
10

What a Difference Place Makes: Reflections on Religious-Secular Divides in Israel and in America

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From [both] the midst of a heritage which is compulsive and fateful and a terrible aloneness which are the source of the unity of the nation, issues forth the attribute of loving-kindness, which summons and drives the fateful collective to imbue their unity with positive content.... The obligation of love for another person emanates from the self-awareness of the people of fate, which is alone and perplexed by its uniqueness.

— Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik¹

*Do I contradict myself?
 Very well then I contradict myself,
 (I am large, I contain multitudes.)*

— Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* (51)

In the 1980s Professor E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* argued that the excesses of educational reforms instituted throughout the twentieth century by the progressive movement, and its emphasis on process over content, had robbed Americans of a "vocabulary of national discourse." In his book, Hirsch proposes that all Americans learn common points of reference to facilitate the equitable exchange of ideas.²

In Israel today, we are often told, the notion that citizens on either side of the religious divide might exchange ideas equitably seems to be an increasingly difficult proposition. The religious-secular divide—which, some polls tell us, depending on what else is happening in the news on any given day, is perceived as the greater threat to the future of the State—reflects the breakdown of a common cultural language.³

When I moved into a Jerusalem apartment, after my wedding a number of years ago, there were two other families who had been living there since 1948. Both families had come from the concentration camps, one via detention in Cyprus, to the Holy Land, fought in her wars, struggled and scrimped, raised families, and grew old. Despite the fact that one household was quite secular, and the other would have been considered ultra-Orthodox, the couples shared a bond of friendship and respect, forged from a half-century of remarkable common experiences. It is also true that the two gentlemen would discuss *Parashat HaShavua* while sitting together in the garden. There was enough of a common cultural vocabulary to sustain communication.

The current state of things, reflected in the Guttman Report and other surveys, points to an ongoing deterioration of conviviality among Israeli Jews. Perhaps paradoxically however, the Guttman Report also pointed out that, contrary to conventional wisdom, on the religious scale there is much more of a diverse continuum than a great divide: "The rhetoric of secular and religious polarization generally used to characterize Israeli society is highly misleading."⁴ This is true despite the fact that religious observance among contemporary Israeli youth

is not that much different from that of their parents. In other words, the perennial decline in observance we have seen from generation to generation seems to have bottomed out—perhaps because it has hit statistical rock bottom and has nowhere else to drop.⁵

Be that as it may, questions of *dati-hiloni* (religious-secular) relations and interactions in Israeli society are to a very large degree *sui generis*. That is, as I will attempt to show, we would be limited in our ability to extrapolate the sources of division in Israel (to whatever degree it does exist) in any meaningful way in order to understand the state of things in North America, or elsewhere in the Diaspora, and vice versa. Similarly, we would find ourselves limited in our ability to learn cross-cultural lessons across the ocean, regardless of which shore we stand on. In 1990, at an early meeting of this Forum on “Israel as a Religious Reality,” Prof. Eliezer Don-Yehiya (examining only one side of this equation) asked the question: “Does place make a difference?”⁶ I would agree with his conclusion: Yes, it does!

That caveat being stated, I believe that examining the state of things both in Israel and in North America would lead to deeper understandings, point the way toward new conceptions of the possible, and draw attention to noteworthy initiatives currently underway.

On the long lists of “*lehavdils*” that have to be made when one compares religious-secular interaction in Israel versus that in North America, the first and most prominent is surely that in the Jewish State we cannot separate the discussion from the political sphere, a situation that is entirely absent in America because of the division of Church and State. The ongoing project of constructing a Jewish society, especially given Orthodox hegemony over significant spheres of civil life, and the role and authority of rabbinic courts, presents unique challenges to *dati-hiloni* relations. Interestingly, polls show that many people don’t want to end the religion and state mix, per se, just to end Orthodox predominance. Such people speak of a desire to see Israel as “Jewish and democratic”—the positioning of Orthodoxy as *anti*-democratic should be clear.⁷

It is precisely this intersection of religion, power, and public policy in Israel that is unique in the Jewish world, and so fraught with tension. The so-called “status quo” outlining the role which religion ought

to take in the public square has its origins in a 1947 letter sent by David Ben-Gurion, Rabbi Y.L. Fishman (Maimon), and Yitzchak Gruenbaum on behalf of the Jewish Agency Executive to the leadership of Agudat Yisrael in Jerusalem, hoping to persuade them to support the partition plan for Palestine. The letter, born out of accommodation, outlined policy guidelines in the areas of *Shabbat* and *kashrut*, personal status, and an autonomous religious education system.⁸ Don-Yehiya points out that the status quo is more dynamic than its static name implies, and that its meaning has changed throughout different periods in Israeli political and social history. Yet throughout the sixty-plus years of statehood, the tensions have manifested themselves in the following three spheres.⁹

First, tensions become manifest as religious society attempts to enact and enforce religious laws, as mandated by *halakhah*, upon the larger society. This includes the areas of marriage, divorce, conversion, and personal status; forbidding the sale of *hametz* during Passover or the raising of pigs; closing of public transportation on *Shabbat*; etc. The “Who is a Jew?” debate is a classical example of this question.

