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Who is a Zionist?

"Zionist" is a concept that's basically simple, clear, easy to define and understand, and there should be no difficulty defending its definition. But over the past 20 to 30 years, this simple concept has turned into one of the most confused and complicated notions of identity, and its overuse has made it impossible to agree on what it means. The right likes to use it as a type of whipped cream to improve the taste of dubious dishes, while the left treats it with fear, as if it were a mine liable to explode in its hands which is why it always feels the need to neutralize it with some strange adjective, as in "sane Zionism" or "humane Zionism."

In the dispute between the "national camp" and the "peace camp," Zionism is used as an offensive weapon that is batted from one side to the other.

Abroad, critics of Israel use Zionism as a kind of poisonous potion to exacerbate every accusation against the state. Many critics believe that the solution to Israel's future lies in the de-Zionization of its identity.

Among Israel's sworn enemies, "Zionist" is a demonic epithet, a term of denunciation that replaces the word "Israeli" or "Jew." Hamas members speak of the captured Zionist soldier, and Hezbollah and Iran speak of the criminal Zionist entity, not about Israel.

So it's about time that we try to define the word "Zionist" realistically. First of all, we must remember that from a historical perspective, the concept emerged only at the end of the 19th century. It's meaningless to try and describe Yehuda Halevi as a Zionist, or any other Jew who immigrated to the Holy Land in centuries past. In the same fashion, we can't use the terms "socialism" or "socialist" for periods before the middle of the 19th century, and describe Robespierre, for example, as the "socialist" of the French Revolution, which occurred at the end of the 18th century. These concepts only have significance from the time when they emerged in a specific historical context, and tossing them around freely as labels for anything we choose is a clearly anachronistic act.

If so, how would we define who is a Zionist, starting from the emergence of the Zionist movement as inspired by Theodor Herzl and his associates? Here is the definition: A

Zionist is a person who desires or supports the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, which in the future will become the state of the Jewish people. This is based on what Herzl said: "In Basel I founded the Jewish state."

The key word in this definition is "state," and its natural location is the Land of Israel because of the Jewish people's historical link to it. Thus my grandfather's grandfather, for example, who came to the Land of Israel from Thessaloniki in the mid-19th century, cannot be considered a Zionist. He came to settle in the Land of Israel, not to establish a state here. This is also the rule for the ancestors of Neturei Karta and other Hasidic groups that came to the Land of Israel as far back as the 17th and 18th centuries, and who remain loyal to it. Not only were these Jews not interested in establishing a Jewish state, but they include some who saw and still see the State of Israel as an abomination and a desecration of God's name.

A Zionist, therefore, is a Jew who supported the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, and not necessarily one who actually settled in the land. Herzl himself and many Zionist leaders never settled in the land, yet you wouldn't hesitate to call them Zionists. Even today, the members of Zionist federations worldwide are considered Zionists by us and by themselves, even though they don't live in Israel. Anyone who believes that only a person who lives in Israel can be a Zionist is essentially saying that today, there are no Zionists outside the State of Israel, and that's not the case. And what about those born in the Land of Israel? Are they considered Zionists based on their place of birth alone?

A Zionist is a person who wanted or supported the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. What kind of state? Well, every Zionist had his own vision and his own plan.

Zionism is not an ideology. If the definition of ideology, according to the Hebrew Encyclopedia, is as follows "A cohesive, systematic combination of ideas, insights, principles and imperatives that finds expression in the particular worldview of a sect, a party or a social class" then Zionism cannot be considered an ideology, but merely a very broad platform for various ideologies that may even contradict one another.

Ever since the State of Israel was founded in 1948, the definition of "Zionist" has been revised, since we don't need to establish another state. Therefore, its definition is as follows: A Zionist is a person who accepts the principle that the State of Israel doesn't belong solely to its citizens, but to the entire Jewish people. The practical expression of this commitment is the Law of Return.

