth remained etched in my memory of those revolution-ridden days, with their hopes and simchas: the cessation of my studies and parting from my tutor whom I loved very much; and the loss of my long black plaits, shorn on the day after my chuppah. These crises came upon me after sharp changes had occurred in my inner world that altered my attitude toward different people and many things. I found refuge from my bewilderment in books. In the late hours of the night, when everyone in our household had gone to their respective corners, I escaped into my bed, my place of hiding, where I had stashed the 'outside' books with which I sequestered myself. I avidly read everything I could lay my hands on."* And she adds, *"I yearned for the wide world, barred from me...I looked for a way to breach the wall. I had only one possibility: a secret battle."* It was a maid who helped Kalish hide the books and journals from family members.

When Ita reached the age of 15, her father chose a groom for his beloved daughter, from a long list of matchmaking options. He had hopes that her marriage would put an end to her desire to deviate from the world into which she was born. But, his hopes were quickly dashed. *"My father did not imagine that his daughter had long*

deviated from the narrow area set out for her....Father had not considered that his daughter learned a foreign language and read 'outside' books, even as she put her young daughter to sleep. And then came the day, when all his illusions fell away: he came to visit me in my apartment and to his amazement, saw a pile of books in Yiddish and Polish. He was shattered to the core. In a storm of emotions, he accused me harshly, confiscated my books and condemned them to destruction."

On that occasion, Ita ran away. But her father managed to convince her to come back home. It was only upon his death that Ita Kalish left her family and moved to Warsaw, where she led a secular life. In her words, *"I cut off ties that did not bind me."* She took her younger sister, Naomi, with her. Their shared room became an emotional and cultural center for young men and women like them, who had fled their Hasidic families to pursue secular careers.

At first, Ita left her young daughter Zina behind, but she later kidnapped her and left for Berlin, where she fought a legal battle until eventually being awarded custody of her daughter. The two immigrated to Palestine, where for many years Ita Kalish worked for the Jewish Agency.

Both Dubnow and Kalish were partners to the creation of secular Jewish culture, each in his/her own time and way. Dubnow occupied a central public and scholarly position and was one of the shapers of the perception that the writing of Jewish history is one of the central components in crystallizing an alternative Jewish identity to the religious one. In writing a comprehensive history of the Jewish people--"a cosmopolitan people," as Dubnow dubbed it, "found everywhere in the world"--Dubnow and Kalish infused it with content.

While Ita Kalish is a less central figure, in her own modest way, she too, was an agent of secularization. Through a natural human process rather than by means of an ideological approach, she shaped a modest Jewish sphere for herself and her friends in Warsaw and later in Berlin--much like the literary salons of the 18th century. Unlike for Dubnow, for Kalish, the process did not lead to principled, intellectual secularization. Rather, it expressed an attempt to extract herself from the uncompromising demands of the traditional Hasidic society in which she was raised. Just as religiosity is not always ideological, both with Dubnow and with Kalish, one can see, albeit in different proportions, the diverse dimensions of secularization – ideological, social and practical.

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HAVAYA – Israeli Life Cycle Ceremonies

by Adv. Smadar Dekel Naim

Although we live in a democratic country, where gender equality and freedom of conscience and religion are an integral part of our ethos, in actual fact, Jews in the State of Israel are subjected to the tyranny of the ultra-orthodox rabbinate on the most personal level pertaining to the establishment of a family or to its dissolution. The inability to separate religion from state on this issue is a blatant affront to the most basic and natural of human rights: the right to marry and the right to personal and cultural identity.

In recent years, a quiet revolution has been waged on the matter, most especially by the religious public. Religious couples are discovering *halachic* alternatives for both marriage and divorce and have been opting for private weddings that don't pass through the Chief Rabbinate. But, while the religious public of the diverse streams has the *halachic* tools to deal with the challenge, the secular public is helpless and unknowledgeable. For the sake of "tradition," and a "stamp of approval," secular Israelis accord ultra-orthodox rabbis a central role in their totally secular wedding ceremonies. That is how an absurd situation has come into being, whereby the rabbinate serves the secular.

