

# JEWISH EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

*because educators think before they teach*

Volume 7:1 Fall 2008 סתיו תשס"ט

## ISRAEL: THE DREAM MEETS REALITY



### ***Inside this issue ...***

Alienation of American Jews • Global partnerships • Palestinian narrative •  
The “Truths” about Israel • New visions • Zionist identity

### ***Perspective on Jewish Education***

David Breakstone





# Now Available!

**Join other Jewish Schools that have already purchased the *Israel Throughout the Year* curriculum.**

After five years of intense planning, research, writing and editing, this comprehensive, stimulating and user-friendly curriculum is ready for your classroom. Teach your students in a fun and engaging way all about Israeli history, geography, culture, tradition, democracy, leaders—and more!



Curriculum includes four comprehensive lessons centered around each of the Jewish dates of Asara BeTevet, Tu BiShvat, Yom Ha'Atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim (total of 16 lessons for each of grades 1-8).

**For more details contact Yonah Fuld at [yonah@lookstein.org](mailto:yonah@lookstein.org)**



*"Thanks so much for this wonderful curriculum."*

*"The books were put together very professionally, were user friendly and had attractive pictures and drawings."*

*"Both the students and I found the lessons to be engaging and stimulating.... I was thrilled to see my students so focused on such an important subject."*



*"Thank you for giving me an opportunity to share these great lessons with my class!"*

#### Jewish Educational Leadership

A publication of  
The Lookstein Center for Jewish Education  
School of Education  
Bar-Ilan University

#### Journal Staff

Zvi Grumet, Editor  
Shalom Berger, Founding Editor  
Mindy Ribner, Managing Editor  
Beverly Buncher, Contributing Editor  
Elana Maryles Sztokman, Contributing Editor

#### Editorial Board

Hanan Alexander  
University of Haifa

Brenda Bacon  
Schechter Institute

Lee Buckman  
Frankel Jewish Academy

Jill Farrell  
Barry University

Cheryl Finkel  
PEJE

Beverly Gribetz  
Tehilla School

Clifford Hill  
Teachers College, Columbia University

Meni Koslowsky  
Bar-Ilan University

Yisrael Rich  
Bar-Ilan University

Jacob J. Schacter  
Yeshiva University

Moshe Sokolow  
Azrieli Graduate School, Yeshiva University

Joel B. Wolowelsky  
Yeshivah of Flatbush

#### Journal Design

Dov Abramson www.dovabramson.com

*Jewish Educational Leadership* is distributed to members of The Lookstein Center. For membership and subscription information, go to <http://www.lookstein.org/joinus> or write to [member@lookstein.org](mailto:member@lookstein.org)

Please send all correspondence to [zvi@lookstein.org](mailto:zvi@lookstein.org)

The Lookstein Center publications present a variety of viewpoints. The views expressed or implied in this publication are not necessarily those of the Center.

#### Editorial offices and advertising

The Lookstein Center for Jewish Education  
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 52900 Israel  
Telephone: 972.3.535.4980  
Fax: 972.3.535.1912  
<http://www.lookstein.org>

© Copyright 2008 by The Lookstein Center for Jewish Education.

All rights reserved. Fall 2008.

## THE RABBI DR. JOSEPH H. LOOKSTEIN CENTER FOR JEWISH EDUCATION IN THE DIASPORA

# NETWORK LEARN GROW

**NETWORK** with peers to discuss relevant educational issues  
**LEARN** with master teachers and leading professionals  
**GROW** professionally and personally

By becoming a member, you will be supporting The Lookstein Center to continue building a flourishing community of educators – for no community can thrive without members – and enabling the Lookstein Center to provide vital school services. In addition, you may be eligible for membership benefits, which include:

- Jewish Educational Leadership – a subscription to the professional journal published by the Lookstein Center
- Jewish Educational Leadership online – full access to online articles and “web-exclusives”
- Internet conferencing – free and discounted online professional development workshops and lectures
- Help-wanted & commercial advertisements – free posting on Announcements and the Bulletin Board (Lookstein.org)
- Video conferencing – discounted professional development workshops and lectures
- Publications – discounted books, monographs and research
- Reductions on popular online purchases and services from our partners

To learn more and become a supporting member of our growing community of educators worldwide, see [www.lookstein.org/joinus](http://www.lookstein.org/joinus) and/or contact [member@lookstein.org](mailto:member@lookstein.org)

#### Membership fees:

Premium membership	\$850
Schools with more than 200 students	\$400
Organizations	\$400
Schools with fewer than 200 students	\$250
Libraries	\$100
Individuals	\$50

The following commercial vendors offer generous discounts to Lookstein Center members:



# Letter from the Editor



## Zvi Grumet

My summers as a child were spent in a bungalow colony in the Catskill mountains. Almost completely cut off from civilization (there was one pay phone for 28 families), we delighted when movie night came. Some entrepreneur would show up with a 16mm projector, and a few large reels of some feature film from a bygone year. Between the children's hour and the film for the parents were a series of "shorts" – 5-10 minute films about Israel. We loved to watch the modern miracle unfold before our eyes, the pioneering spirit, the dedication.

Those films inspired me. During the school year I would wait outside my local subway station and collect money for the JNF. The euphoria of the Six Day War swept over all of us. During the Yom Kippur War I stood on a street corner with a large Israeli flag to collect money; we all danced and cried hearing about the dramatic rescue operation at Entebbe. Later, we beamed at the airlift of thousands of Ethiopian Jews and cried watching Natan Sharansky sing *Hinei mah tov umah na-im* upon his arrival in Israel. And I always knew that I would one day make *aliyah*.

Freeze the scene around my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. I got off the plane in Ben Gurion for the first time and was whisked into a rickety van that wound its way through the rundown, squalid city of Lod and onto a narrow winding road. There were no horas, no kibbutz campfires, no modern miracles. The Yeshiva in which I was studying for the year had no paved paths, frequent power outages, no heated buildings, and hot water for showers only six hours a week. My dream was shattered; how could I ever live in this backward place?

Fast forward to the early 1990s. I had learned to love Israel all over again, but very differently. After years of teaching in a day school, I noticed that few of my students shared the same visceral connection to Israel that I did. Many

couldn't distinguish between Israel and Jerusalem, and most could not articulate a single sentence about either the war in 1948 or 1967. Israel, for them, was a place in which bombs blew buses apart, which invaded Lebanon and massacred civilians, which was occupying someone else's land who was resisting by throwing stones. It was a place to go on vacation if there would be peace and/or if Disney was already booked. Their images and gut reactions were formed by the carefully controlled sound bites and video clips they saw in the mass media.

We were living different realities. And what was true in the 1990s is even more true today. Israel's existence is taken for granted; Diaspora Jewry has grown increasingly self-confident. Whereas once Diaspora Jews studied Hebrew to identify with Israel, Israelis today study English. And Israel itself has changed. The idealism and collective responsibility which once (may have) pervaded the society have been replaced by mighty doses of individualism. The myths that once inspired dreamers turned into a reality that was more complex than any of us were prepared to admit.

I recall a conversation in 1988 in which I asked one of the great Torah luminaries of our generation how to inspire a love for Israel in an era which seemed much more complicated than the one in which we grew up. He knew the challenge, and humbly acknowledged that he had no easy answers.

Our challenge is enormous, and it is to that challenge that we dedicate this issue.

Sociologist Steven Cohen lays important groundwork by demonstrating the alienation of the younger generation of American Jews from Israel. Shalom Berger and Lisa Grant, from different angles, address the question of what should be the content of Israel education, Daniel

Margolis challenges us to reevaluate what we want in a Zionist education, and Alick Isaacs probes further by suggesting an old/new paradigm for Zionist education. Francis Nataf and Susan Handelman debate teaching the Palestinian narrative, while our applications section presents a number of efforts designed to provide students knowledge and background with which to debate Palestinian activists.

Rounding out the issue is our features. David Breakstone, a veteran Zionist educator, is featured on our Perspectives page, and Levi Cooper's *Classics* highlights a Zionist hasidic Rabbi. Finally, in this issue we introduce a new feature, an action research project done by a participant in The Lookstein Center's Principals' Program. Our first report is from Lee Buckman, who currently serves as a mentor in the program.

Don't forget to check out our website [www.lookstein.org/journal\\_all.php](http://www.lookstein.org/journal_all.php) for web-exclusives, including a sample lesson of a new Israel curriculum being developed at The Lookstein Center.

*Bivrakha,*

### Errata

The Spring 2008 issue (6:3) featured an article "Martyr, Mommy, & Matriarch: Gender Scripts of Jewish Women in Educational Leadership". In that article the name of one of the authors was misprinted. It should read Miriam Hirsch. JEL regrets the error and we offer her our sincerest apologies.



# JEWISH EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Israel: The Dream Meets Reality

Volume 7:1 Fall 2008 סתיו תשס"ט

### Table of Contents

#### Research

- 4 > The Alienation of American Jews from Israel** | Steven M. Cohen
- 10 > Israel Education: Exploring the Methodological Implications of Political Empowerment for Jewish Studies** | Alick Isaacs
- 17 > Towards a Vision of Educational Re-engagement with Israel in Day Schools** | Daniel J. Margolis
- 22 > Sacred Vision, Complex Reality: Navigating the Tensions in Israel Education** | Lisa D. Grant
- 28 > The Challenge of Teaching Modern Israel** | Shalom Berger
- 33 > Teaching Israel, Teaching Truth: A Personal View from the Front** | Steve Israel

#### Applications

- 37 > Israel as the Vision and Venture of the Jewish People: Educating for Global Partnership** | Shlomi Ravid and Elana Maryles Sztokman
- 38 > Eyes on Israel: A Curriculum on Israel and the Media** | Hillel Zaremba
- 40 > What Is To Be Done? Educating Jewish Day School Students about Israel** | Roz Rothstein and Roberta P. Seid

#### Features

- 45 > Getting the Discussion Started**  
**Teaching the Palestinian Narrative in Diaspora Jewish Schools** | Francis Nataf
- 49 > Narrative or Truth – A Response to Francis Nataf** | Susan Handelman
- 54 > Action Research**  
**Enhancing the Zionist Identity of a School** | Lee Buckman
- 58 > From the Classics**  
**Hebrew in the Eyes of a Hasidic Master** | Levi Cooper
- 64 > Perspectives on Jewish Education**  
**Teaching Israel from B to Y: An Incomplete Guide for the Jewish Educator** | David Breakstone

**This issue of JEL is sponsored through the generous support of:**

Dr. Shmuel and Evelyn Katz of Bal Harbour, Florida, dear friends of The Lookstein Center and passionate supporters of Israel and

Mr. Steven J. Berger, President Israel Connection Corp.

[www.Myhebrewbooks.com](http://www.Myhebrewbooks.com) • Member, American Board of Trustees, Bar-Ilan University

# The Alienation of American Jews from Israel\*

**Steven M. Cohen**

*Steven Cohen reports on research looking at the levels of attachment of American Jews to Israel, and found some disturbing trends with far-reaching implications.*

American Jews have long maintained a remarkable relationship with Israel. Over the years, their fervent attachment has produced billions of dollars in ongoing philanthropic assistance, a powerful and effective pro-Israel lobby, tens of thousands of visits annually, a steady stream of *aliyah*, and myriad other examples of contact and support, ranging from Israeli film festivals to a growing American Jewish competency in Hebrew. All these expressions of support and engagement rest upon feelings of warmth, attachment and closeness, perhaps even a passionate love of Israel. Yet these feelings of attachment may well be changing, as warmth gives way to indifference, and indifference may even give way to downright alienation. Inevitably, if sufficiently pronounced and widespread, this prospective sea-change in attitudes toward Israel will have profound effects upon American Jews' relationships with Israel. In turn, it will also affect Israelis' sense of connection with, or isolation from, American Jewry.

Indeed, a mounting body of evidence has pointed to a growing distancing from Israel of American Jews, and the distancing seems to be most pronounced among younger Jews. Insofar as younger Jews are less attached to Israel, the inevitable replacement of the older population with younger birth cohorts leads to a growing distancing in the population overall.

In recent years, several studies have pointed to the distancing phenomenon, be they studies focusing on attitudes toward Israel specifically (e.g., Cohen 2002; Luntz), or those painting a more generalized portrait of Jewish identity among younger adult American Jews (e.g., Cohen and Kelman 2007; Greenberg 2004, 2006; Ukeles et al. 2006). Studies pointing to an attenuated American Jewish relationship with Israel are not a recent phenomenon; in fact,



*Professor Steven M. Cohen is Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at HUC-JIR and Director of the Florence G. Heller / JCCA Research Center. Previously, he taught at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Queens College, with visiting appointments at Yale, Brandeis, and JTS. Amongst his numerous publications is The Jew Within (with Arnold Eisen), Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences (with Charles Liebman) and American Modernity & Jewish Identity, and American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?*

\* This article is an edited and abridged version of a more comprehensive report, *BEYOND DISTANCING: Young Adult American Jews and Their Alienation from Israel* (Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman, 2007), Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies. The full report is available at [www.acbp.net/About/PDF/Beyond%20Distancing.pdf](http://www.acbp.net/About/PDF/Beyond%20Distancing.pdf)

they stretch back nearly a quarter of a century. With such titles as, “Are American and Israeli Jews Drifting Apart?” (Cohen 1989), “Ties and Tensions” (Cohen 1987), or “From Romantic Idealists to Loving Realists: The Changing Place of Israel in the Consciousness of American Jews” (Cohen 1985), a long trail of literature documents diminishing attachment to Israel among American Jews.

One explanation for these trends and age-related variations looks to the impact of history and how Israel has appeared in various periods over the last 60 years. Thus, members of the oldest generation

### Surveys over time suggest a weakening of American Jewish attachment to Israel, with comparable measures generally recording declines over the years.

of American Jews, born before World War II, may be highly attached to Israel in part because they can remember the Holocaust and the subsequent founding of the State. Their children, the Baby Boomers, have also experienced events that have, for many, forged a strong sense of Israel connection. For them, memories of the Six Day War and the ensuing period of pro-Israel mobilization have created strong feelings of attachment. Many members of these two generations see Israel as socially progressive, tolerant, peace-seeking, efficient, democratic and proudly Jewish, a society that has successfully withstood mortal threats from malevolent, hostile and fanatical enemies.

But the same cannot be said for younger Jews, especially today's younger adult Jews. Those born after 1974 draw upon memories and impressions less likely to cast Israel in a positive, let alone heroic light. The First Lebanon War in 1982, the First and Second Intifadas and the Second Lebanon War are all perceived as far more morally and politically complex than the wars Israel fought between 1948 and 1974, casting Israel in a more troubling light.

Surveys over time suggest a weakening of American Jewish attachment to Israel, with comparable measures generally recording declines over the years (Cohen

2002). Yet periods of Israeli-Arab hostilities have prompted expressions of American Jewish support, ranging from political mobilization to philanthropic generosity, with accompanying evidence in the surveys. Not surprisingly, the trend lines are mixed, in that some measures rise and fall over the years.

Whenever younger people differ from their elders, either of two processes is taking place. One possibility is that “family life cycle” effects are at work – young adults differ because they are largely single and/or childless; presumably, marriage and parenthood will alter their views

or behaviors to come to more closely resemble those of their elders. Joining churches and synagogues is a classic example of a life cycle effect: the advent of children provokes church and synagogue affiliation, and in time, the single and childless unaffiliated adult of today becomes the affiliated married parent of tomorrow.

Alternatively, “birth cohort” effects could be operating – younger people differ simply because they were born at a different time, years or decades after their elders. The imprint of their history differs from that of their elders and, presumably, is less likely to change with the passage of time. Musical taste is a well-known illustration of a birth cohort effect: Baby Boomers will always have a special place in their hearts for The Beatles, Stones and Temptations, while Generation X might have a similar place for Nirvana or Public Enemy. Marriage and child-bearing rarely provoke a re-shuffling of one's iPod or CD collection.

If it turns out that age-related variations in Israel attitudes are tied to the family life cycle, then we can presume that many young people will come to adopt their elders' warmer attitudes toward Israel as they mature. However, if these gaps between old and young regarding Israel

attachment are due primarily to birth cohort effects, then we may presume that the declines are more permanent and that the gaps today will influence the stance of American Jewry toward Israel for years to come.

In short, with respect to younger Jews and their presumably diminished attachment to Israel, this research focuses upon three questions:

- 1) How broad-based is the distancing, and how comprehensive the evidence? To what extent are younger Jews, in fact, more distant from Israel than their elders?
- 2) Insofar as younger Jews are more distant, can the gap in Israel-related attitudes be seen as a life cycle effect, one that will presumably largely evaporate over time, or does it have the signs of a more enduring birth cohort effect, one tied to relatively permanent features of the younger age groups?
- 3) To what may the age-related variations be attributed? Are they related, as many believe, to political orientations? Or are other factors more critical?

#### Younger Jews are less attached

The charts below graphically present the results for four age groups, ranging from 65+ to under 35. The results are nearly uniform. In all cases, those 65 and over report the highest levels of attachment. For all measures, those who are 50-64 exhibit higher levels of Israel-related attachment, support, caring or engagement than those under 50. And in almost every instance (with just two exceptions), those who are 35-49 outscore those who are under 35.

The range of viewpoints covered by these generalizations is truly broad. The survey questions capture attitudes that encompass feeling attached to Israel as well as feeling proud, excited, ambivalent or ashamed about Israel. The survey also includes questions regarding caring about Israel, feeling concerned about U.S. support for Israel, seeing Israel's destruction as a personal tragedy, talking to others about Israel or being drawn to news stories about Israel. Other questions relate to identifying as pro-Israel, as a

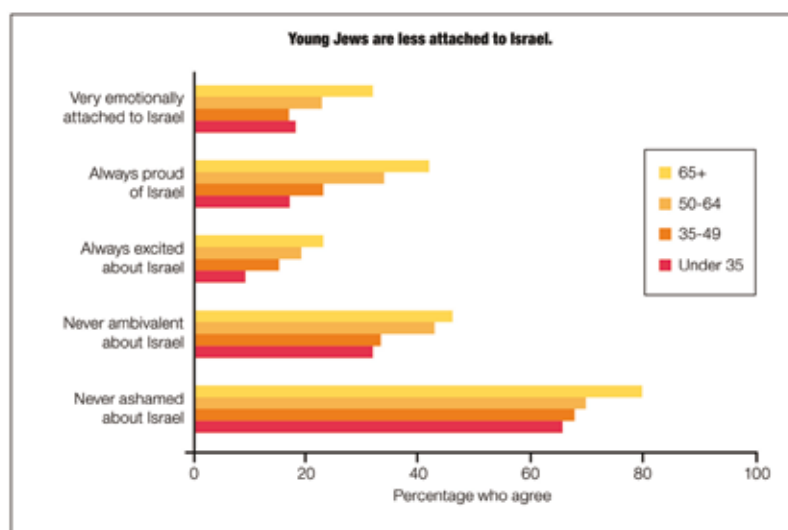
# The Alienation of American Jews from Israel

Zionist and a supporter of Israel, as well as rejecting the notion that Israel occupies lands that belong to someone else and feeling comfortable with the idea of a Jewish State of Israel. Results for any one of these indicators may be dismissed as a peculiarity or as reflecting a very specific behavior or attitude. But the gaps between younger and older Jews for all measures suggest that a broad-based distancing from Israel is well under way and has been under way for decades. Whereas previous studies have pointed to gaps between old and young in a few select indicators of attachment to Israel, this

## Rising intermarriage has helped drive down feelings of attachment to Israel.

study demonstrates declining attachment over a wide variety and large number of indicators, testifying to the breadth, depth and irrefutable nature of that decline.

The results for a summary scale measuring overall attachment to Israel make the point most vividly. Based upon a composite of respondents' answers to several questions, we divided respondents into high, moderate, and low levels of attachment to Israel. Among the most elderly group, those highly attached to Israel vastly exceed those with low attachment. Among those 50-64, the margin narrows such that the number of highly attached only slightly exceed the low-attached. Among those 35-49, the two figures actually reverse:



the low-attached vastly exceed those with high attachment. Among those under 35, the low vs. high gap in Israel attachment widens further still, such that of the four age groups, those under 35 emerge as the least attached, followed by those 35-49.

That each age group is less Israel-attached than its elders suggests that we are in the midst of a long-term and ongoing decline in Israel attachment. The age-related differences cannot be attributed primarily to family life cycle effects, if only because the age-related declines characterize the entire age spectrum from the very old to the very young. Rather, we are in the midst of a massive shift in attitudes toward Israel, propelled forward by the process of cohort replacement, where the maturing younger cohorts that are the least

Israel-engaged are replacing the oldest cohorts that are the most Israel-engaged.

With all this said, caring for Israel among younger adult Jews has not evaporated entirely. Far from it. On a variety of measures, approximately 60% of non-Orthodox Jews under the age of 35 express a measure of interest in, caring for and attachment to Israel. While this figure falls short of comparable figures for their elders, it can be said that most young Jews still express attachment to Israel. Moreover, we need to recall that this analysis sets aside the Orthodox. With the Orthodox, and with their growing percentage in the population, even among younger adult Jews the number who may be reasonably said to feel attachment to Israel approaches three-quarters of the population. At the same time, as these graphs readily demonstrate, the trend lines for the non-Orthodox population certainly point to declining attachment. These declines characterize not just the youngest adult Jews, but the entire age spectrum from oldest, to older-middle-aged, to younger-middle-aged, to young adults.

## Interpreting the data

The general expectation is that those on the political left should be less approving and appreciative of Israel than those on the right. Yet the results do not substantiate the claim that leftist identities are at the heart of the erosion in attachment to Israel. If we can

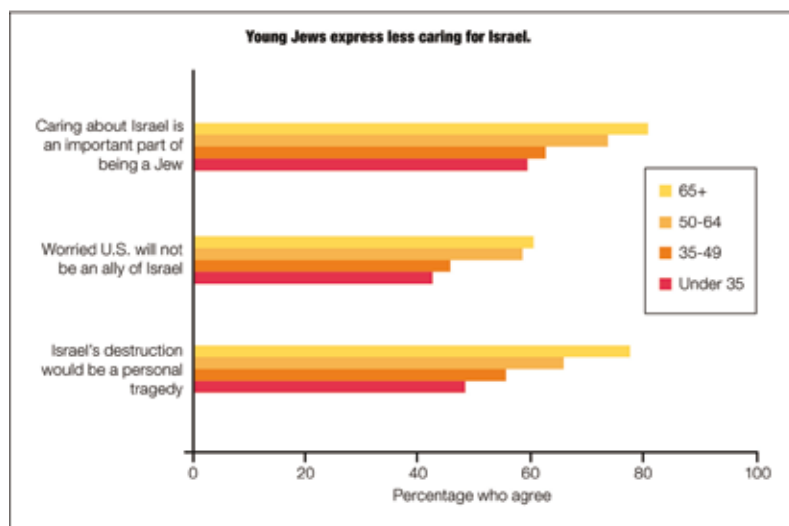
draw any conclusion, it is that political moderation is somewhat more associated with Israel attachment, perhaps suggesting that conventionality or political indifference pose little challenge to expressing positive views of Israel. In other words, the relationship between political views and attachment to Israel is far from uniform or consistent. Neither left-wing nor right-wing views are clearly associated with distancing from Israel.

The relationships between alienation, political views and age are rather curious. The most alienated group is the small number of young people with relatively right-leaning political views where as many as 21% feel alienated from Israel. Among their left-leaning age-peers, just 11% qualify as alienated, as do 12% of those with moderate or "other" political leanings. Thus, contrary to general impressions, it is those

who identify as conservative or Republican who are the most distant from Israel, and not those who see themselves as liberal Democrats – at least among those under 35. However, such is not the case among those 35-49. For this age group, those on the left express more alienation than those on the right (14% vs. 5%). In contrast with the next younger group, we find more alienation on the left than on the right.

What are we to make of these contradictory findings? We could infer that political identities carry a different implication for those under 35 as compared with those 35-49. But such an inference, unsupported by any compelling theory or previous substantiating evidence, demands far more evidence than available in this survey. Rather, we can retreat to a more modest and sustainable claim:





political identity, for the general population, has little bearing upon feelings of warmth toward or alienation from Israel. Whatever conclusion one may draw from the actions of political elites, or the writing of intellectual figures, left-of-center political identity (seeing oneself as liberal and a Democrat) in the general population exerts seemingly little influence on the level of attachment to Israel.

### Intermarriage

If the impact of political attitudes upon pro-Israel feelings is complex or ambiguous, that of intermarriage is far more straightforward. Rising intermarriage, with all that it reflects and all that it brings about, has helped drive down feelings of attachment to Israel. Among the intermarried, those with low attachment to Israel are more than double the number with high attachment.

### ... what can be done to counter the decline in Israel attachment, particularly among younger Jews?

Among the in-married and non-married, the number with high attachment to Israel surpasses the number with low attachment. In short, intermarried Jews sharply trail others with respect to overall attachment to Israel. Since a far greater numbers of younger Jews than older Jews are intermarried – in this sample of non-Orthodox Jews, the percentage of individuals who are intermarried climbs as one moves down the age ladder from 9% among the oldest (65+) to 62% of the youngest (under 35) – it stands to reason that there would be lesser attachment to Israel amongst the younger group than in the older ones.

Moreover, we find similar patterns with respect to “alienation” from Israel, the most distant category. Among the in-married and non-married, just under 5% qualify as alienated from Israel, but among the intermarried, three times that number (15%) qualify as alienated. Among the in-married and non-married, alienation is not at all associated with youthfulness; for them, the youngest are simply not the most alienated from Israel. However, matters

are quite different among the intermarried. Here, alienation from Israel climbs dramatically as one moves from old to young, such that the young intermarried adults are the most alienated among the intermarried. Among those who are under 35 and intermarried, nearly 18% qualify as alienated.

Thus, three trend lines converge to make intermarriage a major factor in driving down the Israel attachment scores of younger adults. First, many more young people are intermarried. Second, the intermarried are more distant and more alienated from Israel. Third, the youngest intermarried are the most distant and alienated from Israel.

### The impact of visiting Israel

For advocates of warmer ties between American Jews and Israel, the analysis thus far may well seem disheartening. Younger Jews are more distant from Israel, and their shifting attitudes are promoting an overall cooling of American Jewish passions for Israel. Intermarriage is a significant factor in the distancing of young people from Israel, in that intermarriage is more frequent, and the younger intermarried Jews are especially distant from Israel. The rather unexpected relationship between alienation from Israel and political attitudes points strongly to the importance of ethnic cohesion (Jews relating to Jews) as a factor in buttressing attachment to Israel.

The American Jewish community can do little to stop the advance of birth cohorts through the population, to influence political attitudes, or to significantly drive down the intermarriage rate in the foreseeable future. That said, what can be done to counter the decline in Israel attachment, particularly among younger Jews?

In the last several years, American Jewish philanthropists, communal organizations and Israeli public bodies have undertaken significant efforts to expand the participation of young people in Israel travel programs, both of short and long duration. Among the many sought-after outcomes associated with this effort is the hope and expectation that participants will return with a stronger attachment to Israel. Indeed, one can argue that if the programs have little impact on feelings about Israel, it is unlikely that they will influence other aspects of Jewish identity and connection.

A full and proper analysis of the impact of an Israel trip goes well beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, we can gain some inkling as to how Israel travel is associated with Israel attachment, discerning how the relationship between travel and attachment may differ for different age groups. If there is evidence of an impact, is the impact consistent across age groups, or is it higher – or lower – for young adults? To what extent does the trip to Israel matter and to whom?

Overall, we do indeed find very sharp differences in attachment to Israel associated with travel to Israel. Among those who have never been to Israel, the number with a high level of attachment is less than half the number with a low level of attachment (19% vs. 42%).

## The Alienation of American Jews from Israel

Among those with only one trip, the relationship is reversed: those with high levels of attachment are double the number of those with a low degree of attachment to Israel (34% vs. 17%). Those who have been to Israel two or more times are even more firmly attached to Israel, with 52% scoring high and under 10% at the low end of attachment. Finally, among those who have lived in Israel (such as might be reported by participants in a semester or year program in Israel), 68% score high on attachment, and just 6% score low. These results do not definitively establish the impact of the Israel trip, but they do open the door to the possibility, if not probability, that trips matter, that more trips are better than fewer, and that trips of longer duration have more impact than those with shorter duration.

Certainly not all these variations in Israel attachment can be attributed to the trips themselves. Self-selection plays a major role in determining who chooses to travel to Israel, and who travels multiple times or for extended periods. Simply put, the more Jewishly involved travel more readily, more often, and for longer duration. Statistically, almost half the gap between travelers and non-travelers remains after controlling for prior Jewish involvement. That said, it seems fair to say that the Israel trip still leaves a noticeable lasting impact on attitudes toward Israel. On an Israel-attitude scale ranging from 0 to 100, the single Israel trip taken at any point in one's life is associated with about 8 percentage points of improvement in scores and a reduction of 4

points in the number who qualify as alienated from Israel (about 8% of the total sample). These numbers are both substantively and statistically significant. When considered in light of other published studies, these findings certainly underscore the value of trips to Israel as promoting attachment to Israel.

Perhaps of greater interest is evidence of a differential relationship between trips and attachment, depending on age. In brief, however important the single trip to Israel may be for promoting attachment toward and preventing alienation from Israel, the impact is clearly more pronounced among those under the age of 35 than those 35-64. The net impact of a trip on the 0-100 Israel-attitude scale amounts to just 4 points for those 50-64, 9 points for those 35-49, and 12 points for those under 35. For the issue of alienation, the same progression runs from 1 point to 4 points to fully 13 points for those under 35. In other words, even when we extract the differences in Jewish identity between one-time travelers to Israel and those who have never been, the apparent impact of the trip on feeling attached to Israel and upon (not) feeling alienated from Israel is noticeably strongest among the younger adults. The bottom line: as important as Israel travel may be for fortifying commitment to Israel and preventing alienation, it is even more important, and most important, for younger Jews.

Absent any trip to Israel, most Jews score on the lowest rung of Israel attachment, and only a few manage to harbor warm feelings toward Israel, but even among the non-travelers, the putative impact varies by age group. For those 65 and over who never went, more than twice as many score high on attachment and not quite half as many score low when compared with those under 35 who have not gone. In other words, going to Israel at some point is almost a requirement for a young person to feel highly attached to Israel. Older generations (especially those who can remember the founding of the State) manage, at times, to develop closeness to Israel even without having ever visited.

Older Jews express considerable attachment to Israel, and very few are genuinely alienated from Israel. The same cannot be said for younger adult Jews. In sharp contrast to their parents and grandparents, non-Orthodox younger Jews, on the whole, feel much less attached to Israel than their elders. Moreover, in the past one could speak of mounting indifference to Israel as the major orientation of the unengaged. In contrast, these days we find instances of genuine alienation as many more Jews, especially young people, profess a near-total absence of any positive feelings toward Israel.