The state's affairs are indeed managed solely by its citizens people who have an Israeli identity card, of whom 80 percent are Jews, while 20 percent are Israeli Palestinians and others. But only a person who supports and affirms the Law of Return is a Zionist, and anyone who rejects the Law of Return is not a Zionist. Nevertheless, Israeli Jews who reject the Law of Return and declare themselves non-Zionists or post-Zionists (whether from the right or the left) are still good citizens who are loyal to the State of Israel, and retain all their civil rights.

From this it emerges that all the big ideological, political, security and social questions over which we do battle day and night have nothing to do with Zionism. They are similar to the questions that many other peoples, past and present, have had to struggle with, and still struggle with. Moreover, Zionism is not a word that's meant to replace patriotism, pioneering, humaneness or love of one's homeland, concepts that are found in other languages as well. Hebrew is rich enough to endow every position or action with the appropriate word. An Israel Defense Forces officer who serves in the standing army for many years after his compulsory service, for example,

is no greater Zionist than the kiosk owner eking out a livelihood, though we would certainly see him as a greater patriot. A person who volunteers to help needy children is no more a Zionist than a stockbroker, although he may be a greater humanitarian.

To be a Zionist is not a badge of honor, or a medal a person wears on his chest. Medals are connected to actions, not to support of the Law of Return.

Nor is there any connection between the size of the country and Zionism. If the Arabs had accepted the partition plan in 1947, the State of Israel within the partition borders would have been just as Zionist as it is within different borders. If the State of Israel had conquered and annexed the east bank of the Jordan and repealed the Law of Return, it would have ceased being Zionist even though it would be three or four times the size. The state was Zionist when it controlled the Gaza Strip, and it was just as Zionist after it withdrew from it. Many countries have seen changes in the size of their sovereign territory, but their core identities remained intact.

With regard to the Law of Return, which some see as discriminating against Israel's Palestinian citizens, this is the answer: The Law of Return is essentially the moral condition set by the countries of the world for the establishment of the State of Israel. The United Nations' partition of Palestine-Eretz Israel in 1947 into a Jewish state and a Palestinian one was on condition that the Jewish state would not just be a state for the 600,000 Jews that lived there at the time, but would instead be a state that could resolve

the distress of Jews all over the world, and would enable every Jew in the world to consider it home. Would it be moral for the hundreds of thousands of Jews who immigrated to Israel on the basis of the Law of Return to shut the door they entered through behind them?

Moreover, it's almost certain that there will be a similar law in the Palestinian state that I hope will be established, speedily and in our days. It would behoove that state to legislate a law of return that would enable every exiled Palestinian to return to the Palestinian state and obtain asylum and citizenship.

But neither the Israeli Law of Return, nor a similar law in the future Palestinian state, contradict general immigration laws that set specific entry criteria, as is customary in every country of the world.

Liberating the concept of Zionism from all the appendages and addenda that have adhered to it would not only clarify the ideological and political arguments we have among ourselves, and thus prevent these disputes from being mythologized, but it would also force critics abroad to clarify and focus their positions.

Who is a Jew?

Compared to the effort to define “who is a Zionist,” defining “who is a Jew” is complex and tedious; it is a question that’s been dealt with and is still being dealt with not only by Jews, but by non-Jews of all sorts, from admirers of the Jewish people to its bitterest enemies. It seems astonishing that a people that estimates its age at some 3,200 years is still arguing about its self-definition, as if thousands of years of history haven’t sufficed to reach agreement on the matter. But if the disputes over defining a Jew, even in the Law of Return, have persisted and even intensified, then there must be some genuine existential, political and cultural need being expressed.

Why do we need a definition at all? Before the state was established, if we had been on a trip and had entered a restaurant in the United States or Argentina or Tashkent, and the proprietor had recognized us as Jews, come over to our table, and said, “Listen, dear guests, I too, am a Jew,” no one would have tried to examine on what basis he was defining himself as a Jew. No one would have wondered if his mother was Jewish or only his father, or whether perhaps some Jewish ancestor appeared to him in a dream and he thus decided to identify as a Jew. None of this would have been important to us; we might have found the very fact that he was identifying himself as a Jew acceptable and even pleasant, but it wouldn’t have committed us to anything. Or we could take a more extreme and horrific example: In the ghettos and death camps during World War II there were no few Jews who identified as Jews and were perceived and imprisoned as Jews, even though from the perspective of halakha (Jewish law) they were not considered Jews because they didn’t have Jewish mothers. Would any of us dare to deduct them from the number of Holocaust victims? But if these six million were to be resurrected and would want to immigrate to Israel, at least half a million of them would be blocked by the Israeli immigration authorities, on the grounds that they aren’t eligible for citizenship under the Law of Return.