However, this blind adherence to the consensus is slowly eroding. Young Israelis have begun to alter reality with their feet. Data from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics indicates that about a fifth of all Israeli Jewish couples marry abroad. Cyprus and Prague are teeming with newly-wed Israeli couples. Many of these start a family without State authorization – as theirs are "common law" marriages. Every year, over 1,000 Israeli couples conduct Jewish marriage ceremonies privately, rather than through the Rabbinate. Some of these are run by pluralistic Jewish streams, while other Jewish-secular ceremonies are conducted by Havaya, or other officiators.

Does it make sense to have Israeli couples travel abroad to marry? Does it make sense for couples to live together and establish a family without marrying, because they are legally unable to have a ceremony that conforms to their worldview? Is it logical that a couple that undergoes a private marriage ceremony cannot register as "married" in Israel's Population Registry? Is it not absurd that 300,000 Israeli citizens who have

made *aliya* by virtue of the Law of Return, are precluded from being able to marry at the Rabbinat?

Basically, the Jewish marriage ceremony is quite simple: A man sanctifies a woman with an object worth a penny in the presence of two witnesses. These are both the necessary and sufficient conditions. The remaining components – the blessings, the *ketubah* [Jewish prenuptial agreement], the rabbi, the bridal guidance, the *mikveh* [ritual bath] and the kashrut certificate are later additions introduced by the rabbinical establishment. As with other matters, here too, the *halacha* has been rendered increasingly rigid and detailed, leaving us with only the most stringent option. The rabbinical establishment, under the patronage of the State of Israel, forces couples to marry in a way with which many don't identify, in which they don't believe, and which they usually also don't understand. Perhaps the saddest part of it all, is that most of the couples, including the secular, think this is the Jewish way to marry. They are not aware that it is the way of the rabbinical establishment, rather than of Judaism.

In recent years, in parallel to growing extremism within the rabbinical establishment, and largely because of the repugnance of the secular public for that establishment and what it represents, more and more couples have become aware of another option: that they can marry in Israel in accordance with their values and beliefs, and a Judaism that is consistent with their worldview. These couples understand that there are a few alternatives from which they can choose. In anticipation of the ceremony, they study and plan it together with an experienced officiator. The ceremony, however, belongs to the couple under the *chuppah* [wedding canopy]: It is not the rabbi's, nor the State's, nor does it belong to the religious.

Pluralistic *Batei Midrash*, open to the general public, began 20 years ago. They are attended by secular Jews interested in studying Jewish texts. During their studies, they discover the many controversies in Jewish tradition and the many grey areas; and are exposed to the fact that in the Mishnah and Gemara, between the diverse generations of rabbis, there is room for a plurality of opinions and differences.

It is in these Batei Midrash that the need to deal with ceremonies and other rites and rituals, was born. Two veteran Batei Midrash, the BINA Center for Jewish Identity

and Hebrew Culture and the Midrasha at Oranim, joined hands with the Secular Institute for Ceremonies and in 2006 established the Havaya – Israeli Ceremony, an organization for ceremonies "from the cradle to the grave," with an emphasis on marriage ceremonies. At Havaya, Israelis study, create and conduct life-cycle ceremonies rooted in Jewish tradition and sources, while at the same time expressing Jewish renewal and modern secularism. Ceremonies are based on the principles of equality and pluralism, which link past and present, tradition and renewal. Havaya also serves as an address for couples unable to marry in the State of Israel – immigrants from the former Soviet Union whose Jewishness is questioned by the Rabbinate, *gerim* [converts to Judaism], uni-sex couples and other Israeli citizens who cannot enjoy the basic right to marry in the country in which they live. Havaya works to bring Judaism back into the hands of the people, to provide for a diversity of ways to marry in the State of Israel, and to rekindle the country's pluralistic lights.

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