### The decline in context

This age-related decline characterizes almost all available measures of genuine Israel attachment and thus cannot be attributed to measurement idiosyncrasy. At the same time, the bottom has not fallen out entirely: about 60% of younger adult Jews who are not Orthodox profess some attachment to Israel. While less attached than their elders, most younger adult Jews still view Israel positively. The small but growing minority of younger generation Jews who are indifferent



**סידור סבָבָה**  
An Interactive  
Full-Color Siddur Curriculum

**Siddur Sababa**

- Teaches structure of weekday *Shaharit*
- Guides students to create meaning
- Connects prayers to *Tikkun Olam*

**10% DISCOUNT  
WITH THIS AD !!!**

To order, contact: Sara Stave  
[info@sabababooks.com](mailto:info@sabababooks.com)  
To view sample pages, visit:  
<http://sabababooks.com>

toward, if not alienated from, Israel did not suddenly emerge. Their distant views are not a matter of a recent, single, pivotal development or a sudden plunge in attachment. Rather, the erosion in Israel engagement has taken place over the entire age spectrum, from elderly, to upper-middle-aged, to lower-middle-

### ... promoting trips to Israel may be the most policy-relevant action organized Jews can undertake to stem the erosion in Israel attachment among younger adult Jews.

aged, to young adult. The phenomenon has the markings of a birth cohort effect rather than a family life cycle effect. A family life cycle effect would show strong relationships with marriage or the advent of children. We might see increases and decreases in attachment over the life cycle as family circumstances change. But here, the trend lines are fairly consistent with age: each drop in age is associated with a drop in Israel attachment. It does appear that levels of attachment are linked to when people were born and came to adulthood, rather than a particular stage in life.

Contrary to widely held beliefs, left-liberal political identity is not primarily responsible for driving down the Israel attachment scores among the non-Orthodox. If left-liberal politics were influential, we should see significant differences in Israel attachment between liberal-Democrats and conservative-Republicans. The absence of such a pattern, and the inconsistent variations within age groups, run contrary to the assertion that political views are the prime source of disaffection from Israel.

Rather, in thinking about why many younger Jews are indifferent to Israel, we need to look at intermarriage and what it reflects, promotes and symbolizes. The intermarried are far less attached to Israel than the in-married or non-married. They are far more numerous among young people than among their elders. And the distance from Israel is greater among the younger adult intermarried than among the older adult intermarried.

Intermarriage flows from and helps produce a more personalized rather than collective view of being Jewish, a trend that has mounted and become increasingly apparent over the years, as reported in Cohen 1998, Cohen and Eisen 2000, Horowitz 2000 and Liebman 1999. These works speak of “ethnic decline,” “The Jew

Within,” “Jewish journeys” and “privatized Judaism,” all of which accompany, reflect and contextualize the intermarriage phenomenon. Intermarriage represents and advances more open and fluid group boundaries along with a commensurate drop in Jewish tribalism, collective Jewish identity and Jewish Peoplehood (Cohen and Wertheimer 2006). It also both comes out of and promotes a more open notion of community, a more fluid conception of Jewish identity, and a more critical approach to peoplehood and belonging. As much as anything else, this shift in the meaning of being Jewish in America explains the retreat from engagement with Israel.

This study underscores previous findings showing that promoting trips to Israel may be the most policy-relevant action organized Jews can undertake to stem the erosion in Israel attachment among younger adult Jews. A single trip has clear positive effects on Israel attachment, repeat trips are even more effective and so are trips of longer duration. Travel to Israel is more essential for securing a pro-Israel identity among young people than it is among their elders. Older people who have never been to Israel have had several ways of shaping a positive relationship with Israel. Their younger counterparts have had few such experiences or opportunities aside from travel to Israel.

Notwithstanding the clear patterns of age-related decline in attachment, as well as the clear emergence of small (but growing) minorities who may be termed indifferent or even alienated from Israel, the results also point to a majority of young adults

with warm and positive feelings toward Israel. Their large number suggests a sizeable and significant reservoir of good feelings, and of potential candidates for travel programs and other forms of Israel education.

### References

- Cohen, Steven M. “From Romantic Idealists to Loving Realists: The Changing Place of Israel in the Consciousness of American Jews.” *Survey of Jewish Affairs* 1985: 169-182.
- Cohen, Steven M. “Are American and Israeli Jews Drifting Apart?” *American Jewish Committee*, 1989.
- Cohen, Steven M. “Religious Stability, Ethnic Decline.” New York: Florence G. Heller – JCCA Research Center, 1998.
- Cohen, Steven M. “Relationships of American Jews with Israel: What We Know and What We Need to Know.” *Contemporary Jewry* 23, 2002: 132-155.
- Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold Eisen. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Cohen, Steven M. and Ari Y. Kelman. *The Continuity of Discontinuity: How Young Jews Are Connecting, Creating, and Organizing Their Own Jewish Lives*. [www.rebooters.net](http://www.rebooters.net). 2007.
- Cohen, Steven M. and Jack Wertheimer. “Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?” *Commentary* 121, No. 6, June 2006: 33-37.
- Greenberg, Anna. *OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era*. [www.rebooters.net](http://www.rebooters.net). 2004.
- Greenberg, Anna. *Grand Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam: Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices*. [www.rebooters.net](http://www.rebooters.net). 2006.
- Horowitz, Bethamie. *Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity*. New York: UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, 2000.
- Liebman, Charles S. “Post-War American Jewry: From Ethnic to Privatized Judaism.” Pp. 7-17 in E. Abrams and D. Dalin (eds.), *Secularism, Spirituality and the Future of American Jewry*. Washington, D. C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999.
- Luntz, Frank. “Israel and American Jews in the Age of Eminem.” New York: Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, 2003.
- Ukeles, Jacob B., Ron Miller, and Pearl Beck. *Young Jewish Adults in the United States Today*. New York: American Jewish Committee, 2006.



# Israel Education: Exploring the Methodological Implications of Political Empowerment for Jewish Studies

**Alick Isaacs**

*Zionist education needs to include much more than the State of Israel, and new visions of Zionism need to recognize how far we have since we were a fledgling state rising from the shadows of the Holocaust.*

## **The New Question of Israel Education**

The Jewish experience of political sovereignty over the past sixty years raises significant and deep questions about how the Jewish tradition should be understood, interpreted and taught in today's world. Arguably, the decision to invest the future of the Jewish people and religion in a democratic, politically sovereign, secular, state is responsible for the most dramatic and epoch defining features of modern Jewish life. Such a significant change in Jewish life requires a far more fundamental curricular response from educators than it has received thus far. It is for this reason that the challenges of Israel education extend beyond the boundaries of Israel alone and into the wider context of Jewish learning today. Israel affects every aspect of Jewish life and hence of Jewish education.

In my view, in comparison to the breadth of Israel's significance, the curriculum of

Israel education is impoverished by the notion that Israel-related subject matter is confined to teaching about Israel and Israel Diaspora relations (Ukeles, Miller and Beck 2006; Cohen and Eisen 2000, Horowitz 2000). The conceptualization of the field as one dedicated to the project of building engaged relationships with Israel and teaching about Israel's history, geography, society and culture (as important and worthy as all of these are) fails to capture the scope of the challenge that Israel poses to Jewish education. The content of field trips, camps, informal activities and formal study have all been overwhelmed by the 'anti-assimilation' agenda that – in our context – is geared to the restoration of love, affection and loyalty to the Jewish State and its people. This is too shallow (Grant 2008) (See article on page 22, ed.). It is necessary to imagine and articulate more complex purposes to Israel education that stretch the boundaries in the field of practice.

Israel education seems especially narrow when compared to its historical predecessor: classical Zionist education. Classical Zionism presented a broad worldview of Israel's significance with implications that spread far beyond the question of one's attitude to or affection for the politics, people and religion of the State at any given time. Zionism drew upon a rich variety of intellectual resources in its construction of a method for evaluating the meaning of the Jewish tradition in light of contemporaneous experience. The Zionist educational effort rested upon the accomplishments of thinkers who reconstructed the classical narratives of Jewish history and Jewish thought, bringing their particular Nationalist/Zionist perspective – with its emphases on the Hebrew language, the holy land, agriculture, democracy, messianism, secularism, self-sufficiency, military empowerment etc. – to bear upon their understandings of the entire Jewish canon. Zionist thought, in all of its varieties, had something to say about the interpretation and meaning of the

*Dr. Alick Isaacs teaches at the Melton Center for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and directs the Advanced Bet Midrash program at the Shalom Hartman Institute.*



Bible, communal life, law and politics. In addition, Religious Zionist thinkers developed both theological and curricular perspectives on Mishna, Talmud, *halakhah*, prayer, *Kabbalah* – and the list really does go on and on.

The intellectual richness of Zionist thought and scholarship fed into educational practices that ranged from classroom teaching to national curriculum development. Ben-Zion Dinur's view of history is perhaps the most systematic and educationally decisive example of this (Dinur 1968). The special challenges which faced those who lived in the unique years

following the destruction of European Jewry and the foundation of the Jewish state made the research and teaching of the new historical narrative an ever more urgent task. He argued that living through remarkable times is in itself an experience that enriches historical research and understanding. History inspires and gives momentum to the public, equipping them with an epic sense of the past with which to go and face their finest hour. Dinur thought of the historian as a leader and an educator whose purpose it was to inspire and lead the way. For these “educational” reasons, he called upon scholars to

address the research questions that their own unique historical experiences had brought to light. In his program, historians should attend to seven distinct fields of inquiry. These corresponded to the seven remarkable historical revelations of the time: the return to the land; the return to political autonomy; the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language; the new relations between Jews and non-Jews (since the Enlightenment on the one hand and the Holocaust on the other); the new awareness of the concept of Diaspora; the centers of Jewish life in the Diaspora and Jewish religious and communal life. Dinur assumed that through each of these prisms, an inherent meta-historical feature of Jewish nationality in the past could be recovered and brought to bear upon the nation-building project.

Dinur composed an educational agenda through which the Zionist historical narrative became a central feature of the emerging Israeli culture. This agenda encompassed a broad spectrum of educational encounters with the past; from scholarship through museums, public institutions, memorial days, school curricula etc. I can think of no better an example, in modern Jewish history, of how an ideology has been effectively translated into an effective educational philosophy through the articulation of an interpretive methodology. In his capacity as Ben Gurion's Minister of Education, Dinur presented a national master narrative of Jewish history to be taught in schools which, in his words, “attempted to give the student the knowledge that our nation... maintained its religion, customs and beliefs over two thousand years of exile... and did not cease to exist as one nation in all its Diaspora.”

Dinur's was a broad historical thesis that sought to illustrate – in a wide variety of historical contexts across the full spectrum of Jewish life – the meaning of the Jewish past. Educationally speaking, the scope of the subject matter was potentially unlimited because he translated the experience of his time into a clear set of methodological premises that could be used to analyze anything. Zionist thought gave Zionist education a way of looking at the world.



This kind of scope is no longer possible today, but not for reasons that are specific to anybody's disenchantment with classical Zionism. A significant shift has occurred in Western thought that has had a decisive impact on methodology. The grand theses of the past have all been called to order by the post-modern critiques that have undermined the validity of both the historical positivism and the historical romanticism that were so crucial to Zionist thinkers. Contemporary hermeneutics is as suspicious of the reader as it is of the text. Romantic methodological notions of scientific objectivity in the humanities have been exposed for their ideological subjectivity. The 'educational' outcome of this critique is that the post-modern reader is more wary of manipulations and cover-ups. In this spirit, the classical narrative of Israel's independence is repeatedly subjected to significant scholarly scrutiny, as are its historically reconstructed 'mythologies' about both the recent and the more distant past. Post-colonial and feminist scholarship, in particular, have called attention to many of the chauvinisms, prejudices, and blind spots that characterized the Zionist heyday, even though these were arguably responsible for the successes of the nation-building project in the first place.

For better or for worse, the naïve era of Zionist education seems to have come to an end and the new question now facing Israel education is what might be its replacement. With what methods might scholars today provide educators with a perception of Jewish civilization that captures the angst of the present Israeli experience while at the same time

comprehensively addressing the breadth of the Jewish historical canon?

While I shall not try to give a full answer I do believe that there is value in drawing attention to its importance. Moreover, I would like to single out some examples of contemporary Jewish scholarship that, in my view, point the way forward. The books and papers that I shall mention

**For better or for worse, the naïve era of Zionist education seems to have come to an end and the new question now facing Israel education is what might be its replacement.**

operate with methodological (not necessarily ideological) tendencies that I believe Jewish educators in general and Israel educators should be aware of. They confront the challenge of incorporating the unique and difficult experiences of contemporary Jewish sovereignty into their readings of the past. They touch upon the painful and disturbing questions that the experience of sovereignty has raised and utilize them in the selection of both subject matter and interpretive attitudes.

### **You Can Compare**

How does contemporary Jewish empowerment impact the way in which Jews think about studying and teaching the cultural resources of the past? One striking example of this concerns Jewish attitudes to non-Jews. The experience of empowerment has afforded Jews the confidence to confront the similarities between their historical conduct and that of their historical enemies in ways that were never possible before. This change has allowed scholars in recent generations to reconsider the assumption that Jewish history is incompatible with that of other nations. Comparison establishes connections between disparate communities that are likely to change the way a person defines his or her relationships with the world around. Let us consider the impact of Jewish Christian comparison on Israeli scholarship.

I once attended a graduate seminar at the Hebrew University taught by a Dominican monk, Professor Marcel Dubois. The seminar dealt with medieval Christian liturgy and the student body was comprised almost exclusively of non-religious Israeli Jews. Dubois left an enduring impression when he pointed at me and the only other observant Jew in the class remarking playfully,

"Only religious people like *us* can really understand what prayer meant to people in the past." Everyone in the room laughed; I felt as if history had been redecorated.

The idea that our shared religiousness was compatible came as quite a shock to me at the time. But, Dubois' quip was hardly an isolated event. It reflected a significant shift of attitudes to the Jewish past that took place around me during the course of my under-graduate and graduate studies in the Jewish history department at the Hebrew University. Rather than treating the Jewish past as a unique story – incompatible with the histories of other nations – my teachers began engaging in inter-religious historical comparisons that shattered the walls dividing Christians and Jews through the discovery of relatedness and similarity. As a scholarly method, comparison is conventionally used to uncover similarities and differences that allow for a sharper understanding of what is unique about a particular historical group (Durkheim 1895; Beteille 1991; Burke 1992; Perl and Issacs 2002). However, in Jewish historiography, the application of this 'convention' to Jews and Christians breaks an ostensible taboo (Marcus 1996).

Comparison is what Christians have insisted upon for over a millennium and what Jews have tenaciously tried to avoid. For Christians, the comparison with Judaism establishes their claim to God's preferential love. The juxtaposition of Synagoga and Ecclesia is a case in point. In decorated manuscripts and on Church





walls all over Europe, the younger sister with her bold gaze and her crown is placed quite deliberately next to Synagoga who stands with her broken staff, bound eyes and upturned Torah Scroll. It proclaims God's rejection of Synagoga and gloats at her loss of former glory.

With its centrifugal direction, comparison was conventionally viewed as a distraction from what Jews perceived as the central-centripetal thrust of the Jewish story. Jews celebrated the tenacity with which they held on to their faith. The Talmud (BT Yoma 69b) even proclaims that the distinctive survival of the Jewish people among the nations replaces the ancient Temple in Jerusalem as proof of God's presence in the world. In the telling of Jewish history, contrast and disparity – not comparison and similarity – were the tools used to champion the heroic underdog. This approach to the past was proliferated by the lamentations of the classical liturgy and accepted almost without question by the founders of modern Jewish historiography.

My premise is that over-adherence to conventional binary distinctions between groups conceals similarities of behavior and belief from view while comparison blurs and complicates linear or partisan allegiances. For this reason, scholarship that establishes compatibility between Jews and Christians in the past or Israelis and non-Isrealis in the present can have a fundamental effect on self-perception by drawing the reflection of 'the other' into view when one looks in the mirror at oneself.

Against the grain of the traditional Jewish historical consciousness, Jewish scholars who engage in comparative scholarship are feeling obliged to confront the ugliness and reprehensibility of the Jewish treatment of others, and in turn are shattering the naïve stereotype that Jews are what Sartre termed the "mildest of men" at a time when it can no longer be borne or allowed to continue exonerating Jews from subjecting their own conduct to honest scrutiny.

### Comparison and Culpability

Comparison has introduced a broader notion of Jewish historical culpability into the scholarly discourse, which has ultimately led many scholars to tackle the 'uglier' side of the Jewish story in ways that were not previously conceivable (Morris 1999, 2004; Pappé 1992). It is this shift that allowed Yisrael Yuval (1993) to comment – in his analysis of medieval blood libel accusations – that, "Even between the persecutor and the persecuted mutual relations exist. Historians must therefore learn to take both sides into account when they write their narratives of Jewish life in Christian Europe." The shift in attitude that Yuval's axiomatic premise reveals is connected, at least in part, to the maturation of an ironic and complex consciousness of Jewish sovereignty without which such reflections were inconceivable. Before moving on to discuss the educational implications of this shift in attitudes to compatibility, let us consider a starker example of Jews confronting the notion of their own historical culpability.

A steadily growing number of recent studies have drawn attention to the phenomenon of Jewish violence against others in the past. I have selected *Reckless Rites* by Elliot Horowitz (2006) for

You may think  
you know how JNF  
promotes Israel and  
environmental education.



Students live and learn at the beautiful Hod HaSharon campus of the Alexander Muss High School in Israel.

Jewish National Fund Israel Advocacy and Education Department engages, educates and energizes the Jewish community to forge a deeper commitment to the land and people of Israel. JNF offers:

- **Plant Your Way to Israel** enabling students ages 5 to 25 to raise money toward a trip to Israel by selling tree certificates. Half the monies raised goes to plant trees in Israel; the other half goes in a special account on the student's behalf to be used for a future trip to Israel. Register at [www.jnf.org/pyw](http://www.jnf.org/pyw).
- **A free B'nai Mitzvah Kit** that helps families celebrate this joyous milestone in a meaningful and memorable way while helping Israel. Visit [www.jnf.org/simcha](http://www.jnf.org/simcha) for information on hands-on B'nai Mitzvah projects, tours to Israel and JNF Tree/Water certificates as invitations.
- **JNF GoNeutral education programs** empowering students in college, middle and high school to improve the environment by joining JNF "green" teams. Go to [www.jnf.org/goneutral](http://www.jnf.org/goneutral) to learn more.
- **The Alexander Muss Institute for Israel Education**, a JNF partner that leads the field in providing transformative Israel experiences. AMIIE's High School in Israel program strengthens Jewish identity, spirituality and knowledge of Jewish history. To learn more, go to [www.amiie.org](http://www.amiie.org).

JNF is your resource for Israel advocacy and education for students from pre-K to age 30, congregations, summer camps and community centers.

**Get to know us!**

Call 1-212-879-9305 x263

email [education@jnf.org](mailto:education@jnf.org) or view [www.jnf.org/iae](http://www.jnf.org/iae)  
to learn more about JNF education and advocacy work



FORESTRY • WATER • COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT • SECURITY  
EDUCATION • RESEARCH • TOURISM & RECREATION • ECOLOGY

closer attention because I think that it is an especially helpful example of Jewish scholarship about the past that openly acknowledges its own contemporary relevance.

*Reckless Rites* ‘rediscovers the past’ in the light of contemporary experience. This agenda is perhaps most explicit in

led by Hitler... today [1956] it is occupied by the hordes of Nasser and the Mufti.” Horowitz continues,

And Shlomo (a.k.a. Steven) Riskin, whose rabbinical career has taken him from New York’s West Side to Efrat on the West Bank, has recently written, on the alleged authority of his “revered

rebbe” Soloveitchik, “that the spiritual heirs of Amalek include the Nazis, the Soviet communists and those Arabs who will not rest until we disappear from the land.”

In the second chapter Horowitz moves to a review of Mordecai’s refusal to bow down to Haman. Given the perilous outcome of

**Rather than treating the Jewish past as a unique story – incompatible with the histories of other nations – my teachers began engaging in inter-religious historical comparisons that shattered the walls dividing Christians and Jews through the discovery of relatedness and similarity.**

the introduction to the book, but a fuller review of the rest will help illustrate the point in all its richness. The book focuses upon the festival of Purim and its accompanying ‘rites of violence’. The first section frames the complexity of the Book of Esther’s reception among non-Jews alongside a historical account of how the Biblical tribe of Amalek was conceptualized by Jews as an appellation for all forms of evil in Jewish history. This appellation was ultimately the foundation of a culture of violence that reverberates through the final chapters of the book of Esther, whose eagerly aggressive finale has often been ignored or suppressed by many Jewish readers. However, as Horowitz shows in some detail, this violence did not escape the attention of Victorians who read it with “bewilderment and with scorn for its sanctioning of... barbarous deeds against non-Jews.”

This allegory has occasionally been applied to such harmless struggles as the internal war with the evil inclination. But, Horowitz is clearly concerned with the ways in which it has been used to justify more pernicious forms of conflict. He closes the section with R. Shlomo Riskin’s ‘commentary’ on a sermon, delivered at the Yeshiva University in New York on Israel’s Eighth Independence Day by R. Joseph Soloveitchik. Horowitz reminds us that, “Soloveitchik advanced the notion that an Amalekite was anyone, of any background, who harbored unconditional hatred of the Jewish people.” In Soloveitchik’s words, “In the thirties and forties this position was occupied by Nazis





this refusal, Mordecai's conduct requires some explanation. Were the ancient tribal conflicts between Benjamin and Amalek at play here, or was Mordecai – as the rabbinic literature suggests – bound to stand straight rather than bow down before the idolatrous amulet that Haman kept hanging around his neck? If, as the rabbinic texts suggest, Mordecai was a willing martyr who refused to stoop before an idol, his conduct does nothing to undermine the pervasiveness of the weak Jewish stereotype that *Reckless Rites* is calling into question. However, if this refusal is tied to an unsettled tribal rivalry (Israel/Amalek, Saul/Agag, Mordecai/Haman), then Mordecai's "reckless" refusal is a wild declaration of territorial war. A subsequent chapter is dedicated to the implications of the latter option in which the historical characterization of

Haman as the eternal symbol of Anti-Semitic persecution is the issue. Horowitz shows how the genealogy of Esau, Amalek and Haman has been tied with the Roman Empire, The Church, Hitler and broadly speaking all those who "in every generation rise against us to destroy us". With the allegorization of Amalek to include all forms of evil, Jews are armed with the God-given right to destroy their enemies in every generation – perpetually obliged by Biblical injunction to use violence against them in order to wipe them out.

The second section of the book is a detailed historical study of Jewish violence that ranges in its examples from violence against Christians in medieval Europe, to the Jewish legends of the boxing ring in 20<sup>th</sup> century America. In most cases, this

violence is connected with the festival of Purim or with the notion that the enemies of the Jewish people are figuratively connected with Amalek. The section on "Second Purims" comes to an ironic halt with the story of Baruch Goldstein, which brings us back to the same contemporary social critique insinuated by his ironic portrayal of Rabbi Riskin. After 'bemoaning' the forgotten custom of declaring a Second (or local) Purim after Jews are saved from persecution Horowitz wryly recalls,

After the massacre of the Tomb of the Patriarchs, at least one local rabbi raised the possibility of establishing a local Purim for the Jews of Hebron and Kiryat Arbah, who had been saved, many insisted, from a savage attack by their Arab neighbors on Purim 1994, through

## Call for papers

# Active Learning

Jewish Educational Leadership invites articles for the Spring 2009 issue

Active Learning is used to describe a broad array of learning modes designed to actively engage the student, with the common element of moving away from traditional frontal teaching. It could include cooperative learning, socratic circles, experiential education, constructivism, peer teaching, service learning, student-generated commemorative programs, and much more.

- What does research indicate are the benefits and downsides of active learning?
- Are there modes of active learning that are more effective than others?
- How do we assess active learning?
- What are the difficulties involved in moving from a traditional teaching method to one of active learning?
- Can active learning be employed in traditional Jewish text-study?
- What role can technology play in the development of active learning?

For more information on the types of articles and guidelines for writers see [www.lookstein.org/journal\\_guidelines.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/journal_guidelines.htm).

Submissions will be accepted until February 15, 2009.

Please send your abstracts, final copies, or questions to the Editor, Zvi Grumet [zvi@lookstein.org](mailto:zvi@lookstein.org).

[info@lookstein.org](mailto:info@lookstein.org)

[www.lookstein.org](http://www.lookstein.org)

the “martyrdom of the sainted Doctor Baruch Goldstein.”

The entire book is written with the ironic consciousness of these lines that bring it to its close. They propel the reader back to the introduction in which Horowitz first mentions the Hebron massacre together with a series of chilling accounts of settler violence against Arab civilians. He weaves these stories together providing historical glosses that place the rhetoric used by the settlers into a broader historical context. Horowitz seems to feel that including these accounts in his introduction to a historical analysis of Purim ritual is somehow a personal confession or a “coming out”. He writes, “Both the Book of Esther and Purim are subjects that have impelled both apologists and anti-Semites to show their true colors, as they have impelled me to show mine in this introduction.” But Horowitz’s true colors are not those of one political party or another nor are they those of a pacifist, a lefty or a self-hating Jew. This book does not take sides. Without ever belaboring the point, Horowitz shows quite plainly that contemporary Jewish violence didn’t come from nowhere. However politicized and entangled the conflict with the Palestinians and other Arab nations might be, however deeply one might believe that the State of Israel and its civilian population use force only in self-defense, this perception is neither proved nor vindicated by the popular knee-jerk response to Jewish history that loyally insists, “we must have been provoked because Jews have never behaved like that!” Horowitz’s voice rings clear, ‘Yes, they have.’

The early years of the Jewish State were not a time for Israeli scholars to engage in complex inter-religious comparison and self-critique. The years following the Holocaust were certainly not a time for historical self-criticism of this sort. This was a time of triumphant recovery from the weaknesses of the Jewish past. Scholars then could not notice how the historical weakness of the Jewish people has been allowed to conceal certain very human questions of conduct from view. The stabilization of the Jewish State and the bolstering of Jewish self-confidence

that Israel’s prosperity and power have afforded allow Jews to begin the work of conciliation with the Jewish past from a position of accountability. Driven by an honest desire to prevent contemporary abuse of a presupposed impeccable historical track record, Horowitz is determined to call historical attention to past misbehaviors. I believe that this is the deeper purpose of *Reckless Rites*. Indeed, I can think of no higher purpose for Zionism today and no worthier project for contemporary Jewish scholarship and education.

### **How does all of this affect the teaching of Israel in day schools?**

The discussion above does not explicitly address the conventional questions of Israel education. What it does is to indicate areas of subject matter, method and purpose that educators might think about addressing today. What I hoped to show is that contemporary experience in Israel has made certain deep concerns within the Jewish tradition apparent and urgent and that these can and have been dealt with legitimately and richly in scholarship. I propose that the curriculum of “Israel education” – as opposed to Zionist education – is one that confronts these issues taking its lead from the methodological trends set by thinkers and scholars and that this agenda might offer the practice of Israel education more of the breadth and depth that characterized its Zionist predecessor.

In the same way as contemporary experience should kick up the angst that defines the research agendas in Jewish studies tying them to the concerns of our generation, I believe the field of Israel education can be one that ceases to view the State of Israel as the answer to the Jewish problem but as the source of today’s Jewish questions. How can Jewish sources be reread today to confront such issues as the Jewish attitudes to war and peace, democracy, violence, human rights, feminism, tradition and secularism, religion and state, Jewish political identity, etc.? The attempts to address these questions through the close reading of the texts that comprise the rich canon of Jewish literature from the Bible

and the Talmud through Maimonides to contemporary Jewish thought can provide the inspiration for a much deeper and richer educational experience that draws upon detailed and critical study of contemporary Israeli society and culture to address the great questions of our day.

### **References**

- A. Beteille, (1991) *Some Observations on the Comparative Method*, The Wertheim Lecture, Amsterdam
- Daniel Boyarin (2004), *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, University of Pennsylvania
- Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*, Cambridge (1992), Chapter 2 22-28.
- Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen (2000), *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*, Indiana University Press
- Ben Zion Dinur (1968), “Hakarat Heavar, B’toda’at Ha’am Uva’ayot Hachecker Ba,” Dorot Ureshumot [Hebrew]
- Emil Durkheim (1895), *Suicide*, The Free Press (1951), Chapter 6;
- Lisa Grant (2008), “A Vision for Israel Education,” Paper presented at the Network for Research in Jewish Education Conference
- Bethamie Horowitz (2000), “Connections and journeys: Assessing critical opportunities for enhancing Jewish identity,” New York: UJA Federation.
- Elliott Horowitz (2006), *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence*, Princeton University Press
- Ivan Marcus (1996), *Rituals of Childhood, Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*, Yale
- Benny Morris (1999), *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2001*, Vintage Books
- Benny Morris (2004), *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge Middle East Studies), Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
- Ilan Pappé (1992), *The making of the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1947-1951*, Tauris
- Jeffrey Perl and Alick Isaacs (2002), “Postscript on Method – Editorial Note” *Common Knowledge* 8:1
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, unpublished manuscript in Leon Poliakov (2003), *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol.111 University of Pennsylvania
- Yisrael Yuval (1993), “Vengeance and Damnation, Blood and Defamation: From Jewish Martyrdom to Blood Libel Accusations,” *Zion* vol. LVIII, 1. [Hebrew]
- Jacob Ukeles, Ron Miller and Pearl Beck (2006). “Young Jewish Adults in the United States Today: Harbingers of the American Jewish Community

"Tomorrow?" Report prepared for the American Jewish Committee

# Towards a Vision of Educational Re-engagement with Israel in Day Schools\*

**Daniel J. Margolis**

*Daniel Margolis argues that new realities, both for Israelis and for American Jews, demands a reconceptualizing of the way we think and teach about Israel.*

## **Israel and Core Jewish Identity - Changing Realities**

Israel is a central component of our Jewish identity. It is not, however, *all* there is to one's Jewishness. For too long, much of our collective, civil, political and communal Jewishness has been predicated on our relationship to Israel. Though we hope and pray daily that it were otherwise, we know that too often our sense of Israel is defined in reaction to an ongoing, recurring set of crises – real, horrific, irrational, and tragic – alternating with periods of “paternalism” towards Israel. Thus, by adopting these governing metaphors, Israel has become the essence of our Jewish *communal* activity.