Thus, before the state was established, the definition of a Jew in and of itself wasn’t important to most people, other than those who were strict about questions of marriage, bastardy and burial. After all, despite the antiquity of the Jewish people, it remained small in numbers and so every addition was welcomed without too much scrutiny. But once the state was established, and especially once the Law of Return was passed, the need for a definition was vital, since a Jew, through his definition as such, obtains the right to come to Israel and become a full-fledged citizen, with all that implies. Thus, over the past generation, the serious problem of defining a Jew came to the fore.

Agnon's warning

After the State of Israel was founded, its first leader, David Ben-Gurion, approached some 60 Jewish wise men – religious and secular, rabbis, philosophers and professors, leaders in Israel and the Diaspora – and asked for an answer to the question of “Who is a Jew.” The responses were many and varied, but one of them sticks out in my memory – the answer of Shai Agnon: Mr. Prime Minister, the author wrote, drop this question – it will only get you into trouble.

Agnon was right; his warning of trouble is valid to this day. But what's a prime minister to do when his government has an Interior Ministry that has to issue – or not issue – citizenship papers in accordance with the law? There's no choice but to define who is a Jew and cope with this complex issue, because there's a benefit in trying to clarify it in anticipation of the next stage awaiting us: the definition of who is an Israeli and what constitutes “Israeliness.”

Let's start by looking at the accepted halakhic definition, because at bottom it provides most of the essential data for proceeding further.

The halakhic definition, by which a Jew is a person born to a Jewish mother, seems to have crystallized at the end of the Second Temple period, when its final formula was set by the contemporary sages. (By the way, during many periods in Jewish history, the word "Israelite" was more commonly used than the word "Jew.") We will analyze the definition to see what it says, and particularly what it doesn't say.

A Jew is the child of a Jewish mother, the definition states. How is the mother Jewish? Only because her mother was Jewish. And what did the grandmother do to become Jewish? Well, nothing – she was simply born to a Jewish woman. Perhaps this Jewish identity, its values and special essence, came from some ancient great-grandmother generations back? Nope. That Jewish great-grandmother was Jewish simply because she, too, was born to a Jewish mother - and so on and so on.

What is not stated in this definition? It doesn't say that a Jew has to live in the Land of Israel to be a Jew. It doesn't say that a Jew has to speak Hebrew to be a Jew. It doesn't say that a Jew must live in a Jewish community, or that he has any obligation at all to other Jews in order to be called a Jew.

What's even more amazing is that although this is a halakhic definition, it doesn't even say that a Jew has to believe in the Torah of Moses or in God to be a Jew.

Thus, the definition is essentially a definition of peoplehood, or tribalism, using the most minimal possible basis – being born to a Jewish mother.

This means that logically it would be a mistake to include Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Jews in one category, just as it would be a logical mistake to put Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Norwegians in one category. The correct classification is Muslim, Buddhist, Christian and

believing (or religious) Jew. Alternately, it would be logical to put an Englishman, an Argentine, a Jew and a Norwegian on the same list.

In other words, according to the halakhic definition, Jewishness is an affiliation with a people, not a religion.

Until around 200 years ago, the sages could have easily, if they had wished, defined “Jew” as a person who believes in the Torah of Moses or someone who observes the commandments. This definition would have fit more than 99 percent of the Jews who were alive until that time, anywhere in the world. But they chose not to define “Jew” that way. The halakha itself defines Jewishness as a national affiliation, not a religious one. Although this national affiliation is missing some significant and necessary national components (perhaps to leave room for observance of the 613 commandments), it is nonetheless still a national affiliation.