Second, the attempt by religious society to protect its own institutions and interests, especially regarding allocation of public funding for education, but also including army service for yeshiva students (whether full exemption in the *haredi* world, and to a lesser degree the “*hesder*” arrangement for the Zionist *yeshivot*, as well as the issue of army service for women).

Finally, the tensions play themselves out within the realm of defining a Jewish national identity, often manifesting itself around public events or in the area of the ceremonial and symbolic (such as the program for *Yom HaAtzmaut* celebrations or which movies get shown on El Al flights).

These three categories of tension—religious society on the offense, on the defense, and in the public square—emanate from Israel’s unique religion-state nexus and have no parallel in American Jewish life.

Yet there is another element which makes comparison difficult. Is the analogy *dati:hiloni* (religious:secular) either accurate or useful in organizing our thinking? Consider a Modern or slightly right-of-center Orthodox C.P.A. who works in a large Manhattan firm—an

amalgam of some people I know. On *Shabbat* he wears a black suit and a hat, but he might actually go without a *kippah* at the office. His identity is complex. His social interactions are limited almost entirely to Jews just like himself. His professional life is spent almost entirely with people he considers to a very great degree to be “other”—and this despite the fact that many of them are Jewish (albeit non-Orthodox). He doesn’t differentiate in any meaningful way between his non-Jewish colleague and his assimilated Jewish co-worker. Both of them occupy a space which is almost wholly foreign to our friend’s sense of his authentic self—this despite the fact that he acknowledges that the non-affiliated Jew is a *Ben-Brit Goral*, with whom he shares a historic connection. Yet, in reality, our accountant tallies all of his figures in the *Brit Ye’ud* column; in what way does *Brit Goral* factor into the equation? His interactions with Jews qua Jews who don’t fit squarely within his camp are reduced to mere theoretical affirmations to what become abstract values: *kol Yisrael areivem zeh la-zeh*, Jewish unity, etc. I am not here speaking of commitment to principles, but to the default reality around which he organizes his life and identity.

I am obviously portraying a stereotype, to which we could marshal many exceptions. However, I believe it to be an accurate typology of how American Orthodox relate to those around them (with the possible exceptions of times of local or global anti-Semitism, or in certain cases of support for Israel in times of peril, which produce a certain level of *Brit Goral* solidarity). I specifically chose the workplace as my example, bearing in mind the purported remark of Isaiah Berlin that “everything is relative, except for when it comes to relatives!” Most of us have been at a wedding or family *simcha*, attended by the *haredi* cousin alongside the intermarried cousin, and everyone in-between.

In Israel, we speak of the categories of *dati'im* and *hilonim*; in America the Orthodox Jew sees himself set apart from the general culture in toto, which subsumes a large number of elements, including non-Orthodox Jews.¹⁰ As is known, how we define the “other” often says more about how we define ourselves.

In the words of Charles Liebman, “compartmentalization is especially appropriate to the conditions of the Diaspora, in which the model of the dominant culture encourages the distinction between the

religious identity of the individual and the attitude toward economic and political matters, including many social and cultural aspects of life.”¹¹ On the other hand, Chaim Waxman has noted that the “integral” or “expansionist” models of Israeli Orthodoxy are simply untenable in the Diaspora, for they are predicated on a majority Jewish (albeit secular) society on which the religious minority seeks to impact on all avenues of civil life.¹²

In America, one’s Jewish identity is voluntary; in Israel one’s Jewish identity is compulsory, be you secular-left or strictly Orthodox. As the great Israeli novelist A. B. Yehoshua—a hero of the Israeli left—recently put it, upon stirring a good deal of controversy among American Jews of various stripes:

We in Israel live in a binding and inescapable relationship with one another, just as all members of a sovereign nation live together, for better or worse, in a binding relationship. We are governed by Jews. We pay taxes to Jews, are judged in Jewish courts, are called up to serve in the Jewish army and compelled by Jews to defend settlements we didn’t want [sic] or, alternatively, are forcibly expelled from settlements by Jews. Our economy is determined by Jews. Our social conditions are determined by Jews. And all the political, economic, cultural and social decisions craft and shape our identity, which although it contains some primary elements, is always in a dynamic process of changes and corrections. While this entails pain and frustration, there is also the pleasure of the freedom of being in your own home.¹³

I am not sufficiently jaded to be uninspired by this formulation, yet I recognize that it is precisely this forced interaction which is the source of a great deal of our tension on this side of the ocean.