However, when we define our relationship only through crisis, to keep up the momentum we frequently expand the definition and call for intensive responses to other “crises” – of economic or political survival, media or religious discrimination – many real, some exaggerated. In doing so, American Jewish leaders, abetted by Israeli counterparts, have created our own *matzav* (situation) of educational credibility which has made it extremely

difficult to educate succeeding generations about Israel as she actually is and as she evolves – how and why to love, support, defend, and, yes, critique her.

There are ramifications of this assertion in Israel herself today. As the State moves from Zionism to post-Zionism, confronting social, economic, military, and cultural challenges that might undo other

young polities, Israelis are also struggling with issues of their own identity – Zionist, Israeli, Jewish, none of the above. At the same time, they are trying to redefine their understanding of and relationship to the Diaspora, in a process that began, for many, with a stance of negating the value of the Diaspora (*shelilat haGolah*), moving to rejection of American paternalism (*ha-dod mei-America*), now to searching for



*Dr. Daniel J. Margolis has been the Executive Director of the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston since 1983.*

\* Portions of this essay have appeared in other documents, published and unpublished. A full list appears at the end. The author is indebted to the Boston BJE staff who helped shaped these ideas during the agency's 2 year project focused on re-engaging with Israel. In particular, I thank Naomi Towvim, Dr. Annette Koren and Dr. Judy Avnery.

meaningful and mutual partnerships with global Jewish communities.

But, whether in Israel or in Diaspora Jewish communities, if we teach only Israel, we will not succeed in “making” our students or families whole Jews or whole persons. Even birthright Israel, from research 5 and more years out, loses much of its immediate, enormous, positive influence on the hearts and minds of the young Jewish alumni, and very little has emerged to recapture that enthusiasm. Clearly, we need a more complete,

chutzpah. Neither defenseless nor quaint, no longer a country uniquely characterized as an idealized expression of Biblical and rabbinic texts and values, Israel today is rich in her modernity, diversity, and complexity.

Western and Levantine, socially progressive and religiously conservative, technologically advanced and anchored in antiquity, a theo/democracy struggling to remain – simultaneously and equitably – democratic, civil, and Jewish. Is Israel

political polarization. Some local rabbis have noted that they do not preach about Israel as much as they’d like for fear that it will create divisiveness within their congregations.

Undoubtedly, this communal tension contributes to the decline in personal commitment to Israel and its becoming less central in our personal and spiritual lives. Across the American Jewish community most Jews are concerned about Israel’s existence, but for younger

## Across the American Jewish community most Jews are concerned about Israel’s existence, but for younger Jews, the sense of attachment is more fragile than it is with older age groups

nuanced, and coherent ideological and pedagogical core if we are to design a responsible and successful curricular vision.

Sounds obvious? Possibly. But making it happen is neither obvious nor easy.

Why? First, because we begin from a complex, virtually unique value statement: The Jewish people is a covenanted nation, linked to each other and bound to our Creator through texts and teaching, vision and values. This commitment to a future of promise has been sorely tested in the recent past. World over, Jews face severe challenges – erosion of affiliation, in-marriage and literacy; questions about whether we have the communal imagination and will to develop educational, cultural and religious innovations to sustain the quality of successful initiatives and efforts, find and retain qualified educators, and develop the financial resources to support all this.

No less, we have serious questions about our deeper commitment to the centrality of Israel in our lives, beyond crisis support. Even in Israel. The mythic, romantic, Zionist/socialist Israel is no longer; neither is Israel as the “poor immigrant cousin.” The old metaphors no longer obtain.

Instead, we confront a place where (almost) universal, dangerous national service vies with the most avid child-centeredness of any contemporary society in the world – where “milk and honey” have been replaced by computer chip and

a naively benevolent, peace-seeking, transitional occupier or class-divided, oppressive, permanent imperialist?

### **Israel presents challenges to Jews’ commitments – Is there a role for education?**

We are not suggesting simply to ignore the old “myths” about Israel (the *halutz*, kibbutz, singing and dancing around the campfire, even the camel at “Israel Day”). It is good to retain core myths – whether biblical, historical, or political. But old myths, either taken as unchallenged “fact” or modified in the light of new research or contemporary reality, block evolving understanding that today’s students must have.

Two realities have come together in the last few years that provide the impetus for us to re-engage with Israel education in new ways in our day schools:

First, the Intifada, Iraq and Iran conflicts, and initial separation from the West Bank and Gaza have heightened the importance for all American Jews to have more basic knowledge of, greater concern for, and commitment to Israel. This awareness presents a dilemma: as Israel becomes more central to our communal lives and identity (and less in our educational and spiritual “lives”), the contradictions it poses for us (particularly against an inadequate knowledge base) highlight more of the divisions within the community, even leading to internal

Jews, the sense of attachment is more fragile than it is with older age groups (see article on page 4). Today, support for the state among American Jews seems to be weaker than it has ever been since its founding.

Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen (2000) surveyed “moderately affiliated Jews” who were members of Jewish institutions (synagogue, JCC or other group) but were not “as involved, learned or pious as the most highly engaged 20-25% of American Jews.” The 1997 survey showed that although two thirds of respondents thought Israel was very or extremely important to their “sense of being Jewish,” less than a third felt very or extremely attached to Israel. Most regarded support for Israel as a desirable or essential part of being a good Jew, but fewer regarded visiting Israel as desirable or essential. When compared to other characteristics associated with being a good Jew, those relating to Israel were of less consequence.

Half of Cohen and Eisen’s subjects thought Israel was critical to sustaining a Jewish life, yet 64% had never been to Israel, 21% had been to Israel once and only 15% had been two or more times. They conclude, “Israel is not central to who American Jews are as Jews – and so the need to visit it or learn about it or wrestle with its importance to the Jewish people is far from pressing.”

Bethamie Horowitz (2000) surveyed 1425 Jews living in the metropolitan New York



area who identified themselves as Jewish but included a wide range of degrees of Jewish engagement. She found “supporting Israel” a “less personally meaningful component of American Jewish identity than, for example, the Holocaust.” “Supporting Israel” ranked close to the bottom among the items she called “meanings associated with being Jewish.”

There is confusion among American Jews. We feel caught, conflicted about how to relate to such a place. How can we understand her and be committed to her while possibly disapproving of some of her actions? How do we support Israel while (mistakenly) seeing her as the cause for increased anti-Semitism around the world?

The second reality, revealed in both national and local research, is the lack of basic knowledge, concern and commitment about Israel among a disturbingly large portion of the Jewish population in America. Confounding also are recent estimates that at least half of all Jewish educators have never been to Israel!

### Changing Israeli realities and Jewish education

These data explain why our communities are as conflicted and diverse in their opinions about Israel as they are. We know that there is a strong correlation between an early experience in Israel and adult involvement in Jewish life, but we also know that virtually every American visitor to Israel (and 100% of repeat visitors) had some formal Jewish education experience. There has to be a strong correlation between the two.

Thus, an analysis of the research suggests that Israel experiences as a teen or undergraduate – not alone, but in conjunction with ongoing academic study and other informal activities (camp, youth group, etc.) through high school and beyond – appear to be a formative component in strengthening adult Jewish identity and in promoting community involvement, in addition to establishing a long term adult relationship with Israel. These, then, should be foundations upon which day schools should design and implement their Israel curricula, formal and informal.

There are other confirmations of the impact of Jewish schooling and informal programs on long-term commitments to Israel, but there are also many questions about why Jewish educators have not “exploited” the power of academic and informal Israel experiences more systematically in their curricular designs.


Sales, Koren and Shevitz (2000) reported on the attitudes of Boston area Jewish parents with children in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grades in congregations with full-time family educators in 1998-99. Sixty-four percent thought “keeping informed about Jewish or Israel-related current events” was very or extremely important to them, but only 36% considered it very or extremely important to “have a connection” to Israel. As educators, we asked ourselves how both disappointing and surprising this was in light of the fact that only 4% of family education programming in those congregations at that time was aimed at conveying anything about Israel.

Koren and Miller-Jacobs (2002) reported on interviews conducted with 13 schools (5 day schools, 7 congregational schools and one

communal school, representing over 1/3 of all enrolled students in greater Boston) to find out how Israel was being taught. They found no unanimity around goals and objectives for teaching about Israel. Though all schools desired both cognitive and affective outcomes, they were teaching Israel as a separate content area rather than integrating it with other aspects of the Judaic curriculum. Further, School Heads expressed a great need for high quality curriculum materials. Family and adult learning opportunities about Israel were, for most part, not available. This, despite the fact that the Boston BJE has produced a proven, multi-grade Israel curriculum with a defined ideology, scope, and sequence.

The BJE Curriculum is a systematic exploration of major “content” elements of Israel education, because the history of Zionism, the geography, culture, and history of the State are no longer found in the core curriculum of most of our Jewish schools. There is also an ongoing decline in the emphasis given to Hebrew language in many schools, another indicator of the gradual weakening of our educational attachment and commitment to Israel. It is our





**Heritage Seminars**

Educational Seminars in Poland, Lithuania, Prague and Ukraine  
Michael Berl, Director

**Ariel A. Tourism**  
Jewish Educational Programs – Israel, Italy, Spain  
Ariel Abecassis, Director

Adults, Universities, One Year Programs,  
High Schools and Families  
Historical Perspective, Torah Scholarship, Lifestyle,  
Personalities, Leadership, Analysis

Noted Historians and Guides, All Land Arrangements  
Glatt Mehadrin Food Services, Orientation Programs  
Medical and Security Personnel

[heritagemjb@013.net](mailto:heritagemjb@013.net)  
[arieltourism@gmail.com](mailto:arieltourism@gmail.com)  
[www.heritage-seminars.org](http://www.heritage-seminars.org)

In NY:  
Alice Miller [agmheritage@aol.com](mailto:agmheritage@aol.com)  
Carrie Teitcher [heritagect@gmail.com](mailto:heritagect@gmail.com)

In cooperation with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem

Heritage Seminars/ Ariel A. Tourism  
Beit Hillel Tel: 972-2-582-0231  
Hebrew University, Mt. Scopus, Fax: 972-2-582-0232  
Jerusalem, ISRAEL 91905

people might engage with Israel as part of a fundamental process of thinking about what it means to be Jewish in the modern world.

In order to re-engage with Israel, Jewish education leaders need to develop a new vision of Israel, a new ideological starting point. We and our communities should re-examine our ideological commitments, how we, in all our diversity, understand and relate to the basic Jewish core texts and ideas that put Zion and Israel – land and people – at the center of our tradition and history. A necessary center, yes, but still an insufficient one to define us as complete Jews. We will each understand these root sources differently and relate to contemporary Israel differently, but from that re-examination, a new, contemporary articulation of our stances will emerge; new visions will, in turn, direct us to more effective educational encounters with Israel in both academic and non-formal settings. And these new generative ideas and foundations must be accompanied by new understandings, teaching approaches and materials.

Going from the personal, each school and community should develop for itself a clear statement of its commitment to Israel, a comprehensive ideology that places today's Israel in the center of our Jewish lives, minds, hearts and institutional cores. Scholars, educators, rabbis, and lay leaders should be engaged to further this process, at the end of which the institution should be able to answer, for example: Is Israel our homeland? A refuge? A grand experiment? The fulfillment of God's promise? The beginning of our deliverance? The third Commonwealth?

Clearly, there will be a variety of ideological positions about Israel, each evolving from different starting points – theological, denominational, political, personal. Eisen and Rosenak (1997) offer five commonplaces about Israel from the perspectives of Israeli and North American Jews. Each category is a trigger to

**How can we understand her and be committed to her while possibly disapproving of some of her actions? How do we support Israel while (mistakenly) seeing her as the cause for increased anti-Semitism around the world?**

contention that the erosion in levels and quality of Jews' support for Israel is rooted, at least in part, in this move away from these topics in the Jewish school curriculum, and even youth group and summer camp programs, compared to the picture only a decade or two earlier.

### **The Need: Articulating an Educational Ideology and Vision of Israel**

Though Israel lies at the heart of our liturgy and textual foundations, the commitment to Israel most of us hold is highly personal. And we have not translated that personal commitment into a professional one in our schools. As individuals, lay or professional leaders, we need to begin the process of articulating our stance with an exploration of personal ties to Israel. We should intensify our study of sources, learn, anew, Israel's story and history, and consider the ways in which both educators and young

developing a more comprehensive ideological position. Towvim (1993) provides similar "main ideas" as the organizing themes of the BJE curriculum series, *The Israel Connection*. This healthy diversity can give rise to a broad continuum of varied, but legitimate and authentic educational approaches and materials.

### **Education prepares for advocacy; it is not advocacy**

Even though an educational approach is a long-term effort, with results and outcomes apparent only at some future time, we must remain true to the education process and our educational objectives. Educating day school children and adults about Israel is not the same as training them to be advocates for her. We don't deny that we must be better prepared to explain and defend Israel on the campus, the street, and in the media. We must not abandon or neglect our responsibility to "be there" for Israel when she is in

need. However, it is our position that a comprehensive, inquiry-based education is the best foundation for effective advocacy.

### Recommendations

Our effort should focus on Israel's striving for peace and normalcy, striving to actualize Judaism's emphasis on equity (*Tzedek*) in the modern, real world. "Normalizing" American Jews' relationships with Israel will mean creating learning opportunities and personal Israel experiences that are in and of themselves, "normal". Learning about Israel as she is, "warts" and all; building personal connections with Israelis because we have something in common with them and because they could be our friends, not only our "family"! - Doctors with doctors; joggers with joggers; rock music "groupies" with fellow fans.

The P2K "sister city" concept, where it is working well, achieves this, and more can be done with educational partnerships, at the school-to-school and professional levels. There are outstanding examples of day schools that have designed their Israel curriculum thoughtfully, deepening the students' experiences – through

## In order to re-engage with Israel, Jewish education leaders need to develop a new vision of Israel, a new ideological starting point.

content and activities – over several successive years, and not only focusing on the "Jewish" angles, but on several aspects of both American and Israeli life that relate to children's interests and needs, including science, arts and culture, and sports.

Which brings me to the issue of reciprocity and mutuality. Is this proposal simply the same old paternalism in post-Zionist dress?

I suggest that at the heart of the educational estrangement between North American Jews and Israelis is the lingering sense that we are still traveling down a one-way street – Visit Israel; Make *aliyah*; The Diaspora has no future.

As I alluded to above, it is my conviction that what is true about the North American Jewish identity "scene" is also true – either in the same or similar terms or in mirror image – in Israel. Israel, too, is facing a critical challenge to its national and Jewish identity: a decline in knowledge of and respect for the tradition; a critical shortage of knowledgeable teachers willing and capable of teaching in liberal school settings; a seriously flawed and skewed view of the Diaspora permeated by a simplistic understanding of the Shoah, and a pervasive feeling of being seen either as a "second-class" Jew or a triumphalist, heroic savior of world Jewry.

It has taken nearly sixty years to shake both the North American and Israeli communities from some of these conceptions. There being a more even "playing field" now, on a wide range of issues, we can see how important, useful, and "easy" it may be to re-imagine the relationship between us, redefine and articulate the common ideological foundations we share, and work together

towards a generative educational vision with authentic and creative materials and experiences to re-engage with Israel, for our part, and re-engage with world Jewry and Judaism, on the part of Israeli educators.

While we try to gain greater understanding of the complexity of the situation and the diversity of opinions about it, we affirm that in addition to knowing about Israel, our goal is also to ensure that, flowing from that knowledge, every Jew should feel committed to Israel, support her in times of crisis or tragedy in whatever way possible or deemed appropriate; and enable and allow Israel to be a vigorous, vibrant element in our daily lives. However, this educative approach should also result in more of us who feel comfortable with our roots in the prophetic tradition – so we can each inherit the mantle and mandate of our prophets, becoming what Martin Buber calls a "loving critic" of our people, our land, our state – and through that newfound relationship allow ourselves, our communities, our Israel to soar to new heights on the wings of our shared *berit* and *halom* – covenant and dream.

### References

- Avnery, Judy and Annette Koren, *Re-Engagement with Israel through Education: The BJE 2002-2004 Project Final Report*, (Boston: Bureau of Jewish Education, 2004)
- Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000)
- Eisen, Arnold and Michael Rosenak, *Israel in our lives, Teaching Israel: Basic issues and Philosophical Guidelines* (Jerusalem: The CRB Foundation, JAFI Department of Jewish and Zionist Education, and JESNA, 1997)
- Horowitz, Bethamie, *Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity* (New York: UJA-Federation of New York, 2000), pp. 64-70.
- Koren, Annette and Sandy Miller-Jacobs *Teaching About Israel in Boston Area Jewish Schools: Implications for the Community* (Boston: Bureau of Jewish Education, 2002).
- Margolis, Daniel J., "Towards a Vision of Educational Re-Engagement with Israel", in *Agenda*, JESNA, New York, 2004.
- Margolis, Daniel J., *Re-Engagement with Israel*, (Boston: Bureau of Jewish Education, 2003)
- Margolis, Daniel J. and Naomi Towvim, "A Call for an Educational Re-Engagement with Israel", in *Jewish Education News* (New York: CAJE, 2004) Volume 25, Number 1, pp.52-53.
- Miller-Jacobs, Sandy and Annette Koren, *Teaching About Israel in Boston Area Jewish Schools: Implications for the Community*, (Boston: Bureau of Jewish Education, 2002)
- Towvim, Naomi, The Teaching of Israel Network, et.al., *Are We One? Issues in Israel-Diaspora Relations (High-School-Adult unit of The Israel Connection)*, based on work by Barry Chazan and others (New York: JESNA, 1993) Distributed by the Boston BJE
- Margolis, Daniel and Shlomo Shimon, *Israel in our lives, Teaching Israel: Israel in Bureaus of Jewish Education* (Jerusalem: The CRB Foundation, JAFI Department of Jewish and Zionist Education, and JESNA, 1997)
- Sales, Amy L., Annette Koren and Susan L. Shevitz *Sh'arim: Building Gateways to Jewish Life and Community* (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies, 2000) p. 17.



# Sacred Vision, Complex Reality: Navigating the Tensions in Israel Education

**Lisa D. Grant**

*Lisa Grant challenges old paradigms regarding the role of Israel in Jewish identity and education, and suggests a new one – more nuanced and more complex – to fit the realities of both Israel and world Jewry.*

For most of the twentieth century, the importance of Israel as spiritual homeland and safe haven served as the foundation of American Jewry's relationship to the emerging State of Israel. At the onset of the twenty-first century, however, these symbols have lost much of their power to engage young American Jews. While caring about Israel's survival remains important to the majority of American Jews, it does not appear to figure strongly into religious identity or how people make personal meaning from being Jewish (Liebman and Cohen, 1990; Cohen and Eisen, 2000; Horowitz, 2000), particularly for Jews under the age of forty. Indeed, some evidence claims that for many today, Israel is irrelevant to sustaining rich American Jewish life (Aviv and Schneerson, 2005).

Israel is certainly an integral part of Jewish tradition. It is embedded throughout the liturgy and calendar. Sacred texts are permeated with references to the landscape, climate, history, and theology of the land. It is an idealized homeland, now made real. It serves both as a sacred symbol of moral striving and a unifying force for the Jewish people. Demographic studies consistently demonstrate that the more identified and



*Dr. Lisa Grant is Associate Professor of Jewish Education at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York school. She is the lead author of A Journey of Heart and Mind: Transformative Learning in Adulthood and author of Aytz Hayim Hi, a two-year curriculum guide for Adult Bat Mitzvah. Dr. Grant is a member of ARZA's Institute for Reform Zionism.*

active one is as a Jew, the more important Israel becomes. Thus, it appears that the more connected one is to Jewish life, the less one needs an Israel “education” per se. But Jewish tradition is not the guiding force for most American Jews today. What was once an organic and integral part of Jewish life has now become diluted and detached from the more personalized and customized forms of Jewish engagement typical of most American Jews.

### Israel and Jewish identity

The primary goal of American Jewish education has always been about helping American Jews adapt and accommodate as Jews in America (Sarna, 1998). The predominant American Jewish educational approach to teaching Israel is consonant with this overarching goal. While not always explicitly stated, attachment to Israel is tacitly used as a means to strengthen *American* Jewish identity and facilitate group cohesiveness. This means that the content and experiences of Israel remain primarily on a symbolic level so that they can remain consistent with American conceptions of “Zion as it ought to be” (Sarna, 1996). We create larger-than-life representations of Israel through episodic and rather superficial encounters. We avoid problematizing or over-complicating in order to ensure a love of Israel. But by doing so, we are left with a superficial understanding of why Israel is or should be significant in American Jewish life.

Most of the research conducted about Israel education measures its affective impact on Jewish identity. It fails to explore the specific content of the program or assess how the multiple layers of Israel – as sacred lodestone for the Jewish people, as site of personal and collective memory and experience, as a vibrant center of Jewish culture, and as a modern geopolitical entity – may be factored into one’s active commitments. If participants feel more strongly Jewish and/or more attached to Israel and/or the Jewish people, then the program is deemed a success. Indeed, there is ample evidence to support the fact that organized Israel trips have been quite successful in this regard (Chazan and Koriansky, 1997, Saxe et al, 2004) particularly for teens and young adults.

Using Israel as a means of building and reinforcing Jewish identity is hardly a bad thing. Neither do I mean to belittle or diminish the impact that Israel experiences have had on participants. Nonetheless, this instrumental focus on Jewish identity seems incomplete and one-sided, implying that Israel exists to make American Jews feel better about being Jewish. In order to feel better, we must perforce keep the content and experiences of Israel primarily on a symbolic or even “mythic” level.

### Does Israel matter?

One of the core challenges impeding the articulation of a compelling vision for Israel education lies in an inability to describe in a substantive and compelling way why Israel matters to American Jews who are comfortably at home in American society. Israel matters because it is a core element of Judaism and the collective Jewish experience wherever it is lived. God, Torah, and Israel are the foundational pillars upon which rich Jewish life

is built. As one of three points on the triangle, Israel is not central, but it is essential to a stable and well-grounded foundation. A tendency in Jewish education seems to be to focus more on God and Torah because these are portable, personal and more immediately relevant to synagogue worship and holiday rituals. Building basic literacy for worship and holiday observance is the primary focus of congregational education, which is the form of education that the majority of American Jews receive. In these settings and in many day schools and camps as well (Kopelowitz and Markin, 2002, Kopelowitz, 2005, Grant, 2007) Israel is an occasional and episodic experience, hardly a central feature of the educational program.

Israel is part of our collective story and hence it is integral but not necessarily central to what it means to be a Jew. Centrality presumes a hierarchy and is therefore accompanied by attendant feelings of guilt or alienation if one does not fit with this normative assumption. Indeed, if we consider Israel central, we challenge those who choose to live on the periphery. This guilt-inducing approach is characteristic of Classical Zionist ideology that privileges life in Israel over the Diaspora. It also places Diaspora Jewry into a supporting role that can be fulfilled through philanthropy and political advocacy while the leading role is taking place on the main stage in Israel. While I believe wholeheartedly that Jews in the Diaspora and Israel



## Brandeis University Master of Arts in Teaching

*For highly motivated students  
passionate about Jewish education:*

**DeLeT/MAT at Brandeis**  
Preparing Teacher-Leaders to  
Transform Jewish Day Schools



## Full-Tuition Fellowships For All Students

plus stipends for living expenses

••• Apply Now •••

summer 2009 start

rolling admission

[www.brandeis.edu/mandel/DeLeT](http://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/DeLeT)  
DeLeT@brandeis.edu – 781-736-2022

A joint initiative of the Mandel Center  
for Studies in Jewish Education and  
the Brandeis Education Program

are inter-dependent, the relationship is healthier and more sustainable if it becomes a reciprocal one of mutual support and exchange of ideas, rather than one based on patronage and privilege.

Making Israel a more integral aspect of Jewish education and Jewish experience

**One of the core challenges impeding the articulation of a compelling vision for Israel education lies in an inability to describe in a substantive and compelling way why Israel matters to American Jews who are comfortably at home in American society.**

is one approach to a more robust and meaningful Israel education. Another step we must take is to confront our discomfort and fear of teaching the complexities of Israel. We are far more likely to see Israel represented as an adventure tale of rescue and refuge for Jews in danger around the world or a story of modern miracles and technological marvels, than we are to hear about the social ills and tensions between rich and poor, religious and secular, and Arab and Jew. In fact, Israel is all of this and more, but our Israel education, in camps, schools, synagogues, and on trips rarely address these multiple dimensions that make Israel both vibrant and complex. Any single orientation to Israel is insufficient and attenuated. The combination, however, provides us with rich material for exploring both the sacred vision and the complex reality of the land, people, and State of Israel.

## Challenging the old paradigm

In the last few years, more and more scholars and educators seem to be challenging the old paradigm of single dimension teaching and asking us to think more substantively about the content and processes of Israel education both in Israel and in North American Jewish educational settings. One way this was made evident was through the February-March 2008 issue of *Sh'ma* that was dedicated to the topic of teaching Israel. In varying ways, each of the contributions pointed to the need to rethink and reshape what and how we teach Israel. Several writers directly

criticized an approach to Israel education that exclusively focuses on advocacy or unquestioned support of the State; virtually all agreed that we need to move away from teaching solely myths and symbols and get more complicated, share more of Israel's "blemishes and flaws" (Geffen, p. 4), shift to a "commitment and

critique" paradigm (Perlman, p. 17), or engage in what Robbie Gringras (p. 19) calls "hugging and wrestling" with Israel.

Israel matters because it is a core value of Jewish life that is an integral and inseparable piece of a larger whole. As a sacred symbol, it is a unifying force for the Jewish people and a motivating force to do our best for ourselves and in service to others. As a complex reality, it both inspires and irritates. Israel is filled with heartbreak and hope, woe and wonder. If we focus only one the inspirational side we run the risk of indoctrination on one extreme and alienation on the other. A more holistic and responsible approach demands critical engagement with both the sacred vision and complex

**First, we must recast the myths, shifting the symbols of what could be described as a "dead past" into a usable past by adding layers of complication and nuance.**

reality. Michael Marmor (2007) uses the metaphor of a cup that is half empty and half full to describe this perspective. He calls it a sense of "confident inadequacy" that enables us to accept the complexity of imperfection, to celebrate what has been achieved and at the same time, to strive to repair all that yet needs to be done.

Marmor's stance of confident inadequacy resonates with the many other tensions that are inherent to the Jewish condition. Just as we navigate between the many other dualisms – the tensions between

universal and particular values, religion and peoplehood, the individual and community, sacred and profane, tradition and change – so, too, must we navigate the dualisms inherent in Israel in all of its manifestations, symbolic and real. Our continuing participation in this unresolved discourse is what keeps a relationship to Judaism and to Israel dynamic and alive. To me, Israel "engagement" means the continuing participation in this unresolved discourse. It is what keeps my relationship to Judaism and to Israel dynamic and alive. Just as with any relationship worth preserving, sustaining this relationship takes work. I see this work as a form of *tikkun* – working towards repairing an imperfect world. I also understand it a partnership, a *brit leolam*, a covenant for all time.

## A two-pronged approach

To realize this vision, I believe that our approaches to Israel education must do two things. First, we must recast the myths, shifting the symbols of what could be described as a "dead past" into a usable past by adding layers of complication and nuance. And second, we must be more conscious and deliberate about integrating a multi-layered Israel more fully into those areas of Jewish life where American Jews already connect, no matter how attenuated that connection might be: *Torah*, *Avodah*, and *Gemilut Hasadim*.

Indeed, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually engaging encounters with texts, people, images, and experiences of Israel within *each* of the strains of Jewish practice thickens and adds richer meaning to Jewish experience.

Two examples of this two-pronged educational approach take place with my students at Hebrew Union College through a semester-long course entitled "Why Israel Matters" and a bi-annual twelve-day seminar in Israel. The course is designed to provide a forum for students to wrestle



intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually with their knowledge of and relationship to Israel and what this means to them as American Jews. Each class session is designed as a multi-layered *mifgash* (encounter) between the idealized visions and complex, dynamic, and always challenging realities that shape our understandings and connections to Israel. We use primary sources, scholarly articles, literature, film, visual images, and music to consider four closely related conceptions of *Am, Torah, Eretz* and *Medinat Yisrael* (People, Torah, Land and State of Israel) as a sacred symbol and a living

### A more holistic and responsible approach demands critical engagement with both the sacred vision and complex reality.

polity. Ample class time is devoted to address questions of personal meaning and to help students articulate a strategic vision for why and how to teach Israel from the pulpit, at camps, in the classroom and other settings where Jews gather to learn.

The bi-annual Israel seminar for students is organized in partnership with colleagues from the Lokey International Center for Jewish Studies at the Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa. Our goal, to develop a deep and multi-layered appreciation for thinking about and teaching Israel, is realized through a series of encounters with land, texts, and people. The learning is largely experiential and integrated, meaning we work to connect study about and experience of Israel with Jewish beliefs and values and Jewish practice. The program strives to model creative educational experiences of multiple *mifgashim* – encounters with Jewish history, with Jewish time and sacred space, with contemporary Israeli culture and politics, and with a plurality of Jewish voices in Israeli society, and around the world. These encounters prompt participants to grapple with “formative tensions” between myth

and reality, Israel and Diaspora, sacred and profane, religion and people, time and space.

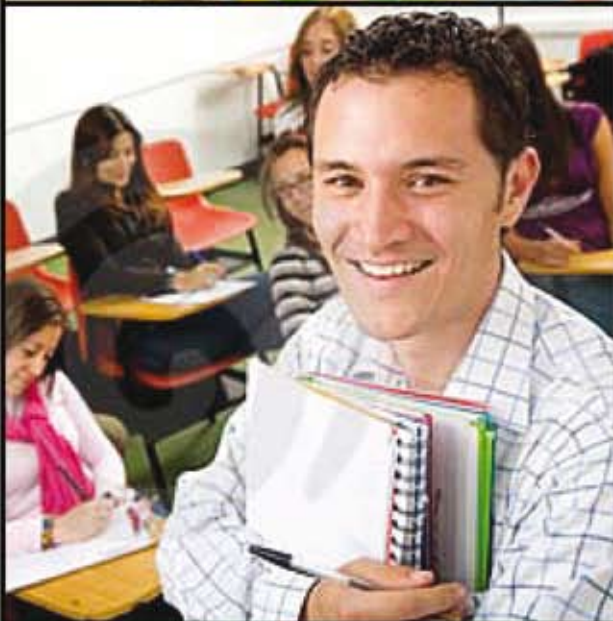
This year, I have also been involved in a project called Beit Keneset Yisrael (BKY), a collaborative initiative between ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America, and MAKOM, the Jewish Agency’s Israel Engagement Network, aimed at strengthening the place of Israel in Reform congregations. The goal of this two-year initiative is to help participating congregations create an integrated and systematic approach that will combine activities such as Israel travel, empowerment of synagogue leadership, and educational development work under one programmatic and organizing framework. By partnering with innovative Reform congregations, ARZA and MAKOM seek to build a congregational norm that reflects this new paradigm that will be replicable throughout the Reform Movement and within other denominations of Judaism.

Ten congregations are participating in the first cohort of this initiative. In phase one, they will undertake a comprehensive mapping of the place of Israel in their congregations, through membership surveys, document analysis, and critical reflection on formal and informal educational programs, worship, cultural and social offerings and all other aspects of congregational life. Phase two begins with an intensive seminar in Israel and is intended to serve as a catalyst to inform thinking and planning for a more robust and integrated vision for Israel in Reform congregations and the Movement.

As part of the mapping process, a team of congregational lay leaders and professionals will engage in an extensive analysis of where Israel already exists within the congregation: through formal curriculum, Israel trips, Israel committees, cultural and educational programming, worship, social action initiatives, etc. To help with this process, the BKY planning team developed a tool called the “Faces of Israel” (see sidebar). This tool is designed to help analyze the different ways in which Israel might be represented throughout the congregation through print media, educational programs, visual images, sermons, social and cultural events, and informal conversations. It will help congregational leaders identify and understand what are the Israel narrative(s) currently present in the congregation. What predominates? What is the mix? How often and where does Israel appear as a safe haven, as sacred center, as a country in conflict, as a mythic place of heroes and miracles (ancient and modern), as a center of Jewish cultural innovation, as a society filled with social, economic, political, and religious tensions, as a community with a shared destiny with Jews around the world?



## MA in Jewish Education and Online Graduate Certificate in Jewish Education



BALTIMORE  
HEBREW  
UNIVERSITY

www.bhu.edu | bhu@bhu.edu  
888-248-7420 (toll free)

  
THE ASSOCIATED



BHU is accredited by the  
Middle States Commission  
on Higher Education, the  
Maryland Higher  
Education Commission and  
the Ministry of Education  
of the State of Israel.

This analytical tool will help congregational leaders reflect on how broadly or narrowly Israel appears in formal and informal educational experiences in the congregation. It should lead them to assess whether their programming fits with espoused and implicit goals and identify areas needing greater (or lesser) emphasis. Finally, it should help them make the implicit more explicit and clarify priorities for more fully integrating Israel into all aspects of congregational life.

The Faces of Israel tool is one way to help planners and educators get more complicated about Israel. It can help gauge how Israel is currently presented and taught and identify potential areas

### Research to assess whether and how a more nuanced and integrated approach to Israel education is taking root and its impact is very thin indeed.

for further development in order to create a more robust and integrated approach. It can be easily adapted to other settings including day schools and camps. It might also be a useful tool for analyzing prepared curriculum to determine how rich or thin the curriculum writers' approach is to representing Israel.

As yet, this reconceptualizing of Israel education as more complicated and more integrated into Jewish life is largely taking place in intellectual circles. As noted earlier, the vast majority of research on Israel experiences focuses on trips for teens and young adults and measures the impact of the Israel experience on Jewish identity. Research to assess whether and how a more nuanced and integrated approach to Israel education is taking root and its impact is very thin indeed. Virtually no studies have been done to examine what is taking place with teacher-training programs, published curriculum, or site-based programming. One recent study of Reform congregational educators, reported that just under a third of respondents indicated that Israel education is strongly integrated into their Jewish studies program (Grant, 2007). However, the research did not explore the question in sufficient detail to understand how these schools define and actualize this integration.

The anecdotal evidence of congregations, camps, and schools that are doing creative work in undertaking an approach that embraces the tensions inherent in a complex and vibrant Israel appears to be growing. Several curriculum initiatives also appear to be moving more in this direction. However, we do not yet have research that more systematically identifies where these innovative sites are, the specifics of the work they are doing, and the impact on their learners. Clearly, research about these initiatives is essential if we hope to foster critical and committed engagement with Israel and further develop a responsible and active relationship with *Am, Torah, Eretz and Medinat Yisrael*.

## References

- Aviv, Caryn and Schneer, David (2005). *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press.
- Chazan, Barry with Arianna Koriensky (1997), *Does the Teen Israel Experience Make a Difference?* New York: Israel Experience Inc.
- Cohen, Steven M. and Eisen, Arnold (2000). *The Jew within: self, family, and community in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Geffen, Peter (2008). "Israel Education: An Ironic Failure." *Sh'ma. Jewish Family & Life!* Jfimedia.com (pp. 4-5).
- Grant, Lisa D. (2007). "Israel Education in Reform Congregational Schools." *CCAR Journal* LIV/3, (pp. 3-24).
- Gringras, Robbie. (2008). "An Ancient Dream & Modern Reality." *Sh'ma. Jewish Family & Life!* Jfimedia.com (p. 19).
- Horowitz, Bethamie. (2000). "Connections and journeys: Assessing critical opportunities for enhancing Jewish identity." New York: UJA-Federation.
- Kopelowitz, Ezra and Pablo Markin. (2002) "The Question of 'Success' in Contemporary Zionist Education: A Look at the Work of Short-Term Israeli Shlichim in the Diaspora.", Department of Jewish Zionist Education, The Jewish Agency.
- Kopelowitz, Ezra. (2005). *Towards what ideal do we strive? A portrait of social and symbolic Israel engagement in community day schools*, RAVSAK Report, 2005.
- Liebman, Charles S. and Cohen, Steven M. (1990). *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Marmur, Michael (2007). "Happiness Inside the State: Towards a Liberal Theology of Israel." *CCAR Journal*, LIV/2, (pp. 84-97).
- Perlman, Lee (2008). "Commitment and Critique: A Paradigm Shift." *Sh'ma. Jewish Family & Life!* Jfimedia.com (pp. 16-17).
- Sarna, Jonathan. (1996). "A Projection of America as it Ought to Be: Zion in the Mind's Eye of American Jews," in Allon Gal, ed. *Envisioning Israel - The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jews*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 41-59.
- Sarna, Jonathan (1998). "American Jewish Education in Historical Perspective." *Journal of Jewish Education*, Winter/Spring, 8-21

## THE FACES OF ISRAEL

# Beit Knesset Yisrael: An Israel Engagement Initiative In Reform Congregations

**Israel as Safe Haven for Jews – Eretz Miklat:** The destination for Jews under duress. This includes a focus on those who have fled to Israel and the need to financially support Israel's immigrants and her capacity to protect Jews.

**Israel as Land of Sacred Moments – Eretz Mikdash:** The land of our ancestors in the classic Jewish texts and within the world of liturgy and worship. It also includes a strong focus on sacred places such as the Kotel and the messianic vision of Israel.

**Israel as Country at War – Eretz Okhelet Yosheveha:** Israel is examined primarily through the lens of the Arab-Israeli conflict and in the context as a country at war. This includes North American, international and Israeli political issues facing peace and security, the role of the IDF, and issues surrounding non-Jews in Israel.

**Israel as Symbol – Eretz KeSemel:** Here Israel is part of the decorations and aesthetic that marks a congregation, camp, or school as a Jewish institution. It includes Israeli flags, maps and pictures of Israel on walls, the playing of Israeli music over the intercom system, or the presence of Israeli media in the library.

**Israel as Our Partners – Eretz Shel Shutfut Goral:** This focus is on the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism, other organizations and projects in Israel that focus on shared

Reform values, and the challenges of religious pluralism in Israel. This lens also includes ways in which Israel is seen as a Jewish partner, engaged in activities with local communities and around the world.

**Israel as Larger than life – Eretz Gedolah meHaHayyim:** This representation focuses on the larger than life narrative of Israel's history and society. It involves the presentation of items such as the extra sweetness of Jaffa oranges, the technological advances of Israeli society, and the achievements of Israelis on the world stage. Conflicts and challenges are not directly associated with this notion of Israel.

**Israel as Jewish/Hebrew Cultural Center – Eretz HaTarbut Halvrit:** A central source of new Jewish and Hebrew culture, including literature, visual arts, performance arts and aspects of culture such as food and wine. This presentation includes how Jewish culture is evolving within the context of Israeli society.

**Israel as Home of Israelis – Eretz KeBayit:** The focus here is on the daily lives of actual Israelis, including family and friends. This includes items from Israeli media that highlight both the similarities and differences between Jewish life in Israel and in North America. This lens also presents the social ills and tensions present in Israeli society, including the governmental corruption, poverty, civil rights, ethnic relations, and immigration challenges.



# The Challenge of Teaching Modern Israel

## Shalom Berger

*Shalom Berger presents practical suggestions for teaching Israel at every stage of the day school educational ladder.*

Once upon a time teaching about Israel and Zionism in a Jewish day school was the equivalent of Mom and apple pie. Who could object to recounting the story of the Jewish return to Zion after almost 2000 years of exile? What could be more inspiring than hearing about the brave soldiers who defended the Jewish State from the onslaught of the neighboring Arab states who were intent upon pushing it into the sea, and in the face of disaster recovered the Jewish people's biblical heartland?

Yet, while celebrating Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, these positions that were so clear in the recent past are now open to question. Anyone who reads their local newspapers knows that concurrent with Israel's Independence Day celebrations come the *Nakba* (catastrophe)

commemorations of many of its Arab citizens and that Israel's government is actively negotiating the establishment of a Palestinian State in territories captured during the Six Day War. Furthermore, it appears that there has been a falling-off of interest among the Diaspora Jewish community in the contemporary Jewish State.

Thus, the teacher on every level of Jewish education is faced with a much more difficult challenge when teaching about modern Israel than virtually any other subject. Should it be taught at all? Should only its successes be portrayed? Is the emphasis political? Geographical? Cultural? Historical? Religious? Should we be encouraging students towards Israel advocacy? Towards *Aliyah*?

There are no "correct" answers to these questions, which are dependent on a wide variety of factors and should be answered differently depending on the vision of the school and community. What is clear, however, is that if we hope that our students will grow up to be knowledgeable adults who feel a sense of connection with Israel then we must develop age-appropriate educational programming that goes well beyond participation in the local Israel Day Parade.

I recently attended a Hebrew University seminar on "Teaching Contemporary Israel" together with a group of graduate students who I was teaching, and the presenter opened with a basic – and important – question. "Why do we teach about Israel?" My students had ready answers for that question:

"According to the Ramban it is a *mitzvah* to live in Israel."

"It is the land where our forefather, Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov lived."

"So many of our *tefillot* focus on Israel and on returning to it."

"Almost all of the *Tanakh* takes place there."

After his presentation, the lecturer admitted to me that he rarely meets with teachers who come from an Orthodox perspective, and he was surprised by the answers that he received. His experience was that educators from the Diaspora rarely knew why they were teaching Israel; it was something in the curriculum that they knew intuitively was important, but had trouble explaining. In response to this, the approach that he had developed was to connect students with the modern State of Israel by finding points of linkage that would encourage them to develop a sense of understanding and relationship with it. Thus, during national elections in their own country, students are taught about Israel's political system, when studying about women's issues students are introduced to the status of women in Israel and when issues of ecology are discussed, Israeli efforts in developing innovative irrigation and solar power techniques are presented.

The sense that he had from meeting with the students that I had brought to the seminar – most of whom were either studying in a Rabbinic ordination program or were married to Rabbinical students



*Rabbi Shalom Z. Berger, Ed.D., is founding editor of JEL and teaches graduate level courses in Israel and Zionism at Gratz College and Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School.*

– was that the religious community had an important advantage when teaching about Israel. The emphasis on a historical narrative beginning with Biblical texts that is the centerpiece of traditional day school education offers a foundation of connection to the land of Israel that offers a powerful segue to contemporary Israel.

In truth, every school and community needs to set its own goals and agenda with regard to Israel. No single curriculum could possibly respond to the needs of unique educational settings. The suggestions that follow do not aim to offer a specific syllabus, nor do they recommend developing a course in Israel and Zionism. Their aim is to raise consciousness of the importance of Israel education and point to its place as part-and-parcel of a day school education.

#### Age-and-stage

If we want to educate our students to be knowledgeable about Israel and have a sense of connectedness to it they need to

understand its history and its centrality to the Jewish people throughout the generations. At the same time, if we leave them with a simplistic understanding of modern Israel we will be sending them into the world ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that they will face when visiting, discussing or defending Israel.

As is the case with any subject, we must begin with basic foundational concepts that become more complex as the child's ability develops over time. This age-and-stage method offers the possibility of building up familiarity with the history and factual information about the land of Israel and the modern state of Israel, moving on to issues of the values, politics, culture and tensions that make are part-and parcel of the prickly *sabra*-story that is Israel today.

#### Primary school

In day school settings, even if there is no formal class offered in "Israel and Zionism," there are ample opportunities to

transmit to students a sense of connection with Israel. Classroom walls can be posterized with a variety of maps of Israel (biblical, medieval, modern, within the context of its neighbors, etc.), its people (contemporary and historical) its produce, its landscapes.

Many elementary schools include in their curricula the study of the *Bereshit* and early prophets. All too often the narrative is taught without connecting it to the geographical locations in which the stories take place. Repeated references to maps of Israel and the surrounding area will not only raise the level of student comprehension, but will also serve to reinforce familiarity with the geography and topography of the land.

Sensitivity to the meaning of the Jewish prayer book also offers constant reminders of traditional Jewish connections to the land of Israel. Whether it is the blessings referring to a return of Jewish sovereignty in the *amidah* prayer or the focus on Israel that appears throughout Grace after meals (including *Tehillim* 126, the *Shir ha-Ma'lot* that serves as an introduction to *birkat ha-mazon* that celebrates a return to Zion), the opportunities to raise our students consciousness about this issue are manifold.

**... if we leave them with a simplistic understanding of modern Israel we will be sending them into the world ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that they will face ...**

## Ivrit Min Ha'Hatchalah Hebrew From Scratch



The popular Hebrew language series currently in use all over the world. The latest expanded edition is geared toward high school and college students and appropriate for all levels of adults learning Hebrew. The **Ivrit Min Ha'Hatchalah** series is available in beginners and intermediate levels of textbooks, teacher's manuals, and CD-ROM.

**NEW!** Now available in a special edition for the Orthodox school system. Revised texts & illustrations.

Exclusive distributor of  
Academon  
Publishing House

For more information please call:  
 W. Coast (Steve) **310.274.6657**  
 E. Coast (Tamar) **201.906.8016**  
 Or email us at:  
[office@myhebrewbooks.com](mailto:office@myhebrewbooks.com)

9595 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 502  
 Beverly Hills, CA 90212  
 Fax: (310) 274-4272



**Israel Connection**  
www.MyHebrewBooks.com

www.MyHebrewBooks.com



## Transform the Jewish Future... One Classroom at a Time

### Prepare for a rewarding career as a Jewish Studies teacher

The Pardes Educators Program in Jerusalem offers traditional Beit Midrash text study and an optional Masters in Jewish Education from Hebrew College. Scholarships and generous living expense stipends are granted for this 2-year program leading to a career as a teacher in Jewish day schools in North America. The Pardes Educators Program was developed with and is funded by a grant from The AVI CHAI Foundation.

The Pardes Summer Curriculum Workshop is a subsidized professional development program in Jerusalem for Novice Judaic Studies Day School Teachers, July 15-29, 2008.

Pardes also offers Year, Advanced and 2 to 3-week Summer learning opportunities for men and women of diverse backgrounds.

Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies  
P.O. Box 4575  
Jerusalem 91084, Israel  
972.2.673.5310 • info@pardes.org.il



American Pardes Foundation  
5 West 27th Street • Suite 802  
New York, NY 10018  
212.447.4333 • info@apf-tdsusa.org

Music and art classes are obvious opportunities to connect with Israel by utilizing compositions and themes that are connected with the topic. Beyond that there are other opportunities for such associations. If a student travels to Israel with his or her family for a vacation or other event, the expectation should be that the student offers a report on his or her travel. What trips did he take? What did she see? What was different than “home”? What was the same?

## What is the significance of an autonomous Jewish government in Israel after 2000 years of exile? How might a return to the biblical heartland of Israel affect Jews in Israel and around the world?

By the end of fifth grade students should have a strong sense of the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel and have a good sense of its physical and geographical layout. Within the context of modern history they should be aware of the creation of the State in 1948, of its development as a modern state, its military success in 1967, its ongoing battles with its Arab neighbors and its peace treaties with Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994.

### Middle school

While primary school is an opportunity for students to familiarize themselves with the reality of historical and modern Israel, middle

school is a good time to compare and contrast. If schools are willing to develop Israel focused programming across the curriculum, students can learn about shekel-dollar exchange rates in math class, about the Israeli political and judicial system in tandem with their examination of the American system in social studies and the concept of an official Rabbinate when studying about “separation of Church and State.”

*Humash* classes will likely focus on the later books of *Bamidbar* and *Devarim* which are replete with references to the potential of the land as “flowing with milk and honey” or as the place where agricultural commandments of tithing and charity are in force. These ideas are wonderful springboards to discuss contemporary “milk and honey.” What is the economic base of Israel today? While people of a certain age still remember the ubiquitous Jaffa orange, agriculture is no longer the driving force behind Israel’s economy today. Don’t miss *Israel in the World: Changing Lives Through Innovation* (Davis and Davis, 2005), a book that documents the original contributions that Israel has made to the world in medicine, science, technology and agriculture – as well as its social and cultural innovations.

Even a trip to the museum to a concert or to watch the local baseball team can be used as opportunities to discuss cultural parallels and differences between Israel and Diaspora communities. Technology has made this a relatively simple task, with websites of Israeli museums, its symphony and its sports teams readily available on-line.

A spiral curriculum – one that recognizes a need for building on previously learned information on a higher developmental level as children grow and develop – would also make use of holidays such as *Yom ha-Atzma’ut* and *Yom Yerushalayim* to present ever more challenging concepts to students. What is the significance of an autonomous Jewish government in Israel after 2000 years of exile? How might a return to the biblical heartland of Israel affect Jews in Israel and around the world?

By the end of eighth grade the student should have been exposed to a wide variety of experiences that will help him grasp the parallels that exist between the world that she is familiar with and Israel,

as well as some of the differences that are present. Part of the challenge is to help students recognize the unique period of history that they are a part of – one that their great-grandparents could only dream of – even as Israel is now a reality on the ground.

### High school

If elementary school offers an opportunity to present a concrete, black-and-white picture of Israel as the sacred homeland of the Jewish people and the contemporary State of Israel as the miraculous return home, high school is an opportunity to add shades of gray and challenge the students to question the certainties with which they grew up. While muddying the pristine



picture may appear at first glance to be a rejection of basic Jewish values, in fact it is an essential inoculation against the challenges that they will face when experiencing the world that they will face when leaving a Jewish day school setting. Just as we encourage high school students to study “problems in American democracy” after they have been taught to understand and value the democratic principles upon which America was founded, similarly questions about Israel can – and must – be raised for discussion.

Our general goal of helping students develop a sense of relationship with the land and state precludes teaching that they must agree with all Israeli policies, believe that everything that goes on is ideal and view the state through proverbially rose-colored glasses. After all, Israel’s greatest critics are committed Zionists who live in Israel.

Some of the thornier issues that may be raised for discussion include:

- Exile and redemption – The Jewish People lived in the Diaspora for almost 2000 years, yearning in their daily prayers and supplications for a Messianic return to their homeland. Today, a modern Jewish state exists in Israel. Is it the answer to 2000 years of prayers? Must we wait for a Messiah who does not appear to have arrived yet? Does contemporary reality obviate the need for such a state? Students should be made aware that the very concept of a modern Jewish state was initially rejected by many Jewish leaders – in both the Orthodox and Reform camps – and remains an open question for many.
- Homeland and Diaspora – Given the existence of Israel, should every Jew go to live there? What place does a Jew – or a Jewish community – have in the Diaspora at a time when their ancestral homeland beckons?
- Land for peace – If the establishment of the State of Israel was a modern day miracle reinforced by its victory in the Six Day War that allowed the Jewish people to return to its biblical heartland, how can we imagine reversing those events? On the other hand, if true peace can be attained by arriving at compromises with the Palestinians, are we not obligated to pursue such an accord, even at the cost of painful concessions?
- Was Israel’s victory in the Six Day War its greatest success, with a return to the Old City of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron, or was it Israel’s greatest catastrophe, leading to the revitalization of a Palestinian nationalist movement that has forced Israel into the role of an oppressor and awakened a sense of Palestinian identity among Israel’s Arab minority?
- How long can a modern Jewish state retain the trappings of a religious state, when the official rabbinate is trusted neither by the Orthodox community, which sees it as an arm of the secular government, nor by the secular community which chafes under perceived religious oppression. This plays out across the spectrum of Israeli life, from questions about closing streets on Shabbat to issues of marriage and divorce and defining “Who is a Jew.”
- How is a Jewish State defined? How can a mix of immigrants from across the globe – from Europe and Arab lands, from

America, the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, join forces and build a country that can be durable, robust and a light unto the nations? Where do non-Jewish citizens, who are a significant minority of the population, fit in to this mix?

These are the tip of the iceberg, and any high school student who reads the daily newspaper will become aware of the ongoing tensions with Hamas, Hizbullah and Iran, the recurring scandals among Israel’s political leadership, the continued strength of the Israeli economy and so forth.

By the end of high school the student should have a sense of the complexity that is the modern State of Israel, which is the Jewish homeland and the center of Jewish life today. Israel’s successes and challenges, its achievements and hardships, its place among the nations of the world, should be issues that are of crucial significance to our graduates. By building a solid foundation and building on it throughout the years of schooling, introducing layers of complexity over time, we can play an important role in making that happen.

## References

Davis, H. and Davis, D. (2005). *Israel in the World: Changing Lives Through Innovation*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

## Resources for educators

We all know how much time kids spend in front of their computers. The internet is a prime place for students to learn about Israel – and, of course, about the controversies that exist around it.

Here are some resources that educators may find to be of value in presenting Israel to their students.

- Lookstein.org has a collection of resources for educators [www.lookstein.org/israel\\_resources.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/israel_resources.htm)
- See also Lookstein.org’s collection of general web-resources [www.lookstein.org/resources/israel\\_online.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/resources/israel_online.htm)
- Babaganewz has a virtual tour of Israel as well as a plethora of Israel-related lesson plans [www.babaganewz.com/virtual/](http://www.babaganewz.com/virtual/)
- The Jewish Agency’s website has a large selection of materials, ranging from early childhood education [www.jafi.org.il/education/child/israel/teaching/](http://www.jafi.org.il/education/child/israel/teaching/) to JUICE, an on-line university [www.jafi.org.il/education/juice/](http://www.jafi.org.il/education/juice/)
- My Israel source [www.myisraelsource.com/](http://www.myisraelsource.com/) is a virtual community of Jewish educators dedicated to Israel Education.
- The Jerusalem Center for Public affairs prepares three collections of articles about Israel and the Middle East for different age groups:  
High school [www.israelhighway.org/](http://www.israelhighway.org/)  
College [www.israelcampusbeat.org/icb/](http://www.israelcampusbeat.org/icb/)  
The Daily Alert [www.dailyalert.org/](http://www.dailyalert.org/)

# Teaching Israel, Teaching Truth: A Personal View from the Front

**Steve Israel**

*How honest should we be when we teach our students about Israel? Steve Israel tackles this question.*

The Szarvash camp, an international Jewish camp in Hungary, is an extraordinary place. Almost 2,000 kids between the ages of 7 and 18 from some twenty different countries (Central and Eastern Europe, Turkey, India, the U.S. and Israel) come for a twelve day experience (the camp runs four sessions throughout July and August). The staff is as international as the kids who come there: it is a truly fascinating young staff which, at least on the level of the senior staff, includes some very gifted educators indeed. Each year it includes around half a dozen Israelis, some of whom are veterans of other camps in the

west. My connection to the camp is that I'm very involved throughout the year as an educational trainer, especially to the senior staff, which includes the Israelis.

The latter this year is almost a totally new group and one of the projects that they took upon themselves was the creation of an Israel center in the camp to which all of the *hanikhim* (campers) would be exposed in one form or other through a variety of programs that the staff would run. They worked very hard creating a multi layered visual and audio experience which would serve as the introduction and stimulus to the programs. At the center of the display were seven figures (based on shop manikins), each representing a different section of the population. The activities were based on an examination of each of the figures and their complex interaction within the fabric of Israeli society. The figures included the usual variety of Israeli characters – the Kibbutznik, the Haredi, the Dati Leumi (Religious Zionist), the secular Tel Avivi, the Soldier, the *Olah Hadasha* and the Israeli Arab. Visually, against the background of each figure, there is a display consisting of



*Steve Israel is an educator whose passion is Jewish Peoplehood. He specializes in informal Jewish education, educator training and writing educational materials. Recently he has been especially engaged in helping to develop informal educational structures in central Europe and in smaller Jewish communities around the world.*

informational introductions that will be incorporated into the activity.

The Israeli staff, a wonderful group of religious and secular youth, representing the best of the young Israeli Jewish population, worked alone under general supervision, preparing the materials and I, as a native English speaker, checked a lot of the English texts that they produced. Everything was fine until I saw the text that introduced the Israeli Arab. The first words were "Israeli Arabs have been victims of discrimination within Israel since the foundation of the state in 1948". I sat and looked at the computer screen opposite me thinking what to do. I finally changed the text to "Israeli Arabs have felt themselves to be the victims of..." and then went off to discuss the change with the group.

Note: Personally, I am on the liberal side of the Israeli spectrum and do, indeed, view the Arab Israeli as a victim of discrimination, which expresses itself in a hundred different ways in Israel – some of which are perhaps inevitable and endemic to the fabric of a Jewish state while others are a result of politics and bureaucracy which have an interest in perpetuating the second class citizenship of the Israeli Arab. It is a subject that I have taught and discussed many times and which troubles me greatly, as an Israeli.

### **Had I not been at least partly guilty of a cover up job, a propaganda ploy in order to sweeten part of a difficult reality?**

Back to our story. The staff is not of one stripe politically, but most fall somewhere in the liberal camp. As we discussed the issue some argued against the change on the basis that the discrimination against Arabs is a fact, and that should be the starting point of any discussion (which could go in the direction of reasons, justifications etc.). I could not accept that, in educational terms, despite the fact that I myself agree with the fact that discrimination is indeed inbuilt into the system as well as a fact of life in Israel. But I argued that to present it as a fact would be to present as truth something which should be discussed in an educational process leading participants to a number of possible conclusions from the material presented. To do otherwise would be to over simplify, to propagandize, to do injustice to a complex situation. I persuaded them and we left it at that. But I was left wondering whether my motives had been as pure as the way I had presented them.

I do strongly believe that a process is necessary and that the original formula would not have allowed that to happen. It would have started the discussion in the wrong place. However, I could not but wonder whether part of my motivation had also been to try and protect Israel – and to try and protect the participants from one of the more difficult truths about Israel. Had I not been at least partly guilty of a cover up job, a propaganda ploy in order to sweeten part of a difficult reality? I am to this day not sure, and although I feel certain that I did the right thing, I cannot be sure that I did it completely for the right reasons.

It reminds me of an article I recently came across. Yosef Aharonovich [1878-1937] was a Labor leader and intellectual who



## **The Senior Educators Program**

This year-long enrichment program provides experienced and talented educators an opportunity for reflection and growth in a pluralistic setting, through interaction with colleagues from around the world and engagement with the world-renowned scholars of the Hebrew University, in the unique atmosphere of Jerusalem.

The program provides generous fellowships for study, living and travel expenses for the participant and his/her family.

### **Applicants should have**

- ✓ B.A. or M.A. degree
- ✓ A working knowledge of Hebrew & English
- ✓ A minimum of four years full-time experience in Jewish education
- ✓ A commitment to work in Jewish education in the Diaspora for at least three years after the program

<http://sep.huji.ac.il>

For more information, please contact [sep@mssc.huji.ac.il](mailto:sep@mssc.huji.ac.il)



**The Melton Centre  
for Jewish Education**  
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



**The Department for  
Jewish Zionist Education**  
The Jewish Agency for Israel



## OUR MISSION

The Rabbi Dr. Joseph H. Lookstein Center for Jewish Education in the Diaspora of the School of Education at Bar-Ilan University is a service and research center deeply committed to enhancing the quality of Jewish education in the Diaspora. The Center seeks to develop and facilitate programs and projects that reflect, encourage, and foster ongoing growth and learning for the Jewish educator. The Center's work is driven and inspired by the belief that there is much to be gained by creating frameworks that nurture and support the symbiosis between:

- The rich educational and spiritual resources in Israel and the particular experience of the Diaspora
- Educators from the broad range of the Jewish community
- The worlds of hands-on practice and Jewish and general theory

***We invite you to join the Lookstein Center in its mission by purchasing (or renewing) your membership package.***

***Membership packages are offered to individuals, schools and organizations — and when a school or organization joins, all educators automatically become members too.***

***If you have read this journal you must share our concern about Jewish education and its future. So join us now, and partner with us, in our common goal — helping Jewish education and in particular, the Jewish educator.***

***For more details, go to [www.lookstein.org/joinus](http://www.lookstein.org/joinus) or email [member@lookstein.org](mailto:member@lookstein.org).***

[info@lookstein.org](mailto:info@lookstein.org) [www.lookstein.org](http://www.lookstein.org)

wrote an article in 1931 simply titled *Emet* (Truth). The article was a response to the historian and literary critic Yosef Klausner who had recently suggested that historical biographies of great Jewish figures should always be presented in a positive light to serve as inspiration for the younger generation. If such figures were found to have flaws, Klausner had said, it might discourage the youth from dedicating themselves to the Zionist cause with all of their strength. Thus there was a need to exercise a kind of educational censorship to uphold the image of the character in question.

Aharonovich attacked the position incisively and elegantly. He argued that far from destroying belief, a true picture was actually far more inspirational. Idealized figures on moral pedestals would seem unreachable to the youth. It would make many readers feel inadequate, leaving them with the feeling that they themselves were unable to reach the moral perfection of their role models and would actually discourage them from enlisting themselves in the cause of the Jewish People. What was needed, he argued, was a “warts and all” approach which would make them feel that they could try to attain the level of their predecessors, without seeing themselves as morally inadequate because of whatever human feelings and deficiencies they found in themselves. To present falseness where truth exists he suggested was not only morally reprehensible but educationally counterproductive.

I agree totally with his argument and have used it (without knowing the article!) for most of the last two decades when I have been intensely involved in the teaching of Israel to Diaspora students. I believe very strongly in the presentation of Israel as a fascinating and extremely complex society. Israel is not perfect; my students are not stupid (I work principally with ages eighteen to adult) and should not be patronized by the presentation of a mythic reality which has no connection with the difficult reality of this most difficult of states. The duty of the educator is to present an accessible picture of the society as it is – vibrant, complex, conflicted and deeply troubled.