Moreover, it is not merely the slippery definition of what “secular” means that makes comparison difficult. It turns out that “religious” or “*dati*” is not necessarily easier to identify. (To be clear, I am speaking sociologically, not according to conformity with the *Shulhan Arukh*.) Among the accomplishments of the *Mizrachi* and later the *Mafdal*, the National Religious Party, as a religious-political movement during

the first sixty years of the State, was the establishment of “big tent” Orthodoxy.¹⁴ Partially as an attempt to keep the non-Orthodox denominations out of the picture, the religious establishment created institutions, or adopted existing framework— most significantly the *Mamlakhti-Dati* school system—which would reach out to and service a disproportionately broad segment of society. Regardless of your commitment to *shmirat ha-mitzvot*, you were counted on the *Mafdal*’s books as “one of us” because Religious Zionist institutions were educating you or your children. Combine this situation with the massive influx of *Edot HaMizrah* or Sephardic Jews starting in the 1950s, and Israel suddenly had the so-called *masorti*, or traditional, middle. This muddies the sociological waters. Which side of the purported divide do these Jews stand on? Religious or secular?¹⁵ This goes beyond the old sense that, for a certain segment of Israeli non-Orthodox, “the shul I don’t *daven* in is an Orthodox one.” These are complex questions, because identity construction is complex. Whitman tells us that people contain contradictions, as well as multitudes.¹⁶

In the United States “big tent” Orthodoxy, to whatever degree it existed there, is getting smaller all the time. When I think of the Orthodox synagogue that I grew up in (and started observing *Shabbat* in), with its almost exclusively non-Orthodox population, I know that I am considering a dying breed.

Finally, in the United States there is a long tradition of civil culture and discourse. In Israel, disagreements about things as mundane as a parking spot rapidly turn into World War III, and this situation fosters a complicated dynamic when discussing rifts in the social fabric that are as sensitive as matters of Jewish identity politics (the exception to this, of course, being times of national crisis, when unity and brotherhood prevail, in a way that both inspires as well as highlights the small-mindedness of some of the daily disputes the rest of the time).

This last feature, one foreign to the American experience, is a consequence of the ideas I have outlined above: a palpable sense that in Israel we are all in the same boat, and a small boat at that. In the process of wrestling for the rudder we collectively rock the boat, and sometimes lose our way at sea. The kinds of policies, programs, and initiatives that factions in Israel develop to address these features of

our societal fabric are by force colored by the interplay of politics and religion. That interplay also frames the hurdles that have to be surmounted by way of implementing solutions.

In Israel, Orthodox organizations concerned with this reality can be divided into groups that operate either out of a sense of collective crisis of national identity, or those that must choose a narrower conception of their mandate. Representatives of the former group imagine that the liberal left sit in the coffee houses of Tel Aviv, read *Ha'aretz*, and support the *hitnatkut* (the 2005 disengagement from Gaza), as a result of their disengagement from Judaism itself. Since members of this group, loosely identified with the right-wing of Religious Zionism, sense that they do not have the political power to address this issue through the system itself, they must circumvent the bureaucracy and have begun efforts to directly rectify the facts on the ground (as I will outline). As for the latter group, those who are forced into a narrower mandate and are loosely identified with the religious left, they get caught in the language of dialogue and conflict mediation—a type of “you are you, and I am I” with a commitment to finding some way to co-exist. Either way, solutions to particular problems in Israel emanate from this background.¹⁷

For these reasons, and others, we are limited in our ability to compare the experiences of Israeli *dati-hiloni* relations with American secular-religious interaction.

Nevertheless, there are a number of notable phenomena happening within the *Dati Leumi* community and impacting on how we relate to larger Israeli society, which should be noteworthy for America Jewry. Recognizing that, as Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein has pointed out, “a *rabbanut* [Israeli Chief Rabbinate] with a leaner self-image and less grandiloquent tone would also be healthier”¹⁸—and a good deal more effective—and hopeless that reform will come from within, a number of organizations, most notably Tzohar, have been founded to essentially do an end-run around the rabbinic establishment.¹⁹ The success of such organizations, and to varying degrees their counterparts established from outside the Orthodox community, such as the emergence of *batei midrash* for the secular, by the secular, underscores the point that there is a great mass of Israeli Jews “in the middle”—neither Or-

thodox nor by any means hostile to religion. We must add to this mix the over one million Russian *olim* who arrived starting in 1989. Even accounting for the estimated 25 percent who are not *halakhically* Jewish, this was still a huge population influx which greatly added to the number of “Jews in the middle” – neither observant nor antagonist to religion.²⁰ I do not deny that there is a very vocal, organized secular “lobby” in the political as well as in the cultural sense. But we do a disservice to the “silent majority” of the Israeli middle to assume that all non-Orthodox are represented by figures like the late journalist and politician Tommy Lapid—an elitist, secular minority, albeit one with great influence.

Additionally, all of the work that has been done over the years toward “dialogue” between the two sides of the purported divide may have been founded on these mistaken ways of conceiving the framework. If these attempts have merely brought together representatives of either edge of what is a continuum, not a chasm, speaking over the heads of the masses in between, it should not be surprising that these attempts have reached and impacted on so small a segment of the population.