There are those who complain that this will have the effect of alienating Diaspora Jews and making them care little for a society afflicted by the same ills with which their own societies are full. Why should Diaspora Jews know about an Israel where there is racism (Jew against Arab, Jew against Jew), family violence, trafficking in women, drug addiction and abuse etc.? They get that at home. We must present a picture of Israel as an alternative, a different kind of society attacked from the outside but suffused by a golden glow from the inside. Only in this way will we get them to care. So goes the argument.

I don't buy it. I believe that it is ineffective and ultimately counterproductive. You can not and should not educate through lies. I believe that from the bottom of my educational soul.

A second anecdote: On a working trip to New Jersey a few years back, I was invited to speak to an audience of male middle school students at a large prestigious Jewish school. As I was introduced to the students in the large auditorium, the Rabbi who was in charge of my visit mentioned that I had come to talk to them

about the Israel that they loved. He then went out of the hall (to my relief) and I put aside my prepared talk to engage them in conversation. Is it true they all love Israel? I asked them. They all answered unanimously “yes” and when I probed, they told me that it was school policy to love Israel. I asked how many had been to Israel and a minority said that they had visited. I then asked the majority if they could ever love a girl that they had never seen. Most, emphatically, said “no”. So I asked if they did not think it strange that they could love a place they had never seen and when I made it clear that they could really speak their mind and asked

### Many said that the discussion of the difficulties had motivated them and they felt the need to try and do something about it.

them how they really felt about Israel and whether they really loved it, many “broke down” and confessed that these were things they had been taught to say and some said that they felt guilty that they didn’t really love Israel the way they were “meant to”.

In the ensuing discussion, which was good and fruitful, I told them my own story, what I saw in the Israel I had lived in for almost thirty years, and what I believed about the country. I would be most surprised if that was not the first honest discussion they had ever really had concerning Israel and it would nice to think that perhaps, here and there it left a mark.

What is the mark that an honest approach to Israel education could hope to leave? Let me give one final anecdote to try and explain.

Recently I finished a course on Israel and Zionism with a group of Australian and youth movement *madrikhim* with whom I had been working for a number of months. We had started the course, as I always do in such courses, by looking at the Zionist dream of the New Jew and a series of Zionist thinkers all of whom had articulated different Utopian visions and had then moved on to a comparison of the dreams with the reality that has developed in Israel through the last six decades. On the internal level, we looked at subjects such as ethnic tension and poverty, the problematic relationship with the Arabs of Israel and with the way that the society had dealt with Holocaust survivors. We constantly bounced backwards and forwards from theory to reality and it was a rocky road for *madrikhim* who had been educated principally within the confines of their Zionist youth movements. When we came to the last class, we engaged in a discussion of how they felt towards the society. Had they been turned off? Did they want to disassociate themselves from the difficult reality which they had encountered in the classroom? What if any relationship did they want with Israel in the future? I settled back anxiously

– I am not indifferent to the answers – I love Israel with all of my being.

It was fascinating. It was not the first time I had experienced the answers I heard that day but every time I wait with intellectually clammy palms, nervous about the outcome. The vast majority wanted active engagement with the country. Many talked about *aliyah* and many spoke movingly about wanting to come and to try and contribute something to the ills and problems that they had witnessed and which we had talked about in the classroom. Many said that the discussion of the difficulties had motivated them and they felt the need to try and do something about it. Aharonovich affirmed! Some of them steered very close to a post-Zionist position, while others were firmly in what they would define as a critical Zionist position. A few professed themselves to be non-Zionist and said they felt little for the State of Israel and would not commit to any real involvement or even support in the future.

How should we assess such a result? What would have been the response had they been taught a conventional Zionism and Israel course which was less critical and which put everything into a far more heroic light? I believe that they would have been stuck – stuck with a picture of Israel whose distance from the reality was great and which threatens to get ever greater as time goes on. I also believe that this would be harmful both to them and to Israel. Uncritical praise and a refusal to confront the real problems of society do no-one any good. The phrase “my country, right or wrong” does not represent an approach which the educating public should try and foster. We are right when we are right (which is often), but when we are wrong we should be prepared to acknowledge that. Positive and active involvement can come from an approach which educates towards accepting that there is plenty to improve and that there is room for the individual to involve him or herself in this less than perfect country of ours.

But in order for this approach to work, I believe that two extra elements are missing. One is a context of idealism – an idealism that aims to connect on the emotional level rather than just the level of thought and belief, an idealism which tries to incorporate elements of caring and connection. We need to allow the criticism to be expressed within a framework that explores and recognizes





the idealism that lies behind Zionism. The mistake is made when that idealism blocks out reality and substitutes a gilded mirror for the true one that we need in order to view the country as it is. The reality needs to be viewed against a larger background of what the country was meant to be like, what we would like the country to be, and what we hope that it can indeed be at some time, but we must face the reality as it is.

on her wedding day. Bet Shammai wants to hold up the mirror of truth and “to tell it like it is”, but Bet Hillel is prepared to shower the bride with compliments, even if, it seems, they are not all justified. It is, I think, a metaphor which could be applied to educating Israel, and obviously my main point supports the former course of action. However, there is no question that Bet Hillel has a point. This position must also

argue that this must be done responsibly and openly. It is not for us to be censors of truth. Let the great poets of the world take responsibility, if they must, for the production of myths. Let us take the responsibility for the production of truth – and an engagement with that truth.

Does that truth have to be taught carefully and prepared for different age groups? Absolutely – in the same way that effective

### **Does that truth have to be taught carefully and prepared for different age groups? Absolutely – in the same way that effective education must always take age and capacity into consideration.**

The other element is a context of complexity. I firmly believe, for a whole host of reasons, that Israel is the most complicated society in the world, and I believe that those reasons can be explained. I believe that what we are in the process of creating is a drama on a very large scale indeed. It is impossible to create the great omelet that we are creating without breaking a great deal of eggs. It is impossible to bring Jews from over a hundred communities, which have gone through very different cultural and historical experiences over sometimes thousands of years, without a great deal of tension and trauma. It is, in other words, possible to explain the reasons for much of the terrible ethnic tension which sometimes plagues this country with reference to the enormous difficulties in closing the great cultural and social gaps which are the heritage of these different histories. It is a far more dramatic and engaging story in my view, than a story which merely portrays the different groups of *Olim* as so many pieces of multi-colored cloth all playing their happy part side-by-side in the great Israeli quilt.

I would suggest that if we can equip our students (young and old) with these two lenses (or perhaps others which can fill a similar function), we can indeed enable them to reap the rewards of a genuine confrontation with reality.

In the old question of how to dance in front of a bride, Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai argue over what you say about a bride (who might not be so beautiful)

be expressed. It seems to me that on the wedding day, we can side with Bet Hillel and say that the bride can dwell happily in her illusion for that one happy day or even the whole week of *Sheva Berakhot*.

But in Israel this marriage is already sixty years old. Our bride is old: she has varicose veins and she wheezes when she walks too fast. If the educator as *Shadkhan*, trying to make a love match between this old would-be beautiful sixty year old bride and a whole host of young and potentially ardent suitors, presents the bride as young and beautiful when the suitors are thousands of miles away, what will happen under the *huppah* when the time comes to remove the veil, or a little later on the wedding night itself? Do we blame Ya’akov for feeling anger when he realized that he had received Leah instead of Rahel? Are we educators really willing to take on in good conscience the role of Laban? Are we willing to educate towards a hoped for love affair through the lens of a distorting mirror which can only promise disappointment and perhaps disillusionment when reality breaks through?

We will always select and attempt to manage the viewpoints of our students regarding Israel as we do in every ideological educational task that we face. But I would

education must always take age and capacity into consideration. It must be accessible and meaningful; complexities must be introduced slowly. But they must be introduced and from the very beginning of our introduction of the subject of Israel, we must be aware of the fact that the story is complex and provide hints that it is not an easy story that we intend to unfold.

Returning to my opening anecdote, among the reasons that I opposed the suggested statement about discrimination were the fact that some of the kids who would see it might be young, and the fact that as a statement without nuance, it has none of the context that is genuinely needed to understand it.

With hard work and luck, we can make many of our students into those who are committed to Israel. The question is: which Israel we really want our kids to commit to?





# Israel as the Vision and Venture of the Jewish People: Educating for Global Partnership

**Shlomi Ravid and Elana Sztokman**

*This new curricular initiative provides a tool-kit with which schools can build their own units.*

The existence of Israel is nothing short of remarkable. That a small nation, scattered around the world, expelled from their host countries every few generations on average and speaking nearly every language under the sun, suddenly re-awakened after two-thousand years to return to its country and seek sovereignty, that this small nation not only dreamed up such an eventually but actually achieved it, is an unparalleled story in the annals of human existence.

The International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies (SJPS) at Beth Hatefutsoth, the Nahum Goldmann Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv, is celebrating this incredible story. The narrative of Israel as the product of mammoth efforts and complex international cooperation between Jewish communities everywhere is the focus of a new and innovative educational initiative. *Israel: The Vision and Venture of the Jewish People* is not a typical curriculum, nor is it a standard program. Rather, it is a tool-kit, a collection of materials, sources, and ideas for engaging students in the intriguing and perhaps unprecedented historic account of Jewish partnership and cooperation. The tool-kit was released this year by SJPS in honor of Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary and seeks to highlight the ways in which Israel's continued thriving has been the product of global cooperation between Jewish communities.

*Israel: The Vision and Venture of the Jewish People* revolves around four themes:

1. **Dreaming and Thinking Jewish Sovereignty.** What led the Jewish People to the conclusion that a Jewish State was a necessity?
2. **How did the Jewish People mobilize to make the dream come true?**

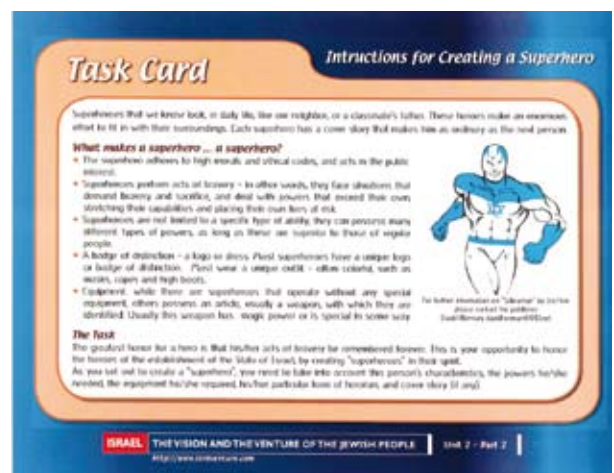
3. **Sixty years of partnership.** How the Jewish people from all corners of the universe collaborated with those who made Israel their home, in assuring the survival, success and thriving of the State. The program will challenge participants to identify the "finger prints" of world Jewry on the State and the impact of Israel on world Jewry.
4. **Creating a joint vision towards 2048.** The future relationship between the Jewish People and the State of Israel, the complexities of the partnership in a changing world.

This tool-kit contains texts, art, photographs, and multi-media resources, and uses original archival materials along with political cartoons, super-hero exercises and real-life dilemmas to pique the interests of students. Project cards also explore important personalities such as Henrietta Szold, Zeev Jabotinsky, Simon Dubnov, Louis Brandeis, and many others.

The uniqueness of the curriculum is that it challenges the current paradigm that Israel belongs to Israelis alone. Having established the point that Israel is the vision and the venture of the whole Jewish people, it pursues by exploring the future challenges of Israel as an enterprise of the Jewish collective. The message to every Jewish student is that Israel is their's, they need to explore what that means to them, to examine what responsibilities (and rights) that confers upon them, and what sort of relationship they envision with partners in Israel.

The tool-box also comes with a disk, a facilitator's guide book, project cards, and access to the interactive website. The website ([www.israventure.com](http://www.israventure.com)), developed in partnership with the Center for Educational Technology, contains resources, forums, and an interactive dialogue with a digitized likeness of Ahad Ha'am. (Other partners in the project are the Jewish Agency for Israel, UJA Federation of New York, United Jewish Communities, the World Confederation of Jewish Community Centers and Israel's Ministry of Education, and the project received support from Nancy and Stephen Grand.)

Initial reactions from the field have been encouraging. "This curriculum made me challenge my basic assumptions about Israel and its role and place in the Jewish world," one educator wrote to SPJS after using the tool-kit. "It is amazing to see how the challenges framed by the founding fathers of Israel (Herzl, Ahad Ha'am, etc.) are relevant today," wrote another educator. "This is a first serious attempt to integrate Israel and Peoplehood education. Hopefully more will follow."



*Dr. Shlomi Ravid is the Director of the School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies, and has worked on behalf of the Jewish People for the past thirty years in Israel and San Francisco.*

*Dr. Elana Maryles Sztokman, Contributing Editor of JEL, is a writer, researcher, educator and activist.*

# Eyes on Israel: A Curriculum on Israel and the Media

## Hillel Zaremba

*CAMERA builds on a quarter century of experience in helping students see through media bias.*

Researchers may differ on how much the news media influences individuals but few would dispute that public perception is shaped substantially by journalistic reporting of events. Israel's struggle for survival and acceptance as a legitimate, sovereign nation in a turbulent region is perceived by most Americans through the lens of the media.

For 25 years the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) has been at the forefront of examining, and alerting others to, the role of the media in covering the Arab-Israeli conflict. CAMERA monitors and analyzes reports in newspapers, magazines, television, radio, Web sites and other news sources on the Middle East. Its professional staff and representatives brief community groups and educate thousands of Americans about Israel and its neighbors. CAMERA's outreach includes reporters and editors as well as TV and radio anchors and producers. Educators and other community leaders have contacted the organization with requests for curricular materials for middle- and high school students to help deal with media portrayals of Israel and the Middle East. In response, CAMERA developed *Eyes on Israel*, a series of curricular modules to be used by day school, community

high or congregational school teachers to help students practice analytical thinking and develop a critical eye regarding what they read, see and hear about Israel in the media.

*Eyes on Israel* is designed as a tool to be used in varied settings and for varied audiences. While many teachers will probably come to Israel education with a strong identification with the Jewish state and the need for its citizens to live within recognized and secure borders, students may have other connections. To some students, Israel is *Eretz haKodesh*, the Holy Land promised to *Bnei Yisrael*; to others, it may merely be that far-away place where terrorists strike with tragic regularity. Still others, depending on what they have seen or read, may have an even more jaundiced view.

One of the chief goals of *Eyes on Israel* is to help students to explore media "texts" (articles, radio and television broadcasts, Web sites) and historical facts so as to encourage insight into the nature of the Middle East conflict and the way in which it is portrayed by the media. It is our belief that this approach will appeal to students' developing need to question and probe, while providing them with the data necessary for understanding the challenges Israel faces.

CAMERA makes *Eyes* available free of charge to schools and other institutions because we strongly believe in educating the next generation about this vital issue.

### Curriculum Structure

*Eyes on Israel* is composed of four modules, each designed to function independently, since not all schools are able to devote extensive time to covering "Israel and the Media" within their programs of study. The four modules are:

1. *Journalism and Its Responsibilities*: An introduction to the core issue of this curriculum, touching on the obligations of journalists in covering complex issues like the Arab-Israeli conflict. Students explore journalistic standards and ethics and their relationship to reporting on Israel.
2. *U.N. Resolution 242: A Case-Study in Media Coverage*: Students examine the background, content and meaning of UN Security Council Resolution 242, the diplomatic foundation-stone of Arab-Israeli negotiations and how it is described in the media.
3. *What You Can Do*: Mindful of journalists' responsibility to follow their own professional standards, this module teaches students how to promote balanced and accurate coverage of the Middle East.
4. *A Brief History of Modern Israel*: A concise overview of the history of Israel from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the current day providing basic facts and events concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict. Full of richly illustrated materials, including an extensive appendix of recommended books and videos.

Each module is a thematic "tent" including a number of recommended lessons, with a least one overall objective for students to master. For example, in Module 1, *Journalism and Its Responsibilities*, one lesson focuses on the topic of journalists' codes of ethics while another examines one of the central items of those codes, the responsibility to "pursue the truth." Each lesson has a least one objective for

*Hillel Zaremba (hillelz@camera.org) received a BA in Oriental (Near Eastern) Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and a Masters in Religious Studies from Yale. He is currently a senior research analyst and developer of special projects for CAMERA.*

students to master which, in turn, contributes to mastery of the module's larger, overall objective.

Within each lesson there are a number of activity options (comprised of lesson plans, Student Handouts and Teacher's Aids) providing various ways for students to approach the subject. Most lesson plans are geared to a 7-12 grade level with the teacher adapting material as necessary (see *Age Suitability* below). Most activity options include a *Digging Deeper* section appropriate for more advanced students or teachers who wish to pursue a subject further. Options offer teachers an opportunity to let students use a variety of abilities, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal, to experience and explore issues related to Israel and the news media.

While activity options within each lesson were developed with a recommended sequence in mind, each lesson plan can, for the most part, stand on its own, without students' use of a prior activity option. A *Brief User's Guide*, laid out as a grid, is designed to help teachers see at a glance how best to use *Eyes on Israel* depending on time limitations and the subject areas upon which they wish to focus.

At the beginning of each activity option, the estimated time required to complete the lesson plan is noted, along with materials needed. All materials needed to conduct a lesson are provided; teachers only need to make the appropriate number of copies of handouts for their students. Each lesson plan is composed of a warm-up activity, followed by a number of suggested steps for the teacher to follow. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the lesson plans in any way they feel may be more suitable for their classroom setting.

#### *Pedagogical Approaches*

CAMERA used various pedagogical approaches in crafting *Eyes on Israel*. For example, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences was used in the development of the lesson plans. As different individuals have greater and lesser strengths in the various intelligences outlined by Gardner, one way to encourage increased class participation and learning was to try to appeal to these various predispositions.

Another approach incorporated is based on "constructivism" which proposes that people learn best when they actively construct their own understanding of a phenomenon or a situation in conjunction with facts. *Eyes on Israel* tries to employ activities which enable students to explore a problem and come up with data, hypotheses, and solutions. Many activities are designed for use by small groups in which students assume the major responsibility for their own learning.

Two final, closely related methodologies that were adopted bear mention. The instructional systems design approach (ISD) is used extensively in business training applications and focuses on observable behaviors, i.e. what the student will *do*, rather than what the student will *know*, which is much harder to assess. A lesson plan which uses the ISD approach first determines the

terminable objectives – the main "things" a student will display mastery of and only then fashions activities that will both enable and display attainment of the goal. In *Eyes*, assessment of students' mastery of objectives tends to occur more through demonstrating critical thinking skills regarding media texts than via tests, even though there are options for such written evaluations in many of the lesson plans.

Similarly, "Understanding by Design" (UbD) developed by Wiggins and McTighe explains that since the fundamental goal of education is the development and deepening of student understanding, true learning only becomes evident when students are seen to apply knowledge and skills in a learning or real-life context.

It is our hope that by employing these various pedagogical approaches *Eyes on Israel* will be a tool that all students and teachers can use to their best advantage.

#### *Age Suitability*

CAMERA's curriculum is designed to be used by students in a wide age range (7th-12th grades). Although the cognitive and behavioral skills of most students at the ends of this spectrum are far apart, simplified versions of some handouts, or vocabulary sheets to accompany others, help in adapting the materials to different groups. Only teachers working in their individual classroom setting can determine best whether their students have the developmental skills necessary to tackle the subject matter and concepts of each lesson.

#### *Use of Technology*

*Eyes on Israel* is presented as an educational CD that can be opened in either a Windows or Mac format on a computer. Each CD contains all the material needed to conduct a lesson from any and

### CHANGING BOUNDARIES The 1940's





## The 1940's

**1940**

**1941**

**1942**

**1943**

**1944**


**1945**

**1946**

**1947**

**1948**

**1949**



**The left-hand map on the opposite side shows the plan the United Nations devised to divide Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs. The Jews accepted the plan; the Arabs rejected it and attacked. The right-hand map shows the cease-fire lines when the fighting stopped.**

1. What might have been the significance for Palestinian Jewry of the 1941 meeting between Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husseini?
2. How did Hitler's "Final Solution" relate to the need for a Jewish homeland?
3. Why do you think the Haganah and other Jewish groups took up arms against the British in 1946?
4. What compromise did the United Nations come up with in 1947 and what were the Jewish and Arab reactions to the proposal? How did this compromise differ from the League of Nations' original Mandate of 1920?
5. What rights did the Jewish leaders of Israel offer the Arabs when they declared independence?
6. What became of the Palestinian Arab state that the U.N. proposed in 1947?

all of the four modules, with lesson plans, Student Handouts and Teacher's Aids in PDF format. This allows teachers to print out as many copies of the material as needed by their classes.

Since *Eyes* focuses on Israel's portrayal in the news media, the "texts" students examine run the gamut from traditional newspaper articles through radio, television and Web-based reporting. What this means, from a practical perspective, is that some materials are meant to be listened to, others viewed on a screen, others read from paper. In crafting this curriculum, we also recognize recent research which contends retention is best served by a combination of inputs as a supplement to reading. Thus we have tried to take advantage of some low-cost technologies available in the marketplace for developing more sensory-stimulating materials.

Since technology availability varies from school to school, we offer materials in a variety of formats. Thus, a particular Teacher's Aid needed for an activity option may appear, for example, as a PowerPoint presentation on the CD, as a series of overhead transparencies or as a PDF document to copy and distribute to the class. In the cases of a video clip, there are no alternatives but this is indicated under

the *Materials* section that opens each lesson plan.

When teachers insert the disk in their computers, they see an opening screen allowing them to choose the curriculum introduction or any of the four modules. When they select a module, a menu screen opens allowing them to select the entire module to read or print, or they may choose individual lesson plans and their accompanying Student Handouts or Teacher's Aids. Teachers may choose to print all the materials in a module and put them in a binder or just the particular lesson plan they wish to use,

along with its accompanying materials.

### Evaluations and Revisions

The curriculum was piloted in approximately two dozen schools across the United States last spring. Pilot schools ran the gamut of day schools, Orthodox to Reform, 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 12<sup>th</sup>. While we did not hear from all those who participated in the pilot, responses from those we did hear from were encouraging. For example, a day-school teacher working with 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders in an Orthodox setting wrote:

I thoroughly enjoyed using the curriculum. The information was clearly presented and readily understood...I was especially pleased with the activities. My students responded best to the mixed media presentations...

My principal dropped in for a surprise visit on the day that I did the unit on the Security Fence. She was very impressed by the PowerPoint Presentation and ... delighted to see the students' exercising critical thinking skills and evaluating the various sources that were quoted.

A 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher working in a Conservative setting responded:

Thank you for providing a fantastic curriculum to address journalistic

integrity and advocacy for Israel... Kids in 8<sup>th</sup> grade are just beginning to look critically at the world around them and at how Israel is covered in the news. Public opinion can hold much sway in their lives. Thusly, the Oprah component was most fascinating to them...

In the several weeks we had to use the materials, I only wish we had touched more on other materials you included! More next time!

Currently, *Eyes on Israel* has been distributed to approximately 500 schools and educators across the United States, Canada and Mexico, as well as Israel, Britain, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. At this time we are still gathering data from these users.

CAMERA views *Eyes on Israel* as a work in progress and welcomes feedback from teachers in ways to improve and augment what we have currently developed. We have created an evaluation form appearing in the *Introduction* section which we ask every user to fill out and send us. Less formal observations and comments via phone or email are also encouraged. Once the initial phase is completed, we anticipate creating a dedicated Web site to allow for changes and revisions to the curriculum which teachers can then download as well as to provide a mechanism for educators to provide us with suggestions and feedback. Eventually, we hope to provide a space for student contributions as well.

The central goal of this curriculum is to help students become critical and educated media consumers, while focusing on the facts of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The developers of *Eyes on Israel* urge teachers not to rely exclusively on the media texts we have collected. Encourage students to monitor their newspapers, radio and TV with an eye towards accuracy and journalistic responsibility explored in these materials. (Methods and suggestions for how to do this are offered in Module 3: *What You Can Do*) You will not only be teaching students how to become lifelong critical consumers of the news, you will also give them an opportunity to "make a difference," an appealing goal for many adolescents.

# TWO NEW FILMS ABOUT FAITH



**"A SMALL MIRACLE!"**  
-Rachel Beckman, *WASHINGTON POST*

**"WARM-HEARTED AND MESMERIZING!"**  
-S. James, *THE NEW YORK SUN*

WINNER  
AUDIENCE AWARD BEST DOCUMENTARY  
2008 SAN DIEGO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER  
AUDIENCE AWARD BEST DOCUMENTARY  
2008 VANCOUVER JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER  
AUDIENCE AWARD BEST DOCUMENTARY  
2008 SEATTLE JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER  
AUDIENCE AWARD BEST DOCUMENTARY  
2007 BOSTON JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER  
AUDIENCE AWARD BEST DOCUMENTARY  
2007 WASHINGTON JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

FAITH CAN BE SIMPLE

## Praying with Lior

A film by Ilana Trachtman

EDITED BY ZILDA CARRASTEN  
COMPOSITIONS BY SHARON CARLBERG & ARI LINDBERG  
LINE PRODUCER ROBERTA MOROS  
COPRODUCER NEDY FISHBANK  
PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION BY ILANA TRACHTMAN

## PRAYING WITH LIOR

Winner of five Audience Awards at Jewish film festivals around the country, *Praying with Lior* asks whether someone with Down syndrome can be a "spiritual genius." Many believe Lior is close to God—at least that's what his family and community believe—though he's also a burden, a best friend, an inspiration and an embarrassment, depending on who is asked and when. As this moving and entertaining documentary builds to its climax, Lior must pass through the gateway to manhood—his Bar Mitzvah.

**"This film is more than touching. It is an amazing portrayal of Jewish family life, of human emotion, parents and children, friendship and community. The love and caring simply leap off the screen."**

– Rabbi Art Green, Dean of Hebrew College

**"The character study of this charming boy tells of how Lior's community successfully integrates him into communal life—a challenge many Jewish communities face with mentally and physically disabled members."**

– Rebecca Wolfson, Jewish Telegraphic Agency

**SPECIAL FEATURES OF 2-DISC EDUCATIONAL DVD SET:** open captions, audio descriptions, Spanish subtitles; bonus scenes; follow-up interviews; additional resources for parents, teachers and communities featuring information on sibling support groups and the inclusion of people with special needs in faith communities.

**87 minutes; DVD; English**  
**Institutional DVD Price: \$395 (plus shipping)**

**EDUCATIONAL DVD AVAILABLE OCT. 1st**

## CONSTANTINE'S SWORD

*Constantine's Sword*, the latest film by Oscar-nominated documentarian Oren Jacoby, is an astonishing exploration of the dark side of Christianity, following acclaimed author and former priest James Carroll on a journey of remembrance and reckoning. He discovers a terrible legacy that reverberates across the centuries—from the Emperor Constantine's vision of the cross as a sword and symbol of power, to the rise of genocidal anti-Semitism, to modern-day wars and conflicts sparked by religious extremism.

**"X marks the spot, literally, where Christianity and the Catholic Church fostered the centuries of religious hatred and anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust. So argues James Carroll in his 2001 book *Constantine's Sword* and in this searching, intellectually lively documentary."**

– Jim Ridley, Village Voice

**"More than a history lesson...in the hands of [Oren] Jacoby, a gifted filmmaker...the film moves along with a buoyancy more typical of a thriller than a documentary about arcane matters of religious theology."**

– Ben Harris, Jewish Telegraphic Agency

**95 minutes; DVD; English**  
**Institutional DVD Price: \$195 (plus shipping)**

**EDUCATIONAL DVD AVAILABLE SEPT. 2nd**

Additional information about Educational DVDs from First Run Features can be found at <http://www.firstrunfeatures.com/educationalsales.html>. To order, please call 1-800-229-8575 or email [edsales@firstrunfeatures.com](mailto:edsales@firstrunfeatures.com)

**"Like THE DA VINCI CODE, it grasps at the enigmatic flux of Christian history. You'll walk out enriched."**

– Owen Gleiberman, ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

JAMES CARROLL'S  
**CONSTANTINE'S SWORD**

**"ENTHRALLING!"**  
– Stephen Holden, NEW YORK TIMES

**"ASTONISHING!"**  
– Jeffrey Lyons, NBC-REEL TALK

**"MAGNIFICENT!"**  
– Ronnie Scheib, VARIETY

**NO WAR IS HOLY**

A FILM BY OSCAR®-NOMINEE  
**OREN JACOBY**



# What Is To Be Done? Educating Jewish Day School Students about Israel

**Roz Rothstein and Roberta P. Seid**

*StandWithUs works on the high school and university level to help students become proud advocates for Israel.*

Recent research has suggested that Jewish students are not as deeply attached to Israel as former generations were. (See article on page 4) Is this true? If so, what can be done about it? What role should Jewish Day Schools play?

StandWithUs [SWU] was founded in 2001 to counter the rising tide of anti-Israel misinformation and bias that came with the Second Intifada. SWU's mission is education: telling the inspiring story of Israel through proactive programs, challenging misinformation with facts, challenging bias by restoring balance, challenging prejudice and extremism by exposing them.

Although we now create materials for high schools based on our experience, a central thrust of our work has been with students who have already matriculated into college. As a result, we have a unique perspective on how their high schools and communities prepared them to face anti-Israel challenges on the college campus. We believe that schools and communities have both succeeded and failed, and we have developed strategies to reinforce the successes and repair the failures.

Late in 2001, we began receiving phone calls from frantic students who did not know how to handle the ugly and intimidating anti-Israel events on their

campuses and the anti-Israel bias in their classrooms. We have worked with an exponentially growing number of students ever since.

We encountered three types of Jewish students who illustrate the successes and failures of our schools and communities. One group was attached to Israel emotionally, but had no idea how to defend it from the onslaught of anti-Israel bias and misinformation. Their backgrounds had successfully instilled an attachment to Israel, but had not educated them or given them the tools to defend and justify that attachment. They simply did not know even elementary facts about modern Israel's history or its *raison d'être*. They were easily shaken by the attacks. The second group had only a vague attachment to Israel, and was even somewhat indifferent to it. They didn't see how Israel and its fate particularly affected them, their lives or their identity as Jews. Their schools and communities had failed to inspire any attachment to Israel, or to educate them about basic facts. Some of them could then be seduced to enter the third, smaller group that, uninspired and uneducated about Israel, slipped into the ranks of the campus anti-Zionists.

In some ways, these attitudes are a product of the remarkable success of Jewish assimilation in America, and especially

of Israel's remarkable success. Between the 1940's and the 1970's, there was awe and excitement about the miracle of Israel's rebirth and survival. Even the non-Jewish world viewed Jews as the romantic underdog, the survivors who had defied British colonialism and successfully defended themselves against the onslaught of five Arab armies just hours after they declared independent statehood.