As was noted above, in the last ten to fifteen years we have seen an awakening within the *Dati Leumi* community, which, despite its desire for “big tent” Orthodoxy, had been historically averse to attempts to reach out to the unaffiliated middle. This awaking has manifested itself in the establishing of programs and organizations to do just that. Clearly, the 1995 Rabin assassination—perpetrated at the hands of one who, on paper at least, should have been a poster child for the Religious Zionist community and its institutions—was a stark wake-up call. It was as if a mirror was held up to the face of the Religious Zionist community in Israel; we saw ourselves as others see us for the first time, and it wasn’t a pretty sight. The community that imagined itself as a bridge within Israeli society had to rethink the manner in which it communicates with those around it.

To be clear, the awakening of the religious community as a force within larger Israeli society dates to the period following the Six Day War with the beginnings of the Gush Emunim movement, and later following the realigning 1977 elections.²¹ It was within this milieu that

internal criticism of the Religious Zionist establishment began to be heard, pointing to the *Mafdal* as a type of “Court Jew” or lap-dog, with calls from figures such as Rabbi Zvi Tau that we ought to be leaders, not servants (“*manhigim ve-lo avadim*”), pursuing our own social, educational, and religious agenda. In the ten years between the Rabin assassination and the disengagement from Gaza, the Religious Zionist community began to take tentative steps away from an isolationist mindset and began to look outward. (It remains to be seen in what way the disengagement has led to a reactionary wave of isolationism, although ongoing discussion of the degree to which the Religious Zionist community should support the State and her institutions indicates that the road toward integrationism is not a one-way street.²²)

Before I mention some specific examples, it is important to note an additional factor which may have brought about this Religious Zionist openness and attempt to impact in a more activist way on secular society. For almost a century the Religious Zionist camp operated under a notion that there was a hidden religious element to secular Zionists, which was embedded in their ideology and bore fruit in their pioneering activities. Most significantly, there was a core belief that ultimately this true essence would break forth and the *hilonim* would cast off secularism in favor of a return to religion.

This theological and messianic conception of secular society received its foundational treatment in Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook’s 1906 essay “*HaDor*.”²³ Rav Kook argued that secular Zionists hadn’t abandon Torah out of rebellion, but out of their search for ideology (which they found in Jewish secular nationalism), seeing Torah as merely a list of abstruse rules and dry rituals. Rav Kook’s theology of secularism stated that the *hilonim*, if only we religious Jews might communicate the ideals of Torah, would quickly tear down the *mehitzah* they had erected between *halakhah* and nationalism. At the same time, he felt, the religious community would be transformed as the Torah itself shed its “*galuti*” mantle of narrowness and particularism.²⁴ While there has been some debate whether this essay was aimed only at Rav Kook’s own generation or is relevant for subsequent generations, some question its applicability to the contemporary scene, in which ideology has lost much of its cache, and secularists aren’t animated by worldviews.

After all, twenty-first century secularism is not the atheism, or even the deism of old, but a sort of modern vacuousness, in which we are not competing in a marketplace of ideas, but in a bazaar of consumerism and often crass or vapid low pop-culture.²⁵

In all cases, the mass national *teshuvah* movement predicted by Rav Kook hadn't taken place when the events in the decade from 1995 to 2005 pushed some in the *Dati Leumi* camp to take responsibility for helping actively bring it about.²⁶

What is notable about the organizations I will mention is that they all work outside of the national religious establishment, being independent of the school systems and the Chief Rabbinate. In fact, in the entire top-down curriculum for the *Mamlakhti-Dati* school system there is nary a mention of secular Jews in the context of how religious Jews can, should, and ought to live and interact with the non-Orthodox, and how such interaction plays itself out in the larger society. These topics, when addressed at all, are outsourced to organizations like Geshet or Yesodot.

Among the phenomena that we have begun to see in the last ten or fifteen years are the following:

A grassroots movement of idealistic, young couples have undertaken to transform communities by forming *Garinim Torani'im* ("Torah delegations") to move into a wide range of communities, in roughly fifty locations from posh Herzliya and North Tel Aviv to development towns such as Lod and Yerucham, as a form of domestic *shlichut*. While the earliest proto-*garinim* date back to the late 1960s, the movement has flourished only since the 1990s. While obviously similar in some ways to the Diaspora's Torah MiTzion Kollel movement, in almost every case the members of these *garinim* work in whatever profession they might have, and rent their own apartments with only a little bit of subsidy from one of the umbrella organizations that have been formed around these initiatives. The group of young couples in each locale embed themselves in the life of the larger community, organizing youth activities, after-school programs, *hesed* and social welfare projects, outreach, *havrutot* and classes, etc.—either independently or in conjunction with an existing but embattled and often previously ineffectual local synagogue. In many cases, the *garin* members are not

professional educators or rabbis (although a significant number are), but rather young couples who want to change the face of Israeli society by bringing Torah to locations from which it has been absent, strengthening what is seen as the spiritual vacuum of Israeli secular society. The slogan that best seems to capture the spirit of the movement is the attempt to “settle in people’s hearts (*le-hitnahel be-levavot*) as well as the land.”²⁷