Historian Howard Sachar captured the world's mood. When Israel was admitted to the UN and hoisted its flag there, observers asked themselves whether only four years had passed since the Star of David had been identified primarily as the seal of doom worn by concentration camp inmates. The rise to independence of history's most cruelly ravaged people transcended the experience, even the powers of description, of case-hardened journalists and social scientists alike. It appeared somehow as if a new law of nature had been born.

This sense of a resourceful, heroic people fighting insurmountable odds grew as Israel made the desert bloom, absorbed hundreds of thousands of impoverished Jewish refugees from the Middle East and Europe, and built a boisterous democracy that gave equal rights to all religious and ethnic minorities. And it grew yet more with little Israel's earthshaking military victories in the 1967 and 1973 wars, and with its spectacular rescue of Jewish hostages from Entebbe in 1976.

Throughout these initial two to three decades, the Jewish community rejoiced in the almost magical re-establishment of Israel, and Jews felt a new found pride in being Jewish. Rabbis, day school teachers, and the community as a whole talked

*Roz Rothstein is the co-founder and International Director of StandWithUs.*

*Roberta P. Seid, Ph.D., is an historian and the Education/Research Director of StandWithUs.*



about Israel's founding, and followed news about Israel with rapt attention. There was an outpouring of support in bond drives and other fund-raising efforts, and a profound appreciation and identification with the Jewish State.

But the younger generation did not get this sense. In the 1980's, Israel began to be regarded as a "given," a country whose survival was no longer in jeopardy. The miracle had matured into an established state. Complacency set in. Young Jews were taught that they should love Israel, but the focus in many Jewish Day Schools became Jewish culture and debates about religious issues. The fervent attachment to Israel dissipated. Israel was a great place to visit, but it was no longer widely regarded

post-modernism and post-colonialism and their anti-American undercurrents, seemed to put Israel on the wrong side of progressive causes for the first time in its modern history. Many began to invert reality, describing Israel as a Goliath and its enemies as David.

The Second Intifada, which began in September 2000, brought only one blessing. It was a wake-up call that we had not educated the younger generation, not prepared them to defend Israel against the anti-Israel propaganda campaign that erupted on campuses, in classrooms, in the media and elsewhere, not inspired them with love for Israel or pride in Zionism which has become a dirty word in college communities. Israel is under renewed

and connection to Israel, and an understanding of how Israel fits into the long history of the Jewish people, and into the ideals of social justice.

These goals have been SWU's mission, and we have developed strategies, educational materials, and programs to help achieve them. We hope that Jewish Day Schools will also be on the front lines of these efforts, and make teaching about Israel a priority in their curriculum.

Our own work has focused on three areas.

1. *Supplying basic information.* We discovered that students and many community members, despite their loyalty to Israel and desire to defend it, did not know basic facts about modern Israel's

**We wanted to lay out the simple facts about Israel's past because they have been so distorted by the anti-Israel campaign, and to restore awareness about some of the forgotten history that is central to Israel's past, such as the "forgotten Jewish refugees" of the Middle East. These forgotten facts can help win the hearts and minds of students.**

as an extraordinary chapter of 3500 years of Jewish history. Israel had become a major regional power, a close ally of the world's only superpower, and an economic success.

These remarkable achievements, coupled with the rise of fashionable theories of

attack, and our young people have not been prepared to meet the challenge.

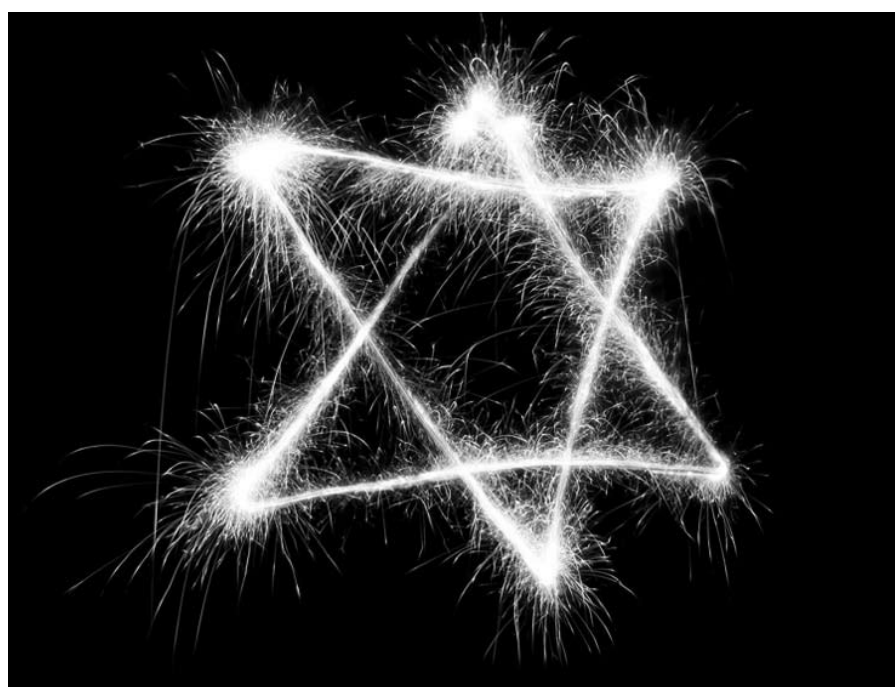
Our task, and the task of the Jewish Day Schools, is to repair this failure.

These are challenging times that require us to rethink how to offer young people information and inspiration, motivation

founding, size, geography, government and history. As a result, we produced *Israel 101*, a colorful, 44-page booklet that lays out the facts and provides a broad perspective on how and why Israel was founded, about the wars and terrorism and Israel's efforts to defend itself, about the society and government Israel created, and about its struggle to establish peace with its neighbors. Jewish Day Schools are invited to use our curriculum or develop similar material that puts the facts within the riveting dramatic narrative that is Israel's history.

SWU also created a Teacher's Manual for *Israel 101* that provides discussion topics, activities and additional resources such as films and novels that teachers can use for each unit. For example, it provides links to Steven Spielberg's film archive, which has extraordinary footage of modern Israel's early years and of Jewish communities world-wide that bring Israeli and Jewish history vividly to life.

We have also created several series of smaller pamphlets and brochures that use photographs to show Israel's multiculturalism, its cutting edge



# Educating Jewish Day School Students about Israel

innovations, and its geographic and cultural diversity. Our timeline, *Israel at 3060* (<http://tiny.cc/dYL6h>), proved especially effective.

Our purpose was not just basic education. We wanted to lay out the simple facts about Israel's past because they have been so distorted by the anti-Israel campaign, and to restore awareness about some

**... our penultimate goal has been to instill in students a passion for Israel and a connection to it that will enrich their lives, and will inspire them to stand up for Israel – not with defensiveness, but with pride and confidence and with the knowledge that in doing so, they are standing up for the noblest values.**

of the forgotten history that is central to Israel's past, such as the "forgotten Jewish refugees" of the Middle East. These forgotten facts can help win the hearts and minds of students. Finally, we wanted to inspire to students with the breathtaking story of the Jews, dispersed for 2,000 years, joining together to fight what seemed to be insuperable odds to re-establish their national independence. As David Ben Gurion allegedly remarked, "If you don't believe in miracles, you are not a realist."

2 *Using the anti-Israel accusations to our advantage.* Jewish Day Schools should also become more strategic by assessing what their students will encounter when they go to college. SWU turned the anti-Israel campaigns into an advantage. We worked backwards, taking the most common anti-Israel accusations, deconstructing them, and using them to educate and prepare students to defend themselves and Israel.

We learned that college students would hear that Israel is an apartheid state, a Nazi-like state, a racist state, a theocracy, imperialist and colonialist, always plotted to ethnically cleanse Palestinians, and is persecuting Christians and other non-Jews. Students needed to know that these are Orwellian inversions of the facts.

Something positive emerged when we developed rebuttals for these "hot button"

topics: students learned that Israel, in fact, struggles to and succeeds in living up to the ideals of Western civilization – liberty, human and civil rights, diversity, the rule of law, humanitarianism. The anti-Israel claims also forced us to produce deeper and more long-range analyses of the Jews and Israel's past. In short, refuting the anti-Israel accusations instilled new knowledge and new pride about Israel.

SWU developed multiple resources to address these issues, from our Internet resources such as *Stand4Facts* ([www.stand4facts.org/](http://www.stand4facts.org/)) which deconstructs anti-Israel speakers and their arguments to our *Know the Facts* series of small booklets which cover a range of topics, from comparing the civil and human rights and the freedom of ideas in different countries in the Middle East to Israel's peculiar relationship with the UN. In all of these materials, we create graphic layouts that make the well researched, documented facts easy to read. We invite Jewish day schools to use any or all of these materials, and we will be happy to work them to create materials tailored to their needs.

3. *Inspiring students to be pro-Israel.* Finally, our penultimate goal has been to instill in students a passion for Israel and a connection to it that will enrich their lives, and will inspire them to stand up for Israel – not with defensiveness, but with pride and confidence and with the knowledge that in doing so, they are standing up for the noblest values.

Anti-Israel campaigners have worked hard to separate Jews and Israel by claiming they only denounce Zionists, and by using anti-Zionist Jews as regulars on the campus lecture circuit. They have also tried to make Israel's supporters seem to be advocates of non-progressive values. And

finally, we have found that many Jewish students seem reluctant to stand up to support their own people as though this is selfish or too parochial.

In addition to the educational materials described above, we have developed several strategies to reverse these trends and to instill passion for and pride in Israel and a profound motivation to defend it – along with the sense that defending it is right and just.

One of our most successful programs has been *Learn Israel* ([www.learnIsrael.org](http://www.learnIsrael.org)) which does not address the conflict or the contentious issues, but rather focuses on Israel's stellar achievements in technology, medicine, biotechnology, environmental preservation, and other cutting edge innovations. The presentation concludes with how Israel has brought these innovations to people around the world in its many humanitarian programs. We also have developed an accompanying curriculum for elementary school through high school. When some college students at UC Irvine, one of our most problematic campuses, recently saw the program, one Jewish student left the classroom with his eyes shining, saying, "I've never been so proud to be Jewish." A non-Jewish student walked out shaking his head saying, "I had no idea. The Jews are incredible. What a terrific country."

In addition, we have helped Jewish students by educating them, by organizing conferences with them, by sponsoring knowledgeable guest lecturers, and by providing educational materials that show Israel is on the right side of social justice issues, that show that in defending Israel, one is not just defending one's own, but also defending cherished values.

We hope that Jewish day schools give the study of Israel a central place in their curriculum. SWU is dedicated to partnering with students and teachers. We will do whatever we can to support the critically needed effort to educate students about Israel to ensure they will become informed young adults who are confident and proud about their heritage, their history, and the miracle of Israel's rebirth and of what it has achieved.

# Teaching the Palestinian Narrative in Diaspora Jewish Schools

**Francis Nataf**

*How do we prepare our students for the anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian propaganda they will encounter in the broader world? Francis Nataf suggests teaching them what “the other side” thinks.*

On matters of ideology, schools of any culture will naturally promote the values of that culture – and Jewish schools are no different in this regard. Among the dearest values of most Jewish communities is identification with Israel in its conflict with its enemies. This is as it should be.

The question at stake is not whether Jewish educators should be supportive of Israel. Rather, the issue is how to most effectively prepare Jewish students to strongly identify with Israel while living in sophisticated multicultural societies. Simply stated, our children will be exposed to more and more ideological and political diversity, making “the marketplace of ideas” more of a reality than ever before. Not only will this put them in a position to convince others of the truth of their beliefs, it will also put them in a position in which they can be convinced by others who don’t share their views. Moreover, the general tilt away from automatic support for Israel will create an increasingly difficult marketplace of ideas as time goes on. That being the case, how we teach the Israeli-Arab conflict may need reexamination.

On some level, this is not a new discussion. It is one that has been taking place in Israeli school systems for several decades (Podeh 2001). As early as 1969, Israeli teachers and academicians have seriously addressed the issue of whether or not to



teach the Arab side of the conflict. To this day, it remains a controversial topic and the results of teaching the Palestinian narrative in Israeli schools, to the extent that it has been taught, are far from clear.

In the present article, we will focus the discussion on Diaspora Jewish day schools. These schools, with few exceptions, still do not see a need to teach the Arab perspective of the conflict in any sustained and non-polemical fashion. While some lessons can be applied from the Israeli experience, others may not. The very fact

that most Diaspora Jewish day schools are under Orthodox auspices already represents a very important difference in how teachers and students are likely to approach ideological questions and pluralistic notions of historical truth. But religious orientation is not the only issue that makes these schools different than the primarily secular Israeli schools. Culture, daily experience and learning styles, to name only a few variables, all pose additional impediments to a direct comparison of Israeli schools and their Diaspora counterparts.

*Rabbi Francis Nataf is the Educational Director of the David Cardozo Academy in Jerusalem. He is the author of Redeeming Relevance in the Book of Genesis as well as numerous articles concerning Jewish education and Jewish thought. Rabbi Nataf was ordained at Yeshiva University and also holds degrees in Jewish history and international affairs.*



## Historical facts and historical narratives

One does not have to be a postmodernist to appreciate the notion that different groups will *understand* history differently. This is true even in the unusual situation wherein all the historical facts are known and agreed upon. Indeed, the study of history is often the attempt to identify the most significant facts and then to analyze these facts in such a way as to provide a patterned sequence of events. In studying early American history, for example, we turn our eyes to enlightenment political

**Too often, when we look at the Arab position, we only look at the facts presented by the other side. What such an approach misses is that opposition to Israel is not really rooted in specific facts. Neither is support of Israel.**

thought, which served as a major influence on the unfolding of the new liberal political order leading up to and following American independence. Many of the major events of this period can subsequently be understood as giving greater impetus to liberalism throughout the Western world. While this understanding is one rooted in facts, it remains a theoretical explanation of the pattern that emerges from these facts. Though highly convincing, it does not bear the stamp of objective truth. A Marxist would give a different theoretical construct to make sense of the same facts. This is not to say that one theory is just as good as another. What it is saying, however, is that historical facts do

allow for different interpretations. I may disagree with a competing interpretation of the facts and can convincingly argue that it is incorrect – I may not argue that the facts automatically spell out a pattern for all to see and that anyone who does not see such a pattern is either stupid or malevolent.

One's perspective will also help determine what data will be accepted uncritically and what will not be accepted without compelling evidence. In other words, when one encounters unverified information that can easily be integrated into a

preexisting framework, we can expect a less critical attitude than with information that cannot be so easily integrated. In that sense, established theories have a way of reinforcing themselves.

Too often, when we look at the Arab position, we only look at the facts presented by the other side. What such an approach misses is that opposition to Israel is not really rooted in specific facts. Neither is support of Israel. Granted, the plausibility of a historical theory will be compromised to the extent that it is based on inaccuracies. Still, we must recognize that even if we agreed on all the facts, the Arabs would continue to view the conflict in different terms than we do.

To take one example, can the question of who is to blame in the Six Day War really be determined by facts? After all, the Six Day War is only one chapter of a story that started earlier. If Israel's actions in 1948 were justified, then the Arabs had no right to threaten the Jewish nation in 1967. If Israel's earlier actions were not justified, then the Arabs were simply using force of arms to achieve a legitimate aim that they had been unable to accomplish in 1948. In turn, justification of Israeli actions in 1948 cannot be "proven" by citing the UN partition or the Balfour Declaration. After all, the Arab narrative would deny the right of Britain and the UN to determine ownership of, what they see as, Arab land. To further claim that the UN's establishment of the State of Israel is recognized by international law doesn't get us much further, since it is the very legitimacy of international law that is being questioned. These arguments have their place and it is important to know them, but none of them get to the root issues of the conflict that ultimately lie in meta-understandings of history and not in facts.

We now are in a better position to ask ourselves of what need is it for Jewish students to understand the Arab side of the conflict, beyond understanding any other important foreign perspective. Is this just part of the general questions of intellectual honesty and multiculturalism in our schools (no small issues in their own right) or is there a more immediate and pressing concern that makes it specifically relevant to our students?

## ***Da mah shetashiv***

Being Jewish has always meant being surrounded and greatly outnumbered by ideological competition. As a result, Jews have long been aware of the importance of being prepared to contend with that competition. Whether it was in the face of paganism, Christianity or Islam, the rabbis (Avot 2:14) spoke about the imperative of *da mah shetashiv* ... (know what to respond ...). It goes without saying that "knowing what to respond" meant doing so effectively. It wasn't enough to have answers that impressed the in-group. The responses minimally had to also hold the opposition at bay.



According to Maimonides, this principle requires knowledge of that which one is arguing against. In this context, R. Aharon Lichtenstein quotes T. S. Eliot's quip that "paganism (is best defeated) in the classical way, by understanding it." Without such understanding, it would be extremely difficult to know how to debate effectively. It would follow that the more sophisticated one's likely opponent, the more background into the opponent's views would be needed in order to rebuff his arguments.

The often high level of contemporary public debate today does not allow credible and convincing responses to be grounded in a superficial and polemical approach to competing ideologies. Rather, such responses require a serious understanding of the competition. In turn, transmitting such an understanding is predicated on showing our students these ideologies' coherence and appeal. Focusing primarily on the ideology's flaws would likely lead to its distortion and not to the type of understanding that would allow one to successfully rebut competing arguments. At best, it leads to positions that will only

**It may well be necessary to explicitly state that appreciating the Arab narrative will actually help to better serve our common pro-Israel convictions. At the same time, it must be emphasized that appreciation of the Arab narrative will require coming to the issue in a fresh way and, as much as is possible, without any axes to grind**

convince those already convinced, but will not carry much weight with others.

Of course, it is most probable that the directive of *da mah shetashiv* was originally meant for the rabbis themselves, since they were the ones likely to encounter ideological challenges. Accordingly, the Talmud contains many episodes of gentiles presenting these challenges to various rabbis. Anyone who was not likely to meet such ideological challenges had no immediate need to be prepared. In the present era of mass education and instant communications, the situation is quite different – we are all susceptible to

ideological challenges. Thus, even if the directive did not have mass application when it was originally formulated, it may well have mass application today.

In short then, the rabbinic principle of *da mah shetashiv* would suggest that all modern Diaspora Jews take the requisite steps to *understand* the views of our ideological opponents, in whatever realm they may present themselves. I also believe it has applications to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

### What should be taught?

Harkabi's (1972) treatment of the topic, although dated, remains possibly the best comprehensive work available, and it is not in the scope of this article to spell out the Palestinian narrative. Rather, we will describe, in broad strokes, how such a narrative should be given over to Diaspora Jewish students.

It should be obvious to most educators that multiple perspectives are not easily integrated in the early years of education. Such leads to confusion and would not be age-appropriate (Reich 2002). Rather, we

envision such a narrative to have a place in the high school and post-high school Israel studies curriculum.

Even for more mature students, the sophistication of the project under discussion requires the teacher to tread carefully. The study of alternative historical narratives needs to be explained and even justified to our students. They must understand that it is possible to look at the same facts and understand them differently. They must also understand the educational goals of this particular endeavor. It may well be necessary to explicitly state that appreciating the Arab

narrative will actually help to better serve our common pro-Israel convictions. At the same time, it must be emphasized that appreciation of the Arab narrative will require coming to the issue in a fresh way and, as much as is possible, without any axes to grind. In this vein, it is extremely unhelpful to take a "myths and facts" approach of stopping after every minor discussion to show the weaknesses in the Arab perspective. Any narrative taught in such a way, including our own, would fail to engage students. Similarly, students should be encouraged to withhold judgmental evaluations and colored language, referring to such a perspective as "warped" or "jaded."

It would be appropriate to start by giving our students some background into Modern Arab history, culture and religion. Educators will then need to look at many of the same facts that our students will already have studied from an Israeli perspective and show them how the Arabs interpret many of the same facts but come to a dramatically different understanding of the conflict. In this context, events that are not given so much importance by Israelis but are seen as highly significant by Palestinians should also be studied. For example, the battle of Karameh, a costly Israeli raid which pitted Israeli soldiers against *Fatah* and Jordan in March 1968, is generally seen as a minor event in Israeli history and not really worthy of mention. Palestinians, however, see it as their equivalent to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and therefore a seminal event. The coherence of the narrative will be best appreciated if our students are aware of all of its major components.

Some have claimed that teaching the Palestinian narrative in our schools is superfluous, since our students will regardless encounter this narrative in the general media or at university. It is true that the media will sometimes sympathize with Arab claims. Occasional and unsystematic exposure to such sympathy, however, is not the same as a deep understanding of how the Arabs understand the conflict. Neither does the fact that one *can* pick this up in universities assure that the necessary electives will be chosen by a large

percentage of our students. Moreover, even if the claim were correct, it still would not mitigate the need to teach the Arab perspective in our own schools. Even graduates of Jewish schools that do attend such university courses may find themselves overwhelmed if they are not properly prepared within the context of their earlier Jewish education. In fact, it could be precisely such students that would most benefit from the teaching of the Arab narrative in Jewish high school and post-high school programs.

## The problem of engendering relativism

Will the teaching of the Palestinian narrative dilute loyalty of Jewish students to their own cause? A smart-alecky student of mine once wanted to drive home this point in her own inimitable way by responding to my statement of, "You now see that the issues are not so clear," by jokingly responding, "The issues are very clear – now I see that the Arabs are totally right."

Indeed, this issue is part of a much larger question facing multiculturalist educators who seek to open students up to the values of other cultures without simultaneously undermining identification with their own culture. Though Jewish education need not be beholden to multiculturalism, our earlier discussion of *da mah shetashiv*

leads us to the same impasse, albeit from different starting assumptions. Teachers who undertake to teach the Palestinian narrative may benefit from looking into some attempts to deal with this problem in the general literature. Though helpful, a perusal of the literature will also show that a fool-proof solution to this problem has not yet been found.

At the same time, I'm not sure that the challenge of diluting Jewish students support for Israel should cause us to shelve it. Is blind zealotry really what we want from our students? If our students' zeal may be tempered by newly found nuance, will this truly compromise their core identification with the Jewish people, its defense and survival? The answer to this question may be found in the rest of the curriculum. That is to say, if teaching the Palestinian narrative will really shake our students' commitment to Israel, the real problem may not lie in whether or not we teach the Arab perspective but how we teach our own.

On some level, providing alternative explanations of the Arab-Israeli conflict ups the ante of what is at stake in how we teach our Judaic studies and specifically our Israel/Zionism classes. They will need to be taught with even greater passion and sophistication, so that they reinforce a Jewish student's natural identification

with the values and heritage of our people as manifested in the State of Israel.

In this context, it may be helpful to note Maimonides' understanding of the context of *da mah shetashiv* in Avot – the mishna continues to say that one should be aware of Whom one is working in front of. Maimonides explains that precisely when one is involved in the necessary study of competing ideologies, one need be mindful of one's primary allegiance. This means that the study of competing ideas should be done in such a way as to prevent these ideas from entering one's *heart* (*shelo yikanes belibkha*). In other words, these ideas should not be pursued with the same holistic and emotional overtones with which we should study our own tradition. Thus, not only will teaching the Palestinian narrative help us better equip our students to defend Israel, it will force us to become better teachers of the Israeli narrative as well.


## References

Harkabi, Y., *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (Jerusalem: Keter 1972)

Podeh, E., *How Israeli Textbooks Portray the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 2001)

Reich, R., *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp.197-8.

.....→ **100 sites and GROWING!**




**חֶלָב וּדְבַשׁ - עֵבְרִית לְיַלְדֵי הַגֶּן**


**Hebrew Sweet As Honey**  
A New Innovative Hebrew Language Program for Young Children

Visit our website  
**[www.chalav-udvash.org.il](http://www.chalav-udvash.org.il)**  
For more information, contact:  
infodvash@jafi.org  
T: 972 2 6216385  
F: 972 2 6216230

**Chalav u'Dvash - Hebrew for Preschoolers**

- Teaches conversational Hebrew in Hebrew - Ivrit b' Ivrit
- Involves the child's family in the learning experience
- Teaches through games, music, movement and the arts - developmentally appropriate practice
- Brings Israel and the Jewish calendar into the Diaspora classroom



 הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל  
**Jewish Agency for Israel**



# Narrative or **Truth** – A Response to Francis Nataf

**Susan Handelman**

*Susan Handelman challenges the very postmodern notion of “narratives” as a blurring of truths.*

*“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.”*

William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming”

I am grateful to my colleague Francis Nataf for suggesting that I write a response to his essay. I admire his openness to the opinions of those who differ with him. He is educator and scholar of great sensitivity and intellectual honesty, and has posed an important challenge to us all.

Let me first say where I do agree with him: Jews have not been doing a good job teaching the Arab-Israeli conflict. Our approach is ineffective and outmoded – be it for Jewish day schools, students in Universities, or the general public in Israel and the Diaspora. The consequences are dire. In fact, the consequences of failing, now that Israel’s existence has been threatened in unprecedented ways in the public sphere in the West, and by the President of Iran, may be life-and-death.

Self-criticism is a Jewish and Western democratic value. It is indeed important to play close attention to what Nataf calls the

“Palestinian narrative,” the Arab account of their encounter with Zionism. But as Nataf also recognizes, it’s an exceedingly difficult and risky task, enmeshed in larger clashes of cultures and values.

I’d like to begin my response by first discussing one of those larger frameworks: “postmodern” views of history, truth and ethics underlying key parts of Nataf’s analysis. I want to then examine some problems in postmodernism, and especially its current application to the Arab-Israeli conflict and education, and finally suggest some alternatives.

## **The Palestinian “Narrative” and Postmodernism**

For those unfamiliar with postmodernism, let me try to explain it “on one foot.” Postmodernism is a philosophical reaction to Enlightenment notions of rationality, objectivity, and ability to gain

sure knowledge about the world. A basic postmodern move is to claim that there are no objective facts, only constructed interpretations. All we have to work with in dealing with the world, then, are a variety of “narratives.” So where the word “narrative” was once used mostly for literature and fiction, it is now applied to the discourses of science, history, medicine, law, politics.

Every narrative, the argument further goes, is at bottom an expression of a particular set of values or “ideology.” Narratives acquire political strength through the “power of a dominant class” to enforce a version. There is no “Grand Narrative,” to use Jean-Francois Lyotard’s term, or “transcendent value” that stands above all the various narratives, and through which one can interpret and evaluate them. There are no universal values.



*Susan Handelman is Chair of the Department and Professor of English at Bar-Ilan University, and previously at the University of Maryland. She has written books on rabbinic thought and postmodern theory, and edited collections of essays on contemporary women’s Torah writing, on Jewish education, and on psychoanalysis and religion. Her new book is “Love at the End”: The Student/Teacher Relation in Classical Jewish Thought and Contemporary Theory.*

Postmodern thinkers, then, often engage in “destabilizing Grand Narratives” that had been taken for transcendent or all-encompassing truths. This endeavor also requires one to simultaneously acknowledge how one’s own stance is partial, and one’s own position is only another “narrative” among others. One must allow other narratives “to interrupt”

**... criteria for judging the credibility, the honesty or dishonesty of narratives, has been lost in the imperative to empathize with the other’s narrative, and the critique of “objective truth.”**

one’s own, “listen to the other,” sometimes even to the extent of “privileging the other.” Otherwise, one is deemed to be repressive and violent.

There is an attractive moral stance here, especially for Jews whose traditions of self-criticism and sensitivity to the suffering of others are so well-developed. As a university professor for the last thirty years, I myself was an early advocate of using postmodernism to understand rabbinic thought. It yielded new understandings of how rabbinic modes of interpretation open up the biblical and talmudic narratives, and grant humans interpretive creativity. Rabbinic thought also “destabilizes” claims to any absolute final knowledge of God, or the text.

A strong dose of philosophical humility is always helpful, even essential. But like all doses, it needs to be in the right proportion to be healthy and effective rather than lethal. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century ended and became the 21<sup>st</sup>, the intensifying global clash of cultures took a new and radically violent turn, in which the Arab-Israeli conflict became enveloped. The application of these postmodern concepts has often led to a harsh critique of the Israeli “Grand Narrative” and almost uncritical acceptance of the Palestinian one. This has been disastrous for both Israelis and Palestinians. It has led to delegitimization of Israel among intellectual Western elites and spilled over into the mass media and popular opinion. Moreover, criteria for judging the credibility, the honesty or dishonesty of

narratives, has been lost in the imperative to empathize with the other’s narrative, and the critique of “objective truth.”

### Day schools

Young people in day schools (and Universities) are at an especially sensitive age where their critical faculties, ethical

and religious sensitivities are just being formed. The influential work of William Perry and his followers has delineated various stages learners go through in confronting new knowledge and ideas. The educator’s task is to prod them to move from their initial position of absolutist thought (*Dualist* – either/or, black and white thinking) to the next level of intellectual complexity, called *Multiplicity* (i.e., there is no One Absolute Right answer but several possible explanations). After *Multiplicity*, students arrive at what Perry calls *Relativism*, a stage where the learner lets go of all firm grounds for truth. This stage is dangerous because the student can easily lapse into the view that “everyone has the right to his or her opinion” and deny the possibility of making any judgments at all. Or become cynical and assume “it’s all just a game.” The educator’s task is to move the student further on to the next stage, which Perry calls *Contextual Relativism*. This means to help the student know how make judgments and personal commitments despite the lack of absolute certain grounds.

It’s a difficult process for the learner to negotiate, and requires both challenge and support. It’s also interesting that Perry’s description of the stages of student cognitive development parallels the larger postmodern cultural problems I described above. The same danger lies in moving from the claim there are no “objective historical facts” but rather a multiplicity of interpretations – to then saying, “all narratives are equal, and can’t be judged.”

So our task, especially in the education of day school and university students is to help them develop standards by which to evaluate “narratives” and the *intentionality* behind them. In our postmodern times, students need also to learn to analyze, evaluate, and employ the rhetoric of images and acquire a “visual literacy,” since so much of the Arab-Israeli conflict is presented to them via the media and internet.

As Gerald Graff and others have pointed out, the contemporary educational curriculum has lost what was once one of its key components: the study of rhetoric, and rules of argument. Students have been left clueless about how to effectively evaluate and engage in public discourse. And they need to be able to decipher when a narrative is fair and self-critical, or when it is intended to deceive or demonize, or when it emanates from an entirely different set of values, which can be dangerously inimical. As Robert Scholes has argued, one can grant that there may be no objective “truth,” with a “capital T,” but one can still evaluate interpretations for accuracy, fairness, comprehensiveness. That is, one can demand “truthful-ness”; for, as he writes, “the love of truth seems to me the first protocol of teaching”.

Let’s be more specific and take an example from Nataf’s essay. He writes that a costly but successful Israeli military raid against Fatah and Jordan in March 1968 at Karameh is seen by Palestinians as “their equivalent of the Warsaw ghetto uprising” and a seminal event. If we would teach that, how will the lesson go? Will the teacher present this information in order for students to understand that the Palestinians have their own equivalent “narrative” and one can interpret facts in many ways, and one must also empathize with their view? The “Warsaw Ghetto” analogy (it is unclear if was used by the Palestinians or by Nataf) implies an uprising against vicious oppressor bent on genocide. Sympathy inevitably shifts to the underdog. So were the Israeli soldiers acting like “Nazis” as they are so often portrayed in the Arab and European Press, and even sometimes by the Israel left?

Would there be a role play, perhaps, with students representing both sides of the

story and engaging in a debate to be decided by other students? According to what criteria? Would the teacher help the students evaluate the analogy to the Warsaw ghetto and make distinctions? Would the lesson examine how *ways of labeling and framing and interpreting* can also indeed be lethal? Would there be an accompanying discussion of rabbinic codes on the conduct of war, when it is necessary and justified and when not? If one narrative calls an act of killing a “suicide bombing,” and the other calls it a “martyrdom operation” and “natural response to the occupation,” we need to be able to judge whether it was murder or not – otherwise we are engaged in the “suicide” of thought.

A frustrated student of mine asked a few years ago when we were studying postmodernism in a graduate literary theory course in Israel: “How come there are no postmodern suicide bombers?” In other words, why does the postmodern move of intense self-criticism, epistemological skepticism, destabilizing one’s own identity, and listening to the “other” seem to be mainly on the Jewish side and not on the Arab side.

So will the teacher presenting the Palestinian narrative also have students investigate whether the Palestinian version itself has been constructed with self-criticism, intellectual honesty, and post-modern humility? Is the Palestinian narrative being taught to Palestinian students with the same toleration for the narratives of others that Natarf is requiring of the Jewish students? We must demand such reciprocity for the suggestion to be plausible. And while Natarf recognizes the dangers in his proposal – that students might lose their identification with their own Israeli/Jewish identity – he does not offer an answer to this problem.

### The marketplace of ideas

This returns us to Natarf’s “marketplace of ideas.” Are the various Palestinian narratives adhering to the same rules of argument, evidence, and transparency required in that market place? That famous phrase relies on an analogy between the economic benefits of competitive capitalist

free markets, and the way the best ideas are supposed to emerge through free expression in a liberal democracy.

The analogy does not hold up well for current debates about the Israeli-Arab conflict. The “marketplace” in this conflict is neither free nor rational: bombs are crashing into it, both literally and metaphorically; it is under siege. Contemporary versions of the conflict have little to do with the kind of medieval intellectual and theological arguments Maimonides was speaking of his in his *da mah lehashiv*. As Richard Landes

has noted, free Western democratic societies have been able to give birth to postmodern skepticism; unfree Arab regimes stifle dissent, and often encourage “Grand Narratives of victimization.” That’s a classically pre-modern way for authoritarian regimes to deflect responsibility: finding a scapegoat. Historically, he continues, those kind of narratives reinforce the victimization of their peoples, and do not free them. And the catastrophic history of the Palestinians and their inability to build any kind civil society over the last sixty years reflects that.





Landes has also investigated the phenomenon he calls “Pallywood,” the conscious altering and doctoring by Palestinians of images and narratives intended for Western consumption. We all remember the famous accusations and television images of the purported Israeli “massacre at Jenin” in Spring 2002 which caused a storm in the world-wide press and damaged Israel. But the Israeli military had deliberately chosen not to bomb the city from the air, instead conducting a house-to-house operation of only five blocks in the Jenin refugee camp, so as to minimize civilian casualties. This came at a great cost to Israel – 23 soldiers lost. Rather than the hundreds of dead claimed by Palestinians, 56 Palestinians were killed, most of them

### **Da mah lehashiv – Beyond Narrative**

If it is “war by other means,” then should the Jewish response be the traditional *da mah lehashiv*, to use Nataf’s term? Of course, the Rabbis were not always calm multi-culturalists whose response was to politely debate the opponent. They were also quite realistic and adamant about how to deal with one’s existential opponents, be they external or internal. Historical circumstances also forced upon them varied responses.

So what does one do when an enemy is using highly sophisticated “narrative” techniques? For narratives are not neutral, as the postmodern position tells us. When does an intellectual or theological challenge

Finally, I think that when we teach and analyze the conflict, we need to move beyond the notion that all we have is “narratives.” We have to take back and reconfigure the terms by which the conflict has been defined. We need to retrieve the original Hebrew meanings of the words which designate the reality of Israel: place, peoplehood, holiness. We need sophisticated analyses of the meaning in Jewish thought of Hebrew words like *makom*, *am*, *kedushah*, *shalom*. How are those tied together in the meaning of the land of Israel. As the philosopher Wittgenstein famously said, the limits of my language are the limits of my world. Zionism is not reducible to nationalist or historical “narratives,” nor does it begin in 1948, or with Herzl.

**Rather than the hundreds of dead claimed by Palestinians, 56 Palestinians were killed, most of them armed. But once the “Palestinian narrative” took hold in the media and the minds of television viewers around the world, all the later Israeli official clarifications of “facts,” did little to erase the damage or remove the term “Jenin massacre” from the minds of Arabs.**

armed. But once the “Palestinian narrative” took hold in the media and the minds of television viewers around the world, all the later Israeli official clarifications of “facts,” did little to erase the damage or remove the term “Jenin massacre” from the minds of Arabs. In this and other similar cases, some writers even argued – in a caricature of postmodernism – that it does not matter whether it “actually happened” or not, since Israel is responsible for many “massacres of Palestinians” and so it is a “reality.”

Of course, there are many, many “Palestinian narratives,” not just one. Certainly, Jewish students need to learn more in depth about Arab culture, and religion. They need to more deeply understand the complex 1500 year history of Islam, its historical manifestations, its religious tenets, its political history. But when the Palestinian narrative includes Arafat’s proclamation that a Jewish Temple never existed, Jesus was a Palestinian and not a Jew, and there was never any historical continuity of Jewish presence in the Land of Israel, this is a conscious and intended assault on truth, a calculated “war by other means.”

become a political and violent external threat? In what ways can obscure or benign postmodern ideas become allied to visceral hatred of Israel and Jews? How do we account for the unholy alliance of many post-modern intellectuals with pre-modern absolutist Arab regimes?

Chaim Perelman (1912-1984) the great rhetorical theorist in his masterwork *The New Rhetoric*, brilliantly noted that the skeptic and fanatic are two sides of the same coin. Both believe that the criteria for truth can only be Absolute – the skeptic denies one can ever reach it; the fanatic says he or she alone has it. Perelman was a Belgian Jew, philosopher and jurist who himself survived the Nazis, and as a result dedicated his later academic work to understanding the nature of rhetoric, the relations between argument and ethics, facts and values. His insight helps us understand a strange alliance between postmodern skepticism and Islamic jihad. The ideas of rational consensus, the “market place of ideas,” respect for rules of argument, evidence, and liberal democracy are not to be found in either the jihadist or radical postmodern positions.

So we would need also to dig deeper with our students to understand how the Palestinian narrative has been “constructed,” and ask why the martyrdom and jihad narratives have seduced so many in the Arab world, and also in Western elites. The reasons, of course, are complex and there is not space to elaborate. Let me just address one aspect, however, connected to education and psychology.

The famous Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, who himself had escaped to America from Nazi Germany in the 1940’s, wrote an essay called “A Theology of Education” in 1961, about the problems of contemporary education in his book *Theology of Culture*. Writes Tillich:

One could observe how European youth before World War II were longing for symbols in which they could see a convincing expression of the meaning of existence. They desired to be initiated into these symbols which demanded unconditional surrender, even if they showed very soon their demonic-destructive character. The young ones wanted something *absolutely serious*

[italics his] – in contrast to the playing with cultural goods. They wanted something for which they could sacrifice themselves, even if it was distorted religious-political aim. (152)

It is not difficult to see the parallels between Tillich's description of pre-World War II European malaise, and contemporary

in Hebrew, the word for "history" is *toldot*, from the root meaning "to give birth, to engender." *Toldot* are much more than "narratives" – history is the engendering of generations, to bring forth something, to enact God's designs, and to choose life. Our own claim to the land of Israel is tied into a holy mission given to us by God.

## A Hamas leader famously said that his people would in the end win, "Because the Jews love life, but we love death more."

Islamic religious-political movements which also preach a surrender to absolutes, and commit horrific violence in their name. Contemporary postmodern Western culture, with its extreme skepticism and loss of faith in traditional religious belief, is unable to grasp the motivation of these kinds of pre-modern mentalities. And what is the Jewish answer to a similar search among Jewish youth today, who seek expression of the meaning of existence?

On a broader level, the mission of the Jew in history is prophetic one; the role of Israel is part of a long process of universal redemption and repair of the world. As the great contemporary French educator, R. Leon Askenazi ("Manitou") has stressed,

A Hamas leader famously said that his people would in the end win, "Because the Jews love life, but we love death more." But we Jews have a famous verse in the biblical Song of Songs (8:6), that "Love is as strong as death." I am sure Nataf joins me in yearning to educate our students with love for the Land of Israel, the People of Israel, the Torah of Israel, and the God of Israel so that we may vanquish those who "love death more," and bring redemption to the rest of the world, which now is caught up in the same battle.

### References

Ashkenazi, R. Leon. ("Manitou"). *La Parole et L'Ecrit: Penser la tradition juive aujourd'hui*. Ed Marcel Goldmann. Paris:Albin Michel, 1999

--- *Sod ha-Ivri:Yesodot ha-Emunah L'Ohr Pesukei ha-Torah*. Tran., Gabriella ben Shmuel. Ed. Israel Pibko. Jerusalem, 2005.

Graff, Gerald. *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993

Handelman, Susan. *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Scholem, Benjamin, and Levinas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

*The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1982

"The 'Torah' of Criticism and the Criticism of Torah: Recuperating the Pedagogical Moment." In Kepnes, Steven, ed. *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age* New York: New York University Press 1996

Landes, Richard. [www.theaugeanstables.com/](http://www.theaugeanstables.com/)

<http://seconddraft.org/>

Lyotard, Jean- Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Perelman, Chaim and Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969

Perry, William. *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970

Scholes, Robert. *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Tillich, Paul. *A Theology of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.



**Day School Partnership Programs in Israel**

**8th thru 12th graders • Ten days to 19 weeks**

The Alexander Muss High School in Israel is dedicated to engaging teens and helping them **discover, explore** and **embrace** their connection to the heritage and culture and land of Israel.

Let us work together to bring this journey through Israel's living history into the hearts of your students and faculty.

Over 3 decades of successful experiential study and travel

Tailored programs to fit YOUR school's unique vision and mission

Providing a unique campus atmosphere at the Mosenson Youth Village, Hod Hasharon



To learn more about our Day School Partnerships, contact us at 800-327-5980, or [dayschools@amiie.org](mailto:dayschools@amiie.org)



# Enhancing the Zionist Identity of a School

by Lee Buckman

*In this issue we introduce a new feature – an action research project conducted by a participant in The Lookstein Center’s Principals’ Program. Lee Buckman investigated the effectiveness of programming on increasing student awareness of the school’s Zionist ethos.*

Two years ago, in May 2006, I was sitting in Tzefat with our 12th graders on their month-long senior Israel trip. After Shabbat dinner two students led their peers in a values clarification exercise about the definition of a good Zionist.

The next day I wanted to press them further on their understanding of Zionism. I decided to present a follow-up question to the group and ask whether or not they thought their school was Zionist.

Given that this conversation was taking place in Israel, I had expected their response to be affirmative. And yet, the students’ responses were mixed. Some said that the Frankel Jewish Academy was not a Zionist school. A few said it was. Others said they did not know.

I was surprised. After all, this discussion was taking place in Israel with a group of students that had sung Hatikva at every weekly assembly for the past four years. They knew first hand that Hebrew was a four-year graduation requirement.

They knew that just a few years earlier our school was one of the few high schools that did not cancel its Israel trip in 2003

at the height of the Second Intifada. In their freshman year, we chartered a 737 jet to Washington, DC to transport the entire student body to participate in the rally in support of Israel on the lawn of the Capitol.

I began to realize that although one could recount numerous programs, activities, and dramatic moments that could define the school as Zionist, these events were not connected one to the other in the minds of our students. No organizing principle connected or drove these commitments.

As part of an action research project, I set out to create these connections and thereby heighten the Zionist ethos of the school. To do this, I developed a theory of action, a plan that I hypothesized would help students understand more clearly the role of Israel in the school’s mission, and sketched out the data that I would need to collect to assess the extent to which I accomplished the task at hand.

## **Theory of Action**

My main hypothesis was that a series

of sustained conversations about the centrality of Israel in the life of the school would help students create the necessary connections.

Initially, I had hoped to establish a heterogeneous committee of students, staff, and board members that would meet regularly to work towards accomplishing these goals. Due to schedule conflicts and logistical problems, this was not practical. Instead, we established a set of parallel conversations around the topic of Zionism in the school. My thinking was that the more that stakeholders talked about the nature of our commitment to Israel, the more Israel would take a central place in the consciousness of the school. That proved to be true.

## *Teacher Engagement*

I decided to begin with the Jewish Studies and Hebrew Language teachers. This cross-departmental collaboration in and of itself was an accomplishment. For most of the school’s history since its inception in 2000, the Hebrew teachers and Rabbis/Bible teachers worked independently.

The more we studied together, the more I realized that it was the Hebrew Language staff, made up mostly of secular or *masorati* Israelis, who carried the vision of Zionism in the school. They planned the Israeli holiday commemorations celebrations such as Yom Hashoah and Yom Ha’atzmaut. It was not a distributed vision or even one we ever discussed explicitly.

The group met every three weeks for over a year and often for two or more hours at a time. Meetings were scheduled ahead of time, agendas were published, minutes were distributed, and substitute teachers were hired whenever necessary. Sometimes these meetings were heated and we would have to repair some damage and re-establish guidelines so that that we could be honest without being hurtful.

Over the course of the year, these faculty members produced a draft of a graduate profile. It described what we collectively hoped students would know, value,

*Rabbi Lee Buckman is Founding Head of School, the Frankel Jewish Academy of Metro Detroit. He was a participant in Lookstein’s Principals’ Program and now serves as a mentor in that program.*



and do by the time they graduated. This document captured the common language and aspirations around which we began to coalesce: A belief that students should shoulder a sense of responsibility for the future of the State of Israel, a commitment to spend a semester or year living in Israel after graduation, and a willingness to grapple with certain questions – How does love of Israel not simply help Israel but define them as Jews? How does Israel enrich and fit into their religious lives?

Once we had drafted this graduate profile we began backwards planning to embed these goals in the curriculum and identified areas where each department could reinforce the curricular objectives of the other. In addition, after some intensive learning

population so that they can help promote long-term programs in Israel. Educating this key opinion-maker in our school had a significant impact as will be evident.

*Student engagement in the conversation*

Our Director of Student Life designed grade level shabbatonim devoted to the theme of Israel. Israelis played a key role.

Our *shenat sheirut* interns were invited, and when these Israelis were unavailable, other young guests from Israel (e.g. Pardes and Hartman interns) helped staff the shabbaton. They shared their autobiography, led activities, and served as a general resource or role model. On *motzaei Shabbat*, time was allocated for “work groups” to brainstorm ways in which the students or

more salient in the school through regular student updates on news from Israel.

At various times throughout the year, we invited representatives from twelve different institutions to introduce their gap-year program to the students. Alumni who had spent a year in Israel were also invited to speak to current students about the impact that their year in Israel had on them.

Slowly and in a deliberate manner, Israel was taking a more prominent place in the consciousness of teachers and students in the school. Throughout the year, we made sure that parents and board members knew that Israel was the focus. I wrote articles and spoke at board meetings. More than that, as we began to crystallize our thinking, we began to share our image of the ideal

**I began to realize that although one could recount numerous programs, activities, and dramatic moments that could define the school as Zionist, these events were not connected one to the other in the minds of our students.**

about various forms of religious Zionism, I wrote a ten-page essay on the religious significance of Israel that helped me clarify my position as Head of School and served as a conversation piece among staff and among students.

Yet, more than any product that we produced, the process was most valuable. Sustained conversations on enhancing the Zionist character of the school, co-planning Israel celebrations, and sharing what each was teaching in his or her own classes – all of these conversations trickled down to our students and help them form a more integrated picture of who we were as a school. They improved collegiality among the Jewish Studies and Hebrew Language Departments and distributed the responsibility for carrying forward a vision of Zionism more evenly among the teachers.

Although we did not extend these conversations too far beyond the Jewish Studies and Hebrew Language teachers, we did hope to do so eventually. In the meantime, the school’s guidance counselors participated in a national mission to Israel for college guidance counselors. The purpose was for counselors that worked in high schools with a large Jewish student

staff could bring more “Israeliness” into the school.

The impact of these shabbatonim was evident immediately. Ninth graders, for example, reported that prior to the shabbaton they did not know the meaning of words like *aliyah* and Zionism, but following the shabbaton they did understand and could participate more intelligently in conversations about the Zionist character of the school.

Older students formed an Israel action committee. Their goal was to make Israel

graduate (the graduate profile) at parent meetings. A special meeting, for example, was convened for 11th grade parents to educate them about MASA-sponsored post-high school programs in Israel. As time went on, the term “gap year” to describe these programs became part of the lexicon.

**Results**

I was interested in knowing what the results were of increasing the number of Israel programs and activities in the school, initiating school-wide conversations at shabbatonim among students about our



connection to Israel, and promoting a year-long experience post-graduation.

To do this, we conducted surveys and focus groups and collected other data to determine whether or not the students and staff were “getting it,” i.e. that Israel was central to the mission of the school and that the school is a Zionist institution. A twelve-question survey (see sidebar) was administered to 9th, 10th, and 11th grade students on the last day of final exams (Seniors had already graduated) in order to investigate the extent to which our students feel connected to Israel and the extent to which the school helped shape their relationship with Israel.

Of 162 students in grades 9 to 11, 127 completed the survey. That constitutes a 78% response rate, a percentage that allows us to make some fairly reliable generalizations. The majority of students (62%) reported having been in Israel, having parents that have been to Israel (80%), and having family or close friends living in Israel (63%).

*Data indicated that students understood the centrality of Israel in the mission*

Students were asked three questions about the place Israel takes in the culture of the school. In response, 44% reported that they felt that the Frankel Jewish Academy, to a great extent, helped them develop their relationship to Israel. Forty-eight percent of the students reported that the school did so to some extent.

Over half the students (56%) felt that the school had done a good job, to a great extent, explaining its relationship to Israel (56%). Thirty-five percent said that the school did so to some extent.

An even higher percentage of students (58%) reported that they felt, to a great extent, that the school had provided sufficient emphasis on Israel. Another 29% felt that the school, to some extent, provided sufficient emphasis on Israel.

*An increased number of graduates chose to spend a year in Israel*

In previous years, an average of four students per graduating class deferred university admissions to spend a year in

Israel. Most chose Orthodox *yeshivot* or seminaries. In 2007, perhaps as a result of our efforts, there was a stunning increase in the number of students that chose to defer college and spend a gap year in Israel. Of the 50 students in the 2007 graduating class, 20 chose to spend their gap year in Israel! Six enrolled in *yeshivot* or seminaries, five in one of Young Judea’s Year Course tracks, and nine in various other contexts (e.g. *Mahal*, *Sherut Le’umi*, Kibbutz, Rimon Music School, etc...).

Much work must still be done to create a new communal norm outside the Orthodox community where a gap year in Israel is viewed as a rite of passage. However, among the 2007 graduates, focus groups were conducted to begin to determine why that class graduating class was different from all others, and they typically said, “going to Israel post-high school seems like the natural things to do from our school.” The truth is that it had not been natural; we were beginning to change the culture of the school and make it natural.

## Conclusions

In contrast to the ambivalent responses among the students in the Class of 2006 a year earlier, which prompted this action research in the first place, students the following year reported much more unanimity in understanding that the Frankel Jewish Academy school was a Zionist institution. They understood that Israel was central to the school’s identity as a Jewish institution. Furthermore, they understood that it was a primary goal to instill in each one of them an attachment to the State of Israel and its people as well as a sense of responsibility for Israel’s welfare.

In terms of their evaluation of the school, the students seemed to feel that the school was doing what it should be doing in terms of Israel engagement. For example, 58% of all respondents reported that, to a great extent, the school provided a sufficient emphasis on Israel. Slightly less than that (56%) reported that, to a great extent, the school did a good job explaining its relationship to Israel. Nearly all (92%) reported that the school helped them either to some extent or to a great extent to develop their relationship with Israel.

## Personal and professional insights due to action research

In addition to the changes made in the school, this action research project, which was the outgrowth of training at the Lookstein Principals’ Program, had contributed much to my thinking and actions as school leader.

First, I adopted a new methodology of thinking about school improvement. It involved formulating a hypothesis on the factors that might lead to change, reflecting ahead of time on what would constitute success, implementing a plan, collecting data to monitor one’s progress, and using those data to make better decisions. In many respects, I became an administrator-researcher. School improvement became an experimental science. I began to ask others to view their work in similar terms and structured around similar questions: What do we think needs to improve? How do we think we can get there? What kind of data can we collect to let us know how we are doing?

Second, the action research opened up conversations in ways that I had not previously been able to do. With discussions taking place on so many levels, I could not control the process. Stakeholders felt freer. Teachers reported that they felt more empowered in the process. They felt I was much more open to their contribution and that I was not looking for a particular result. I, too, felt that conversations were much more open-ended and that there was genuine dialogue.

Third, this action research project helped me and the school become more purposeful. The sustained conversations with teachers and students gave birth to a more clearly defined vision of Zionism. At the same time, they generated significant questions: What does it mean to be a Zionist in the 21st century? Who does and who should carry the vision of Zionism in a school? What language should be used to express those aspirations? These are enduring questions.



PLEASE TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO ANSWER THIS SURVEY. IT DEALS WITH THE ROLE ISRAEL PLAYS IN THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL AND IN YOUR OWN PERSONAL LIFE. THE SURVEY IS ANONYMOUS. CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

**1. Your current grade:**

9<sup>th</sup>                      10<sup>th</sup>                      11<sup>th</sup>                      12<sup>th</sup>

**2. To what extent do you think the Frankel Jewish Academy helps you develop your relationship with Israel?**

1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all              To some extent              To a great extent              Not sure

**3. To what extent do you think the school has done a good job of explaining to students its relationship to Israel?**

1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all              To some extent              To a great extent              Not sure

**4. To what extent do you think the school has provided a sufficient emphasis on Israel in the school?**

1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all              To some extent              To a great extent              Not sure

**5. To what extent do you think FJA students care about Israel?**

1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all              To some extent              To a great extent              Not sure

**6. To what extent do you feel close to other Jews?**

1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all              To some extent              To a great extent              Not sure

**7. To what extent do you feel close to Israelis?**

1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all              To some extent              To a great extent              Not sure

**8. To what extent do you feel close to non-Jewish Americans?**

1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all              To some extent              To a great extent              Not sure

**9. To what extent do you feel that Israel fits into who you are as a Jew?**

1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all              To some extent              To a great extent              Not sure

**10. Have you ever been to Israel?**

Yes                      No

**11. Have your parents ever been to Israel?**

Yes                      No

**12. Do you have family or close friends living in Israel?**

Yes                      No





# Hebrew in the Eyes of a Hasidic Master

## Levi Cooper

Hasidic masters who actively supported and took part in the Zionist enterprise comprise a largely neglected chapter of the Zionist narrative.<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Yaakov Friedman of Husiatyn Tel-Aviv was one of the unique personalities who belonged to this cadre.<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Yaakov Friedman was born in the Romanian town of Buhuși in 1878, the youngest son of Rabbi Yitzhak Friedman (1835-1896) who was the oldest grandson of the famed hasidic master, the regal Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhin (1797-1851). After marrying his second cousin, also a scion of the Ruzhin dynasty, Rabbi Yaakov moved to the home of his father-in-law, Rabbi Yisrael (1858-1949), in the eastern Galician town of Husiatyn. During the battles of World War I, much of Husiatyn was devastated and many of the inhabitants of the town fled. The extended Friedman family was in Frankfurt-am-Main when the war broke out and from there they moved to Vienna, where Rabbi Yaakov became active in Zionist causes.

In 1937 the family made the journey to the Promised Land. Rabbi Yaakov is remembered best for the final twenty years of his life, when he lived in Tel-Aviv. That period – 1937-1956 – was a critical era in Jewish history, a period of tragic destruction followed by miraculous rebirth.

When Rabbi Yaakov Friedman passed away in 1956 he was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Yitzhak Friedman (1900-1968). Rabbi Yitzhak's son who was named after the first Husiatyn Rebbe, Reb Mordechai Shraga, predeceased his father and when Rabbi Yitzhak passed away, the Husiatyn dynasty ended. Today, what remains of

*Levi Cooper is a rabbi in Tzur Hadassah and teaches Jewish Studies at Machon Pardes and other university level programs in Jerusalem.*



**Rabbi Yaakov's discourses were collected under the title *Oholei Yaakov* and he is commonly referred to by the title of this work. It is in these writings that the *Oholei Yaakov's* positive attitude towards Zionism shines forth.**

this branch of the noble Ruzhin hasidic court is the Beit Midrash on Bialik Street in Tel-Aviv that continues to be used for prayer and study and the writings of Rabbi Yaakov and, to a lesser extent, those of his son Rabbi Yitzhak.

Rabbi Yaakov's discourses were collected under the title *Oholei Yaakov*<sup>3</sup> and he is commonly referred to by the title of this work. It is in these writings that the *Oholei Yaakov's* positive attitude towards Zionism shines forth.<sup>4</sup> One facet of the *Oholei*

*Yaakov's* identification with the Zionist enterprise was his position regarding Hebrew. The first recorded reference to Hebrew appears in a discourse dated Shabbat 23<sup>rd</sup> Av 5698 (August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1938):

When the Berlin Haskalah began to spread to Russia, Poland and Galicia, early Maskilim conspired against the [G-d]-fearing youth to turn his heart from the path of faith and tradition, and for this purpose they used pure *Ivrit* and appealing florid style *in order to ensnare the children of Israel by their heart* (Ezekiel 14:5). They wrote books and articles in a manner that draws the heart, and they

recruited many with their glib language. And because of this the Hasidim prevented their sons from studying and from speaking *Lashon HaKodesh*, out of fear lest out of love for the language and phraseology they come to read the books of the Maskilim. But that was just a temporary measure, today there are already those who are for the welfare of the faithful of Israel who have mastered *Lashon HaKodesh* and write beautifully, and the [G-d]-fearing child is no longer forced to drink from the evil waters.

Thus the *Oholei Yaakov* explained that opposition to Hebrew – valid as it may have been in a previous era – was no longer necessary. In saying that the opposition was a “temporary measure”<sup>5</sup> the *Oholei Yaakov* is suggesting that the relevant rule is one that encourages Hebrew use. As the *Oholei Yaakov* himself was aware, the significance of learning the Holy Tongue was not a new value; indeed, he buttressed his claim with citations from undisputable sources and his analysis led him to wonder how others could disregard the language:

And if speaking in *Lashon HaKodesh* is such an important matter, it is surprising that most people denigrate it.

The *Oholei Yaakov* did not make mention of hasidic sources that speak in favor

of the Holy Tongue, though those too abound.<sup>6</sup> Even the *Oholei Yaakov*'s older contemporary, the hasidic master and town rabbi in Munkatch, Rabbi Hayim Elazar Shapira (1871-1937) – the arch pre-State anti-Zionist who could never be “accused” of sympathy for the Zionist cause – wrote:<sup>7</sup>

... *Lashon HaKodesh* is the choicest language from amongst the languages of the ancients...<sup>8</sup>

the *Oholei Yaakov*'s statement is nevertheless qualitatively different on a number of fronts.

First, as apparent in the above passage, the *Oholei Yaakov* used the terms *Ivrit* and *Lashon HaKodesh* interchangeably: The term *Ivrit* can be translated as Modern Hebrew and refers to the resuscitation of a rarified language as part of the Zionist endeavor; *Lashon HaKodesh*, the Holy Tongue, denotes the biblical language of our ancestors used primarily for liturgical purposes. Early statements in favor of the language referred to *Lashon HaKodesh* because they predated *Ivrit*. From the beginning of the Zionist awakening the term for the language carried significance: *Ivrit* indicated a certain identity with Zionist efforts, while *Lashon HaKodesh* suggested a rejection of this enterprise.

In this light, the interchangeable use of the two terms by the *Oholei Yaakov* is significant: Rabbi Yaakov felt that *Ivrit* was merely the modern version of *Lashon HaKodesh* and its natural offspring. The only reason to object to the use of the language – the allure of the Jewish Enlightenment – was no longer relevant. In the pre-State era, this was indeed a loaded issue.<sup>9</sup> Thus the assumed identity between *Lashon HaKodesh* and *Ivrit* lead the *Oholei Yaakov* to cite classic, pre-Zionist sources extolling *Lashon HaKodesh* as prooftexts for the value of *Ivrit*.<sup>10</sup>

The assumed identity between *Ivrit* and *Lashon HaKodesh* is far from obvious and many objected to the modern language on the grounds that it was desecration of the Holy Tongue. In a lengthy letter laden with sources, the leader of the Lubavitch Hasidim, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn (1860-1920) known by the acronym Rashab, opposed the language on these very grounds. The Rashab even saw this sacrilege in the very term *Ivrit*:<sup>11</sup>

But those who suggested making *Lashon HaKodesh* into a spoken language and who held this position are removing it from the holy to the mundane, and therefore they changed its name and they call it the language of *Avar*<sup>12</sup>, since they removed it from its holiness. Israel

# Zachor...

A KIT FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TO STUDY AND MEMORIALIZE THE HOLOCAUST



Make this year's Yom HaShoah commemoration a meaningful one with the Zachor Kit, a detailed guide to planning Holocaust remembrance ceremonies.

## KIT INCLUDES:

- Step-by-step Guide • Memorial Candles
- Candle-lighting Statements • Songs and Prayers

Ideal for middle school grades and higher. Available online or in our Pickman Museum Shop for \$32.95.

This kit is made possible by generous funding from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany: The Rabbi Israel Miller Fund for Shoah Research, Documentation and Education.



EDMOND J. SAFRA PLAZA | 36 BATTERY PLACE  
WWW.MJHNYC.ORG | 646.437.4213

## From the Classics – Hebrew in the Eyes of a Hasidic Master

was called by the name *Ivri*, before the Giving of the Torah ... but after the Giving of the Torah there is no place in Torah where they are called *Ivrim*.<sup>13</sup>

The claim that *Ivrit* was a desecration or at least a de-sanctification of *Lashon HaKodesh* may have been well founded; this old-new language was part of the secular Zionist movement to create a new Jew that had at one time roots in the biblical past but was not obligated by Jewish law as it developed during the vicissitudes of the Diaspora years. Yet the *Oholei Yaakov* chose to ignore this secular goal, lauding the language on its own merits much as he extolled the virtues of the Land of Israel and later the nascent State of Israel despite the stated secular ambitions and visible tendencies.