Organizations such as MiBereishit may be well-known within the Modern Orthodox community for advancing parent-child Torah study (*avot u-banim*) in synagogues throughout Israel and the Diaspora, but their more significant activity may be providing quality curricular materials and study sheets to secular kindergartens and elementary schools—direct marketing of Jewish heritage to the “silent majority” in the middle (and their schools and teachers) who simply, and tragically, have never been exposed to it. ITIM, the Jewish-Life Information Center, founded by American Rabbi Seth Farber, similarly interfaces directly with the *hiloni* population attempting to make life cycle events such as weddings, *brit milah*, mourning, etc., opportunities for positive Jewish intervention. They also take an active role lobbying on behalf of prospective converts, or Russian *olim* who become entangled in the rabbinate red tape.²⁸ Organizations such as Maayanei Yeshua and Rosh Yehudi, with their information booths in bus stops and train stations throughout the country, take a page straight from the Chabad playbook, laying *tefillin* and distributing *Shabbat* candles and information sheets, attempting to be *Dati Leumi* alternatives. Again, these are not only attempts to circumvent the perceived ineffectualness of the bureaucracies and organs of established State religion (such as the *Minhal Hinukh ha-Dati*—bureau of religious education in the Ministry of Education—or the Chief Rabbinate), but also the aforementioned vocal, secular lobby.²⁹

Having enumerated a number of these *lehavdils* between the scene in Israel and that in North America, we turn our attention to the question of what, nevertheless, might each side emulate or learn from the other.

A visiting first-time tourist recently commented to me that he was surprised that in the Jewish State he couldn’t find a good deli sandwich

on rye! I responded that this is less remarkable than the fact that in the entire Jewish State one can't find a single full-time shul rabbi. As a by-product of the mentality that the state-run religious bureaucracy provides for all needs—from schools, to *kashrut*, to *mikvaot*, to *eruvim*, to *hevra kadisha*, and on and on—local synagogues have not bought in (*tarti mashma*) to the idea that hiring a rabbi is a worthwhile investment because they operate under the illusion that all necessary religious services are provided top-down. It's part of what we pay taxes for. This is related to the phenomenon of viewing synagogues as merely a place to *daven* or perhaps catch the *daf yomi shiur*. Although obviously *also* those things, Israel never adopted the notion of the synagogue as a center of Jewish life, an obvious side-effect of the otherwise positive fact of living in a whole society which is inherently Jewish and non-compartmentalized. In the Diaspora, the shul often becomes a "Jewish Center," a one-stop shop for all Jewish needs, and the rabbi's role is so conceived to play into his potential to act as a positive force within this larger agenda, including serving as an articulate spokesman for Orthodoxy to other denominations and the larger, unaffiliated Jewish community, to say nothing of a more activist orientation as an agent for Jewish outreach.³⁰

Although some of these rabbinic roles are filled, to varying degrees, by the municipally appointed *Rabbanei Ir* (chief rabbis of the cities), the impersonal nature of those positions generally neutralizes any potential to make an impact on individuals and families, the specific arena in which the American rabbinate has had its most significant impact. Furthermore, and without meaning to malign any specific figures, we must remember that rabbinic appointments at this level are made through political connections, not necessarily due to talent; are effectively tenured positions from which appointees cannot be removed; and have created a situation in which the rabbis have no constituency to whom they are genuinely accountable.

While it is too early to judge, there are signs of hope that this situation is beginning to change.³¹ More and more shuls in Israel are hiring part-time rabbis, and a number of organizations, such as Shaalei Torah and Eretz Hemdah, are attempting to provide training for community clergy. These idealistic, young rabbis attempt to hold a portfolio of

jobs that would more properly be served by a full-time professional, which include being available for *psak halakhah* or counseling, teaching and speaking, and, often most crucially, working with adolescents, whose *Dati-Leumi* parents fear are always at risk of going “off the *derekh*.” These rabbis do this for about a one-third addition to their other salary (usually as a teacher), and of course function without the team of professionals (executive director, secretary, youth director, etc.) on which their American counterparts can usually rely.

One noteworthy example of this change is Rabbi Binyamin Lau’s Ramban Synagogue in Jerusalem. Partially because of his own personal dynamism and constellation of talents, he has turned his part-time pulpit into an American-style “Jewish Center,” not just a place for *tefillah* and teaching, but a platform for social action in the larger Jerusalem community. The synagogue is located on the seam between Jerusalem’s wealthiest Anglo-Saxon neighborhoods of Baka and the German Colony, on one side, and the financially depressed and often dilapidated Katamonim and Gonen on the other. The Jerusalem Municipality sought out Lau’s partnership, and he is now the principle distributor on their behalf of charity and social welfare support for the southern district of the city. This “faith-based initiative” is testament to the power and potential of synagogue rabbis to reach across ideological lines, act as a source of good, and, in the most basic sense, be a force for *kiddush shem shamayim*.