Less than a year after his first recorded mention of Hebrew, the *Oholei Yaakov* returned to the theme, once again praising the virtues of Hebrew usage and explaining the opposition as no longer relevant. In this passage, dated 20<sup>th</sup> Adar 5699 (March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1939), the *Oholei Yaakov* went further lauding the use of Hebrew in Torah institutions and questioning those who continued to oppose Hebrew:

Indeed during the period of the Haskalah the Hasidim stopped themselves and their offspring from studying *Lashon HaKodesh* properly and from conversing in it, for the Maskilim used lucid *Lashon HaKodesh* with an evil intent: To introduce improper ideas in the hearts of those who read their books. But this

censure was merely a temporary measure, now there is no longer any reason for concern. The children speak *Lashon HaKodesh* in their Talmud Torahs [elementary schools], in the Yeshivot it is the language of instruction. [G-d]-fearing rabbis preach in *Lashon HaKodesh*. And if there are people who follow the path of Torah and wish to introduce *Lashon HaKodesh* while learning

### The *Oholei Yaakov* acclaimed educational settings where Hebrew was used as the language of instruction.

Torah, in synagogues and in houses of study, and others come with concerns stemming from “fear of sin” – this fear must be examined, lest there is some personal bias to this.

The *Oholei Yaakov* acclaimed educational settings where Hebrew was used as the language of instruction.<sup>14</sup> He continued reporting a comment from his revered father-in-law, suggesting that he too was in favor of the renewed use of Hebrew:

My teacher and master, my father-in-law, the righteous rabbi, may he merit good and bountiful days (may the memory of the righteous be a blessing)<sup>15</sup> told me that he heard that in one of the houses of prayer (Yavneh<sup>16</sup>) there is a certain wise scholar who publicly teaches [Talmud] Yerushalmi in *Lashon HaKodesh*, and there are those who question this out of “fear of sin” – his honorable holiness<sup>17</sup> was surprised by this.

In the continuation of this passage the *Oholei Yaakov* casts further aspersions on the integrity of this so called “fear of sin”. The *Oholei Yaakov* never fully defines this “fear of sin”, though it would appear that he is referring to a concern that the use of Hebrew would lead the speaker from the path of Tradition. Characteristically, Rabbi Yaakov avoids identifying by name the persons who made this claim.

The *Oholei Yaakov*'s claim that previous dangers of the language were no longer relevant, however, was by no means an accepted position. We saw how the *Oholei Yaakov* lauded the use of Hebrew in educational settings. Some twenty years prior to the *Oholei Yaakov*'s discourse the pioneer of women's Jewish education in Eastern Europe – a slightly younger contemporary of Rabbi Yaakov – Sarah Schenirer (1883-1935), made a principled decision to use Yiddish as the language of Torah instruction asserting that Yiddish would serve as an effective barrier to assimilation. To be sure, Sarah Schenirer, who was not fluent in Hebrew and even had difficulty accessing texts that did not have accompanying Yiddish translation, was probably faced with the choice of Yiddish or Polish. Nevertheless, her principled decision reflected the widespread view that Yiddish was a linguistic safeguard of Tradition.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the most engaging aspect of the *Oholei Yaakov* discourse appears in his interpretation of a statement attributed to the mishnaic sage, Rabbi Meir:<sup>19</sup>

Whoever lives in the Land of Israel, and reads the *shema* in the morning and in the evening and speaks *Lashon HaKodesh*, behold

Exclusively distributed by Israel Connection

עברית במוקוס  
Hebrew in  
**FOCUS**

46 poster-size photographs of Israeli society for the teaching of Hebrew

For more information please call:  
W. Coast (Steve) 310.274.6657 E. Coast (Tamar) 201.906.8016

[www.MyHebrewBooks.com](http://www.MyHebrewBooks.com)

Israel Connection  
www.MyHebrewBooks.com

9595 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 502 Beverly Hills, CA 90212 Fax: (310) 274-4272  
office@myhebrewbooks.com



he has a portion in the world to come.

The *Oholei Yaakov* commented:

See that Rabbi Meir enumerated three things: The Land of Israel, reading *shema*, *Lashon HaKodesh*. Whoever lives in the Land of Israel acknowledges the first and the last [of the enumerated items], but with regard to the middle [item] – accepting the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven<sup>20</sup> which is the primary value, the central point – this is acknowledged only by those who are for the welfare of the faithful of Israel. And we should pray before God: And they will all accept the yoke of your sovereignty<sup>21</sup> and then the redemption will surely be.

Rabbi Meir's statement enumerates three items that serve as entry passes to the world to come. The *Oholei Yaakov's* nuanced reading sees Rabbi Meir as presenting a troika of values, albeit with an internal hierarchy.<sup>22</sup> Giving primacy to the yoke of Heaven is understood; indeed, the *Oholei Yaakov* often lauded Zionist achievements only to lament the lack of an accompanying fidelity to Tradition. It is however surprising that the value of speaking Hebrew ranks so near the Land of Israel and the yoke of Heaven!<sup>23</sup>

A final aspect of the *Oholei Yaakov's* thought that bears highlighting is his approach to the goals of Hebrew instruction. In his earliest comment on Hebrew, the *Oholei Yaakov* opened by quoting Maimonides commentary on the Mishna:<sup>24</sup>

And be as careful with a light commandment as with a weighty one, for you know not the reward given for the commandments.

Seeking to identify the “light” and “weighty” commandments, Maimonides gave examples:

One must be careful regarding a commandment that people think of as “light”, such as rejoicing on festivals and learning *Lashon HaKodesh*, as with a commandment whose weightiness has been expounded such as circumcision and *tzitzit* and slaughtering the Paschal lamb.

All the commandments mentioned by Maimonides have a clear biblical source bar one: Learning Hebrew. The *Oholei Yaakov* – following other super-commentaries – cites a possible source<sup>25</sup> which leads him to an interesting conclusion about Maimonides:

That which Maimonides said – “such as learning *Lashon HaKodesh*” – the meaning of “learning” is in order to speak *Lashon HaKodesh*.

At first blush, Maimonides never spoke about using *Lashon HaKodesh* as a spoken language; he may have advocated studying *Lashon HaKodesh* for entirely different ends.<sup>26</sup> It is the *Oholei Yaakov* who draws the conclusion – wholly in line with Zionist priorities – that the goal of studying the language is that it should be spoken.

Let me conclude by sharing an anecdote that, I imagine, sounds familiar to many of our generation: Growing up in Australia, I was urged by my great-grandfather, Jonas Pushett, a native of pre-World War II Warsaw, to study his mother tongue. “You can travel the world on Yiddish,” he would tell me. He would regale me with tales of how he perchanced upon fellow Jews in distant lands – my native Australia being one of those “distant lands” – and was only able to communicate with them in Yiddish, the international language.<sup>27</sup>

Today the Jewish landscape is clearly different and the Holy Tongue of *Ivrit* is the vehicular language of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

## Notes

1 Thanks to my father, Hersh Cooper, who with much enthusiasm first brought the *Oholei Yaakov* to my attention.

I would also like to acknowledge the students of my bi-weekly *chassidus* class 2007/8 in the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem. Together we dedicated the year of study to the writings of Rabbi Yaakov Freidman and while preparing for class I discovered the passages presented herein.

For the relationship between the hasidic movement and the Land of Israel and later the nascent State, a good starting point is the collections of essays in הרב ד"ר שמעון פדרבוש (עורך), *החסידות וציון*, ירושלים תשכ"ג (herein: “Federbush, Hassidut”). A most significant study of hasidic responses to Zionism appears to be: יצחק אלפסי, *החסידות ושיבת ציון*, תל-אביב תשמ"א.

2 Biographic material on Rabbi Yaakov Friedman (and indeed on the entire Husiatyn branch of the Ruzhin dynasty) is incomplete and primarily exists of encyclopedia entries. On Rabbi Yaakov see Yitzhak Goldshlag's entries in Yitzhak Alfasi's encyclopedia: חלק: ירושלים תשל"ב, חלק: *אנציקלופדיה של הצינונות הדתית*, ירושלים תשס"א, עמ' רמד-רמו (herein: “Goldshlag, Tziyonut” and “Goldshlag, Hassidut”). See also Alfasi's recent entry in his 75-76 תורת החסידות – תולדות, דברי תורה והגות, כרך ראשון: ירושלים תשס"ז, עמ' 75-76.

See also: מאיר צבי גרזמן, *אמרו צדיק – קובץ סיפורי מופת על אדמו"רי בית הוסיאטין*, רמת-2006 this collection offers wonder stories of the leaders of the Husiatyn dynasty. A brief biography of Rabbi Yaakov is offered on pp. 312-314 followed by four tales (pp. 315-333). A significant contribution to understanding Rabbi Yaakov's thought has been made by Rabbi Dr Yehuda Brandes whose father grew up in Husiatyn. Brandes published an article and later an accessible survey of Rabbi Yaakov's roots, history and thought as reflected in his writings: יהודה ברנדס, “אהלי יעקב” – דרשה חסידיית עם הקמת המדינה, בתוך: שמחה זו (עורך), קובץ הצינונות הדתית – מוקדש לכבודו של ד"ר זרח והרפטיג, ירושלים תשס"ב, עמ' 631-623; יהודה ברנדס, במלכות הקדושה: ביקור בהיכלו של האדמו"ר מהוסיאטין – אדמו"ר ציוני בתל אביב, אלון שבות (herein: “Brandes, Husiatyn”). See there footnotes 4 and 8 for additional references.

Most recently in 2007, in commemoration of 50 years since Rabbi Yaakov's passing, a 24 page booklet was published in Tel Aviv, with the title: *אדמו"ר הקדוש והטהור רבי יעקב מהוסיאטין זי"ע* – תולדות, אמרי קדש, שיחות, אגרות וסיפורים לזכרו. במלאות חמישים שנה להסתלקותו. י"ח במרחשון תשי"ז – תשס"ז. For the English reader, two volumes that contain histories of the Ruzhin hasidic dynasties, relate, *inter alia*, to Husiatyn and Rabbi Yaakov: Yisroel Friedman, *The Golden Dynasty*, Jerusalem 1997, pp. 224-242; Menachem Brayer, *The House of Rizhin – Chassidus and the Rizhiner Dynasty*, preview edition 2003, first edition 2008, pp. 419-426. Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. Ruzhin, Israel, vol. 14, pp. 531-532 outlines the lineage and Tzvi M. Rabinowicz (editor), *The Encyclopedia of Hasidism*, New Jersey and London 1996 (herein: “Rabinowicz, Encyclopedia”), p. 139 gives a concise biographical sketch.

3 This work is a collection of Rabbi Yaakov's notes from discourses he presented after his arrival in the Land of Israel in 1937. We have no record of his talks prior to his arrival in the British Mandate of Palestine.

This work was first published posthumously in 1968 and again in 1984 with corrections and an index. A second volume of *Oholei Yaakov* was also printed in 1997. A new edition of the first volume was recently reprinted in 2006. Despite being recently reprinted, the first volume is unfortunately not widely available. The second volume – which is currently unavailable – includes discourses from Rabbi Yaakov's son and successor under the title *Siah Yitzhak*. Recently more material from Rabbi Yitzhak has come to light and the publication of a more complete volume of *Siah Yitzhak* is planned (communication from Rabbi Yaakov Schreiber of Jerusalem, publisher of the latest edition and son of the publisher of the previous editions, June 2008).

The writings of the *Oholei Yaakov* have yet to be rendered in English; all translation presented herein are my own.

4 See Federbush, Hassidut, pp. 227-229 on the Zionist activity of Rabbi Yisrael Friedman and of his son-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov (the entire chapter in Federbush's collection was penned by the aforementioned Rabbi Dr Menachem Brayer (d. 2007) son-in-law of the previous Boyaner rebbe and father of the

current Boyaner rebbe. In this article he explores the attitudes towards Zionism of scions from the Ruzhin dynasty); Goldshlag, Tziyonut, p. 421-423, As the title to Brandes' volume implies, a central theme of his work is highlighting the Zionism of the *Oholei Yaakov*.

5 The *Oholei Yaakov* uses the Hebrew term *הוראת שעה* which has a legal connotation of a temporary regulation that is contra to normative law; see, for instance in the writings of Maimonides (ד, רמב"ם, הלכות סנהדרין כד, ד), and similarly (ד, רמב"ם, הלכות ממרים ב, ד).

6 For example: Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdychiv wrote (פ' דברים א, א) "קדושת לוי, כי הלשון של כל האומות הוא החיות מן האומה ולשון הקודש הוא של ישראל לבד (ה.":

7 This statement appears in his commentary to the Torah (פ' יגש), חיים ושלום, פ' יגש) which is peppered with vehement accusations against all form of Jewish political organization, in particular Zionism.

8 The Munkatcher Rebbe recorded a dream from the night of 9<sup>th</sup> Shevat 5683 (January 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>, 1923) in which he received an insight into the mystical pedigree of *Lashon HaKodesh* as opposed to [Aramaic] translation (דברי תורה, (מהדורא תניינא, אות טב

9 The Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel refers to "the revival of the Hebrew language" as one of the events in the chain of national reawakening and return to the Land of Israel. The prominence given by the Zionist movement to the Hebrew language was enshrined in the first statute enacted after the establishment of the State of Israel that repealed any law that required the use of the English language (Law and Administration Ordinance of 1948, Section 15(b)).

10 This is akin to employing expressions of pre-Zionist yearnings for a return to the Holy Land in rhetoric relating to the modern Zionist endeavor; a topic that is beyond the scope of this paper.

11 This letter has been published in two places: יהושע מונדישין, מגדל עז, כפר אגרות קודש מאת כ"ק אדמו"ר מוהרש"ב נ"ע, and from there in: עמ' טז-כב (herein: "Rashab, Letters"). The letter was penned in the final years of the Rashab's life around 1916. The Rashab was a strong opponent of Zionism and from the end of the letter, it is clear that in his mind the two issues – Zionism and the use of Hebrew as a spoken language – were inseparable.

12 Meaning crossed over, transgressed or referring to the past. *Ivri* or the feminine form *Ivrit* is the adjective of the noun *Avar*.

13 In a letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> Tammuz 5677 (July 10<sup>th</sup> 1917), the limits of the use of *Lashon HaKodesh* according to the Rashab are clarified (Rashab, Letters, letter 482, pp. 853-854):

"לפ"ד אין זה נכון מה שעושים הפרוגרמא בל' רוס' ויה' צ"ל הכל בלה"ק ויה' גם העתק רוסית. וכבודו בין שאין כוונתי ח"ו משום שפת האומה, וכמו שדורשים בזה הדרשים. רק מפני שכל עניני אחינו היראים צריכים להיות נכתבים בלה"ק, וכמו שאנו כותבים מכתבים בלה"ק ולא בל' אחר."

During Pesah 1943 – only a few years after the *Oholei Yaakov's* statements – the Rashab's son and successor, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950) offered a harsh formulation that echoed his father's position on both Zionism and the use of Hebrew.

A unpredictable aspect of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's position is that he lauded the introduction of new words that were not of taken from Jewish sources, expressing the hope that the new language would one day contain no words from *Lashon HaKodesh*.

Interestingly, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's statements were recorded in the original Yiddish, though they were later made available in *Lashon HaKodesh* (ר' יוסף יצחק) שניאורסאהן, לקוטי דבורים, ברוקלין תשנ"ב, בימי חג הפסח ה'תש"ג, סדר שני, אות לג, עמ' תי-תכ; ר' אברהם תנך גליצנשטיין (מתרגם), ליקוטי דיבורים – שיחות קודש של כ"ק אדמו"ר (רבי יוסף יצחק נ"ע שניאורסאהן מליובאוויטש, כפר חב"ד תש"ג, עמ' 594-595).

I was unable to find similar statements in the writings of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's prolific son-in-law and successor as leader of the Lubavitch Hasidim, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994). In a letter from 1953 Rabbi Menachem Mendel advised against *changing* the language of instruction from Yiddish (עמ' כז) (אגרות קודש, כרך ח, עמ' כז). Approximately one year later he also spoke out against the method known as *Ivrit Belvrit*, primarily on educational grounds, although he mentioned the non-Traditional roots of the method (אגרות קודש, כרך י, עמ' כט).

14 Rabbi Yaakov himself was a renowned orator who spoke a number of languages (Goldshlag, Tziyonut, p.421 and Goldshlag, Hassidut, p. 255; Brandes, Husiatyn, note 2). His discourses were delivered in Yiddish, though as per accepted custom he wrote his notes for posterity in Hebrew (on writing in Hebrew see also below footnote 19).

15 This talk was originally delivered and transcribed in 1939 when the *Oholei Yaakov's* father-in-law and predecessor as Husiatyn Rebbe was still alive. Later when it was printed the original text – שליט"א – was retained and the appropriate appendage for the deceased righteous – זצ"ל – added in brackets.

16 This appears bracketed in the original text and like other bracketed words may have been added later (see above note 23). If this assumption is correct, it would appear that the name of the synagogue was added later since Rabbi Yisrael was lauding its efforts.

17 This honorific – כבוד קדושתו – is used to denote a leader of a hasidic court.

18 The comparison with Sarah Schenirer is fascinating for she, like Rabbi Yaakov, spent time in Vienna during World War I. Like Rabbi Yaakov, her time in Vienna was formative: In her memoirs, Sarah Schenirer recounted how she was inspired to her calling while in Vienna. At that same time in Vienna, Rabbi Yaakov was becoming active in Zionist causes.

For more on Sarah Schenirer generally, see my earlier article: "The Rightful Heirs of Sarah Schenirer", *Jewish Educational Leadership*, Vol. 6:3, Spring 2008, pp. 58-63; particularly footnote 9 – Sarah Schenirer's memoirs regarding her time in Vienna, and footnote 25 – the issue of language of instruction.

19 Yalkut Shimoni, Haazinu, section 1046; Isaiah, section 439. Slightly different versions of this statement appear in earlier sources: Y. Shabbat 3c, 1:3; Y. Shekalim 47c, 3:4. These earlier sources contain a fourth element, which is not relevant to our current discussion – scrupulously eating even unconsecrated food in a state of ritual purity.

20 The twice daily reading of shema is considered a declaration of acceptance of the Almighty's singular dominion.

21 This is a paraphrase from the prayers recited before the morning shema describing the angels' conduct before the Almighty: "שְׁמַיִם זֶה מְקוֹהוֹ".

22 Other commentators understood the three to be linked by a common factor, not as three sterling values. See, for instance, the commentary Berit Avraham to Yalkut Shimoni, Haazinu, section 1046:

23 Rabbi Meir's statement enumerates three (or four, see above note 27) items that serve as passes to the world to come. The *Oholei Yaakov* reads the statement as presenting three values that despite an internal hierarchy reflect a triumvirate of values.

24 M. Avot 1:2. Maimonides, Commentary to the Mishna, *loc. cit.*

25 Sifrei, Eikev 46 (11:19): "כשהתינוק מתחיל לדבר, אביו מדבר עמו בלשון הקודש ... The *Oholei Yaakov* quotes a slightly different version. ומלמדו תורה ...

26 Thus, for instance, a common approach was that passages advocating learning *Lashon HaKodesh* were talking about for the purpose of studying Torah, not for speaking. In the hasidic milieu, this position was voiced by the Rashab (Rashab, Letters, p. 483; 821-822) and later by Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1888-1979) the Satmar rebbe (מאמר לשון הקודש, סימן א).

27 A popular quip describes the Esperanto conferences of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first session of the conference would be dedicated to the importance of an international language that defied borders. The second session would deal with the success in disseminating the new language. In that vein the day would continue, until the lunch break when the participants would gather to eat and chat in the real international language, Yiddish!



# Teaching Israel from B to Y: An Incomplete Guide for the Jewish Educator

## David Breakstone

As we celebrate 60 years of Jewish statehood and marvel at the transformation of the country over the past six decades, it is important that those of us involved in Israel education take advantage of the opportunity not only to rejoice, but also to reflect.

- Has the field evolved over the years in keeping with the dramatic developments in Israeli society, the radical changes in the realities of the Jewish world, and the evolving dynamics of Israel-Diaspora relations?
- Have we succeeded in articulating a philosophy of teaching Israel that does justice to the subject matter?
- Are the tools we have created adequate to the task at hand?
- Are we even able to express what our goals and objectives are in teaching Israel?

As I begin contemplating these questions myself, Pesah is only a few weeks behind us. After a brief moment of exulting in our freedom, we hesitantly embark on an arduous journey to some faraway Promised Land that only a couple of us will actually complete. More than once we have second thoughts about the wisdom and practicality of what it is that we have set out to do. Are we ready for the responsibilities that come with the privileges of sovereignty?

*Dr. David Breakstone has been engaged in the field of teaching Israel for more than 30 years. He currently serves as the head of the Department for Zionist Activities of the World Zionist Organization, where he is also represents the worldwide Masorti (Conservative) Movement on the Zionist Executive.*



**Surely if each of us accompanied our forebears as they left Egypt, and stood with them at Mt. Sinai as the *shofar* sounded, then we most certainly also attended the First Zionist Congress at which Herzl founded the Jewish State, and were present 50 years later when David Ben Gurion declared its independence.**

Surely if each of us accompanied our forebears as they left Egypt, and stood with them at Mt. Sinai as the *shofar* sounded, then we most certainly also attended the First Zionist Congress at which Herzl founded the Jewish State, and were present 50 years later when David Ben Gurion declared its independence. Still, the question begs asking: “What are the real meanings for us today of the Land of Israel and the State of Israel,

the longings for which have been so fundamental to our tradition and the evolution of our collective consciousness?”

We may not be ready to grapple with the question on our own, but sooner or later those sitting in our classrooms will force us to.

- The wise child asks: *Why did our sages assert that the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel is equal in merit to all the rest of the commandments combined?*
- The rebellious child asks: *Why do we proclaim “Next Year in Jerusalem” when*



*we never really intend to get up and go there?*

- The simple child asks: *How is it possible to fashion a state that is both Jewish and democratic?*
- As to the child unable to enquire, well, we are uncertain as to the lesson we wish to impart.

How many of those teaching Israel today are adequately prepared to stand before these four students? Can we help them find answers to their questions when we

**I am *not* proposing that the objective need be bringing all of our students to Israel to live. I *am* suggesting, however, that the subject be taught in our schools in such a way that *not* moving to Israel also become a decision that our young people must consciously make.**

are still fumbling for them ourselves? There have been a number of efforts over the years to develop an approach to Israel education that would offer some guidance in this regard. The most recent, and probably the most comprehensive, is Makom, whose aim is “to create the compelling content needed to build the field of Israel engagement for our times.” It is an undertaking of the Jewish Agency’s Department for Jewish Zionist Education, whose mission is “to intensify the unique and multi-dimensional significance of Israel in connecting the next generation to its heritage, people and homeland.” While I readily identify with these goals, I also note that they refer to process rather than substance. As those connected to this initiative and others go about building a curriculum that will give expression to their objectives, I want to urge that they embrace two topics that heretofore have been sorely missing from the lexicon of teaching Israel: *Aliyah* and Zionism.

Regarding the first, I am *not* proposing that the objective need be bringing all of our students to Israel to live. I *am* suggesting, however, that the subject be taught in our schools in such a way that *not* moving to Israel also become a decision that our young people must consciously make, rather than taking it for granted – much as is the case regarding

the observance of other *mitzvot* such as lighting Shabbat candles, maintaining *kashrut*, or marrying within the faith. While *aliyah* may be a four-letter word in Hebrew, it isn’t in English, and it shouldn’t be treated that way. But it is now part of a vocabulary uttered only in undertones or with apologies. Instead, *aliyah* should be presented unabashedly as the highest expression of Zionist fulfillment. It allows for the most direct involvement in the exhilarating task of Jewish state building. It signifies a shift in our engagement with

Jewish values from the realm of theoretical discourse into the practice of shaping a Jewish society. It means binding one’s destiny to the destiny of the Jewish people in a more profound way than is possible anywhere else. *Aliyah* is not only a great challenge facing the Jewish people; it is also potentially the greatest source of fulfillment for the individual Jew. As to those who would dismiss these phrases as mere cliché, I can only express my regrets that they will never experience the deep satisfaction that comes with internalizing their power to transform.

As for Zionism, it is not – and has never been – only about providing a safe haven for Jews in need; it is also the dream of creating a model state. While Zionist visionaries have certainly disagreed regarding what that state should look like, they were also bound by a passion for forging a *hevrat mofet*, a society that would exemplify the very best that the Jewish civilization has to offer. This narrative, what I refer to as “positive Zionism,” is all but ignored in the practice of teaching Israel. Instead, the Diaspora community is fixated on “crisis Zionism,” focusing on the negative factors which necessitated the emergence of a Jewish nationalist movement: rescuing Jews in distress, combating antisemitism, and countering

anti-Zionist and anti-Israel propaganda. While present circumstances require that all of these measures continue, our students will have been swindled if they are not taught that from its inception, Zionism not only offered a *solution to the Jewish problem* but also a *vision for Jewish life*, rooted no less in Biblical tradition than Zionist ideology, that involves creating a society characterized by the fundamental tenets of prophetic Judaism: *tzedek tzedek tirdof*, *rodef shalom*, and *tikkun olam* – pursuing justice, seeking peace, and repairing the world. “Never again,” and the need for a safe refuge are not phrases that resonate for members of a generation that identifies the Six Day War as “the beginning of the occupation.” But an invitation to help shape a model society, and a Jewish one at that, is something that should energize them. Herzl recognized this a century ago. “A community must have an ideal,” he wrote, “for it is that which drives us... The ideal is for the community what bread and water are for the individual. And our Zionism, which led us hither and which will lead us still further to yet unknown heights, is but such an ideal, an infinite endless ideal.”

These concepts do not appear in the popular manuals for teaching about the Jewish state that I am familiar with. They all begin with “B” for Birthright and end with “Y” for *Yerushalayim shel Zahav*. I certainly wouldn’t change those entries, but on Israel’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, I believe the time has come to produce a guide that is more complete, one that goes all the way from A to Z. *Aliyah* and Zionism must be given their rightful places in the discipline of Israel education. Only then will we be able to stand with integrity before all of our students – the wise, the rebellious, the simple, and the one unable to enquire.



# Online exclusives

*Jewish Educational Leadership often features articles which appear only in our online edition. Below you will find abstracts of those articles. All the online articles for this issue can be accessed at [www.lookstein.org/online\\_journal\\_toc.php?id=12](http://www.lookstein.org/online_journal_toc.php?id=12).*

## My Zionism – An Evolving Engaging Curriculum, by Drora Arussy

The Hebrew department in this school initiated a Zionism and Israel curriculum. Those studies were fully integrated into Hebrew language instruction as culture and topics for language usage, with the main goal established as to engage the students in activities that would make the information relevant and engaging. Using contemporary Israeli culture, including music, film and drama (a short sidebar provides suggestions for resources to access those) the students are brought into a stimulating learning program.

## The Lookstein Center's Israel Curriculum project

While most American Jews have a natural affinity and love for Israel, a recent survey suggested that many others feel a lack of connection, apathy and perhaps even hostility toward Israel.

Most principals now recognize the importance of teaching about Israel, however, they have difficulty fitting the subject into the school curriculum. With precious time needed for the "core" subjects, where in the full school schedule can an Israel curriculum fit?

The Lookstein Center's Israel Curriculum, sponsored by a generous grant from Dr. Shmuel and Evelyn Katz, Bal Harbour, FL is designed to respond to that challenge.

All my life I had heard stories about the many brave Yemenite Jews who moved to the holy city of Jerusalem in the land of the Jews.



## Hebrew/Israel Immersion Program, by Harry Sinoff

As the Director of Judaic Studies, one of Harry Sinoff's first directives was to develop an Israel program for the Herzl/RMHA high school. While there were many Israel programs for schools that were based on touring, he decided to innovate an Israel experience for high school students that was not predicated on touring.

וְאַשָׁא אֶתְכֶם עַל כִּנְפֵי נְשָׂרִים, וְאַבָּא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי.  
שְׁמוֹת י"ט: ד'



This program was originally formulated during several seminars conducted by The Lookstein Center together with school principals in North America, under a grant from Yeshiva University in New York. During the course of these seminars, it was decided that since it is not possible to introduce another curricular subject into the already overburdened schedule of Jewish schools, the curriculum was designed so that the subject could be taught in a systematic manner, using four lessons thematically focused around each of four dates in the yearly calendar during each of the eight years of elementary school. The four dates are: The Tenth of Tevet, Tu B'Shevat, Yom Ha'Atzmaut, and Yom Yerushalayim. This results in a total of sixteen sessions per year or 128 sessions over the

course of eight years of elementary school.

This project design allows the subject to be covered rather thoroughly without creating undue pressure on an already crowded school educational program.

The materials being created by a specially assembled team, headed by The Lookstein Center's Yonah Fuld (formerly principal of SAR Academy in NY), include student workbooks and teacher guides. At present the curriculum is being field-tested in eight schools, and the feedback from the pilot lessons – both from students and teachers – has been overwhelmingly positive.

A sample lesson plan (for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade), is available at [www.lookstein.org/lessonplans/is4.pdf](http://www.lookstein.org/lessonplans/is4.pdf).



### International Hebrew Language Text Book Distributor

- Exclusive Distributor for Academon Publishing house
- Official distributor for: Probook (Dyanon), Rachgold (matach), The Jewish Agency, Reches, Or-am, The Ministry Of Education, Maalot, Hayesod, Ad Publishing etc...
- Distributors of Hebrew language Textbooks on all levels, written and published by experienced teachers and instructors that teach Hebrew as a second language.

### Academic Year- seasonal educational materials for schools and academic institutions

- Large variety of Israeli flags in all sizes for schools, home, car, kids, cake decorating, and more.
- Posters and stickers for the holidays, Special occasions, classrooms, and home.
- Lulav and Etrog sets - one of Israel's largest exporters of Lulavim and Etrogim to the USA.

### "Ha'Keshet Ha'Israeli" Israel Connection

- Head office Los Angeles:  
Israel Connection  
9595 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 502 Beverly Hills, CA 90212, USA  
Tel W. coast (Steve): 310.274.6657 ● Tel E. coast (Tamar): 201.906.8016  
Fax: (310) 274-4272 ● office@isrconn.com
- Israel Office staff based in Jerusalem and Modiin.
- Personal and professional assistance in Hebrew, English, Italian, and Spanish

[www.MyHebrewBooks.com](http://www.MyHebrewBooks.com)





[info@lookstein.org](mailto:info@lookstein.org)

[www.lookstein.org](http://www.lookstein.org)