In the other direction, we can look to the work of Israeli organizations such as BeMaaglei Tzedek, established in 2004 by a group of young activists to promote a grassroots agenda of social action and *tikkun olam*, especially as it relates to some of the shocking norms of Israeli life, including promoting disabled access in restaurants and public places, fair treatment to employees, including foreign workers, and generally tackling social inequality across society through educational programming.³² The activists were almost exclusively from within the Religious Zionist camp and articulated that their agenda was a reflection of “Jewish values,” yet they do not present themselves as an Orthodox organization per se. It seems to me that this approach enables them to have a broader impact without getting pigeon-holed into the identity politics of religion and state. In America, for a slew of reasons

including the relationship between an organization's mandate and its funding sources, one senses that Orthodox institutions are more explicitly particularistic, and denominationally focused and identified, potentially limiting their ability to have broad impact across Jewish or American society.³³ In Israel, however, this is one way religious organizations have succeeded in communicating and impacting across the divide. (This difference is borne out in a comparison between BeMaa-glei Tzedek and its American counterpart Uri L'Tzedek—which promotes itself in the far more particularistic language of Orthodoxy.)³⁴

In place of a summary, I would like to end with a remark on a separate, yet related topic. Whether or not the Guttman Report is correct, that it's a continuum, not a divide, that separates religious and non-religious in Israel, there clearly does exist a chasm within our own religious society, and a painful one at that. If the borders of Orthodox religious identity in America are more porous, allowing for shades of gray within a spectrum ranging from liberal Orthodox to right-wing *yeshivish* (we might perhaps exclude Hassidic American society), in Israel we are compelled by the line of demarcation between those who serve in the army and those that don't—and the ideological positions from which that decision emanates—to live in a far more bifurcated world. We each tend to occupy our own little box, making occasional visits to the boxes immediately to the right or to the left. If I have no meaningful interaction with *haredi* Jews and society, with those I accept as partners in *goral* as well as *ye'ud*, regardless of what they may think of me, then my religious life is less rich, and so is theirs, whether they accept this proposition or not.

The old, pithy complaint of certain religious intellectuals that “the people we talk to we can't *daven* with, and those we *daven* with we can't talk to” no longer applies—neither in Israel nor abroad. We have come into our own as a religious, social, and intellectual community. Even if I wouldn't choose to be stranded on a desert island with any random member of my shul, I can easily select more than a *minyán* of folk with whom I would feel spiritual communion, and still draw intellectual succor, and simply enjoy conversing with, and still be able to say *kaddish de-rabbanan* upon conclusion! This self-sufficiency, however, should not delude us into thinking that we do indeed live on a desert

island, nor should it distract us from our community's responsibility to seek a bridge to those around us—both on the left and on the right.³⁵

NOTES

1. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek: Listen—My Beloved Knocks*, trans. D. Gordon (New York: Yeshiva University, 2006), pp. 62-63.
2. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). For a good critique of the progressive movement's impact on twentieth-century American public education, see: Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reform* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
3. For one description of the current state of Jewish cultural literacy in Israel, see *Am ve-Olam: Tarbut Yehudit Ba-Olam Mishtaneh (Recommendations of the Committee on Jewish Studies in Public Education)*, Prof. Aliza Shinhar, Chairperson (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, August 1994). The so-called "Shinhar Report," and the library of articles and books in its wake, paints a bleak picture indeed. I addressed these topics in my review of Adam Baruch's *Seder Yom: Hayye Yom-Yom be-Rei haHalakhah*, which appeared in *Modern Judaism* 21:3 (October 2001), pp. 283-287.
4. Commissioned by the Avi Chai Foundation, the findings of the Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research were published in English as: Levy, Levensohn, and Katz, *Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction Among Israeli Jews* (Jerusalem: Avi Chai, 1993). See also Leibman and Katz, eds., *The Jewishness of Israel: Responses to the Guttman Report* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). A follow-up study was made public as *A Portrait of Israeli Jews: Beliefs, Observances and Values among Israeli Jews 2000* (Jerusalem: Avi Chai and the Israel Democracy Institute, 2003). Both studies are available online from: www.avichai.org.il.
5. Shlomit Levy and Hagit Hacohen Wolf, "Jewish Identity of the Israeli Young Generation," in *Tomorrow: Background Policy Documents*, ed. R. Tal and B. Geltman (Jerusalem: The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2008), p. 185 (available at: www.jpppi.org.il).
6. Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Does Place Make a Difference?: Jewish Orthodoxy in Israel and the Diaspora," *Israel as a Religious Reality*, ed. C. Waxman (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1994), pp. 43-74.
7. See Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Religion and Politics in Israel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), esp. the historic survey on pp. 57-78.
8. For the background of the status quo agreement, see Menachem Friedman, "VeEleh Toldot ha-Status Quo: Dat u-Medinah be-Yisrael" in *HaMa'avar me-Yishuv la-Medinah 1947-1949: Retzifut u-Temurot*, ed. V. Pilovsky (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1988), pp. 47-79; and Eliezar Don-Yehiya, *Religion and Political Accommodation in Israel* (Jerusalem: Floersheimer Institute, 1999), esp. chapter

3. For the secular critique on the status quo, see Shulamit Aloni, *HaHesder: Mi-Medinat Hok la-Medinat Halakhah* (Tel Aviv: Otpaz, 1970), as well as her other screeds and rantings throughout the years.
9. Eliezar Don-Yiheya, *Religion and Political Accommodation in Israel*, p. 48.
10. American initiatives such as Aish HaTorah's "Project Inspire" (see www.kiruv.org) are noteworthy in this regard precisely because they attempt to encourage our accountant to "do *kiruv*" or outreach to his assimilated Jewish colleague. Some might see an evangelical impulse—pardon the expression—in such an effort to train "*baalebatim*" for grassroots *kiruv* work, but its existence highlights the fact that this simply does not take place on its own.
11. Charles S. Leibman, "Religion and the Chaos of Modernity," in *Take Judaism for Example*, ed. J. Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 157.
12. Chaim I. Waxman, *American Aliya: Portrait of an Innovative Migration Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 133. See also his "Jewish Identity and Identification of America's Young Jews," in *Tomorrow: Background Policy Documents*, ed. R. Tal and B. Geltman (Jerusalem: The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2008), pp. 173-178 (available at: www.jpppi.org.il). Compare this, however, to the evangelical movement in America, whose attempt to imprint its values on the majority political, civic, and popular culture is well documented in: Daniel Radosh, *Rapture Ready: Adventures in the Parallel Universe of Christian Pop Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2008), and the 2006 documentary film *Jesus Camp* (see www.jesuscampthemovie.com).
13. A. B. Yehoshua, "The Meaning of Homeland" in *The A.B. Yehoshua Controversy: An Israeli-Diaspora Dialogue on Jewishness, Israeliness, and Identity* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2006), p. 9 (available at www.ajc.org). See also his recent collection of essays, where the Hebrew original of this selection appears, *Ahizat Moledet* (Bnei Brak: HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 2008).
14. Disbanded in November 2008, the *Mafdal* had drifted from its historic role as a pragmatic, social issues party and perennial coalition partner regardless of whom the governing majority was to a right-wing party focused on sectarian issues regarding the settlements. Much of the void left by the rightward shift, and subsequent demise, of the *Mafdal* has been filled by *Shas*, with their program of social welfare and education. Rabbi Binyamin Lau wryly commented to me that at the end, the *Mafdal* "was speaking the language of *klal Yisrael* but acting sectorially. *Shas* has done the exact opposite."
15. For a description of how this played itself out in the educational arena, see Matityahu Dagan, *HaHinukh ha-Tzioni ha-Dati ba-Mivhan ha-Zman ve-haTekufah: Hamishim Shnot ha-Hinukh ha-Dati ba-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Misrad HaBitahon - Mikhlelet Lifshitz, 2006). It is worthwhile noting that the occasional polls which show us that a certain percentage of graduates of the religious school system don't observe *Shabbat*, e.g., highlight the complications brought about by the picture I've painted: the question is how many of them came from homes that kept *Shabbat* in the first place?

16. Some even question the use of secular-religious dichotomies as useful tools. Dr. Zehavit Gross of Bar Ilan University is conducting interesting research on alternate models of understanding identity construction among secular Israeli youth, and we look forward to the publication of her data. I learned of her work at her presentation, "Multiple Religious and Secular Definitions Among Secular Adolescents in Israel," at the Fifth International Conference of the Israel Association for Research in Jewish Education (Jerusalem, January 8, 2009).
17. Aside from this one section, I acknowledge that in this paper I have not adopted Yoel Finkelman's distinction between "Religious Zionist Right" vs. "Religious Zionist Left," which would be informative were it not for space limitations. See his "On the Irrelevance of Religious-Zionism," *Tradition* 39:1 (Spring 2005), pp. 21-44. While hopeful for the impact the efforts I outline here might make in the future, Finkelman's pessimistic analysis of the degree of past impact should be borne in mind.
18. Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Israeli Chief Rabbinate: A Current Halakhic Perspective," in *Israel as a Religious Reality*, ed. C. Waxman (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1994), p. 135.
19. See Adam Ferziger, "Religion for the Secular: The New Israeli Rabbinate," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 7:1 (March 2008), pp. 67-90. Those interested in Rabbi Soloveitchik's critique of the Chief Rabbinate, and of religion-state interface in Israel, should see my "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and the Israeli Chief Rabbinate: Biographical Notes (1959-60)," *B.D.D. Journal of Torah and Scholarship* 17 (2006), pp. 45-67.
20. I admit that for a large segment of the Russian *olim*, while there might not be antagonism toward religion, there might very well be indifference. Unlike the Sephardic *masorti'im*, those who emerged from behind the Iron Curtain have no well of nostalgia on which to draw.
21. Dr. Ruth Calderon, head of the secular Alma College in Tel Aviv, recently commented to me that the transformative nature of the 1967 Six Day War, which lead Religious Zionists to believe they were witnessing the incipient stages of the messianic era, has its mirror parallel for the *hiloni* community in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The near calamitous result of the Yom Kippur War led the secularists to question their own belief in the ethos of the Sabra society, allowing for an openness to Jewish, not merely Israeli, culture, albeit a Jewish culture constructed and interpreted in a secular vein. On the societal impact of the Yom Kippur War see Tirza Hechter, "Historical Traumas, Ideological Conflicts, and the Process of Mythologizing," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35:3 (2003), pp. 439-460.
22. See Dr. Yoel Finkelman's contribution to this Forum for a discussion of this issue.
23. Printed in *Eder HaYakar ve-Ikvei HaTzon* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1967), pp. 107-116. Surprisingly, this important essay has yet to be translated into English.

24. R. Yoel Bin-Nun's recently completed doctoral dissertation is of interest in this regard. "The Dual Source of Human Inspiration and Authority in the Philosophy of Rav Kook" (Hebrew), Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University (November 2008).
25. The philosopher Charles Taylor's recent *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), makes an 874-page argument against my thesis here, suggesting that God is not dead, but removed to arenas such as moral inquiry and aesthetic sensibilities. If modern man would only look there, suggests Taylor, he would discover pathways to religion. Be that as it may, I suggest that *hoi polloi* are not opening those windows to a modern theology but are all too often mired elsewhere.
26. See Asher Cohen, *HaTalit ve-haDegel: HaTzionut ha-Datit ve-Hazon Medinat ha-Torah be-Reishit ha-Medinah* (Jerusalem: Yed Ben-Tzvi, 1998); and Dov Schwartz, *Etgar u-Mashber be-Hug ha-Rav Kook* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001), esp. chapter 2, as well as his other books in that series all dealing with the origins, ideology, and crises of Israeli Religious Zionism.
27. There is no research on the *garinim* yet available, but a doctoral dissertation is being completed by Mati Dombrowsky at Bar Ilan University. A website at www.garinim.org.il purports to be an informal portal for the various *garinim*.
28. On ITIM see www.itim.org.il, as well as Ferziger, "Religion for the Secular," *op. cit.*
29. I make no claims as to the long-range impact of these organizations. It's too early to tell, and no statistics or research are yet available. However, their existence signals a positive new orientation with much potential.
30. I can only attest to the catalytic impact that my own synagogue rabbi and his family played in my life as a young teenager. I am speaking of Rabbi Steven M. Dworken z"l, of Cong. Anshe Chesed in Linden, N.J. For an array of some of the roles that an industrious synagogue rabbi can play in America—and which are often absent in Israeli communities—see *The Rabbinate as Calling and Vocation: Models of Rabbinic Leadership*, ed. B. Herring (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1991), but for our discussion, especially the essays by Rabbis Ephraim Buchwald, Joel Tessler, Haskel Lookstein, William Cohen, Saul Berman, and Shubert Spero.
31. See Adam Ferziger, "Asseh Lekha Kahal: Temurot Makbilot be-Rabbanut ha-Orthodoksit be-Yisrael uve-Tzfon Amerika" forthcoming in: *HaRav*, ed. Y. Stern and S. Friedman (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute).
32. BeMaaglei Tzedek's flagship initiative is their "*Tav Hevrati*," a sort of social justice *teudat hekhsher*, displayed alongside the certificate attesting to the *kashrut* of the food ingredients, this "social seal" testifies that the restaurant agrees to treat its employees fairly, provide a safe work environment, pay minimum wage, as well as enable fair access to the disabled. The certificate explicitly states that it does not certify the *kashrut* (in the conventional sense) of the food being served. When BeMaaglei Tzedek started this project, I admit that I thought it was a nice idea but unlikely to have much impact. In the intervening few years I have noticed that many people, of varying ideological and religious stripes, with whom I set appointments to meet over coffee ask that we only go to a café that has the *Tav Hevrati*. See www.mtzedek.org.il for more information.

33. An exception to this might be Chabad's work combating substance abuse. But of course, Chabad is an exception to so many rules.
34. Uri L'Tzedek was founded in 2007 in New York, calling itself "an *Orthodox* social justice organization guided by Torah values and dedicated to combating suffering and oppression" (see www.uriltzedek.webnode.com). See the interesting, and rather heated discussion on the role and need for this type of social activism in the North American Jewish educational scene which took place on the Lookjed email list in March-April 2009 (archived at: www.tinyurl.com/uriltzedek). In that forum some of the rhetorical attack on Uri L'Tzedek was waged because the organization frames itself specifically as a criticism of contemporary Orthodox education.
35. Throughout this paper I have consciously not addressed the so called *Hardal*, or *Haredi Leumi*, phenomenon. A careful analysis of this community is required, and no doubt the manner in which they relate with other ideological and social groups in Israel would be of interest to the present study.