I argue that within a religious definition lies an inherent component of secularism, or non-religiosity. But a person born to a Jewish mother who doesn’t believe in God or the Torah, and even denies any connection to the Jewish religious tradition, will still be considered a Jew in every way, even under the most stringent rendering of halakha.

Emptiness

From this we see that the first element that emerges from the halakhic definition – a Jew is the child of a Jewish mother – is emptiness. This definition provides no significant content.

So the question is then, is belonging to the Jewish people only a biological belonging? Are we talking about an ethnic group, or even a race, which can be identified by its genes, like the black race or the yellow race?

Of course not. While black cannot become white and white cannot become black, a person born of a Jewish mother can become a Christian or convert to Islam and shed his Jewish identity and move to another religion. Brother Daniel, a Holocaust survivor who converted to Christianity and lived in the Stella Maris Carmelite Monastery in Haifa, asked in Israel's Supreme Court to be registered as a Jew on his identity card, but his request was denied.

France's late Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, a child of Jews who perished in the Holocaust, boasted that not only was he a Christian, he was also still a Jew. But all of France’s rabbis categorically rejected his assertion. Jewishness is not a racial affiliation and thus converting to another religion cancels the person’s Jewishness, even though he was born of a Jewish mother. On the other hand, a person who was not born to a Jewish mother can join the Jewish people by converting.

During the past two thousand years of Jewish history, countless Jews left the Jewish people by converting to Christianity or Islam, and were swallowed up beyond recognition by other nations. The number of Jews at the end of the late Second Temple period is estimated at four

million, while by the start of the 18th century there were only one million Jews. At the same time, people not born to a Jewish mother were becoming Jews by conversion. One of our dynamic and nimble historians says such converts numbered in the tens of thousands.

This means that the existence or non-existence of a Jewish mother is not a required component of the definition of a Jew. The religious corridor leading to the entrance to, or exit from, the Jewish people remains dependent on a person's will, not a biological or genetic characteristic. After the act of converting to Christianity, which means the person has left the Jewish people, there is no meaning to the question of how loyal the person is to Christianity. Transit through the Christian or Muslim corridor removes his Jewishness from him. The same is true of a person who converts and enters the Jewish people through the religious corridor and becomes part of it: There's no significance to the question of whether he is remaining loyal to the religion that converted him. Passing through the corridor is what attaches him to the Jewish people, and the moment he becomes part of it he can determine his values and beliefs (even if secular), just like any other Jew. These religious corridors are diverse. There are Orthodox and Reform corridors and there are others; now there are still other conversion corridors being planned of a national-secular nature.

Choice and freedom

To summarize this section, we have identified another component in the definition of a Jew, in addition to the element of emptiness, and that's the component of choice and freedom. A Jew is a Jew because he chose to be a Jew and not because he was forced - because of biology or by some external social force, to define himself as a Jew. In many ways it's easier to stop being a Jew than to stop being an Israeli or stop being an Englishman.

I am emphasizing this point because this is what gives value to choosing a Jewish identity. No anti-Semite will determine whether a person is a Jew or not, and certainly the Nazis were not authorized to determine who is a Jew and who is not, even if for a few years they had the power to kill both Jews and non-Jews by their insane definition. If a man who did not consider himself a Jew perished in Auschwitz, we must respect his self-definition, and not that of those who killed him in accordance with their own distorted classification.

Hence the question arises: If a Jew need not live in Israel, need not speak Hebrew, need not be committed to formal communal relations with other Jews, need not believe in the God of Israel and His Torah, and does not necessarily have to be the child of a Jewish mother - who then, is a Jew? And here is the answer, which, though problematic, is the correct one: A Jew is anyone who identifies as a Jew. That is the root; that is the essence.

If the reader thinks this anarchic definition is the fruit of a literary imagination, he ought to know that this is exactly the definition that served as the basis for the State of Israel's Population

Registry in its earliest years, when it absorbed more than one million immigrants. That was the definition of “Jew” in the Israeli Population Registry Regulation: A person is a Jew by his own declaration (provided he is not a member of another religion). The Law of Return only passed in July 1950.

“By his own declaration,” means by his identification as such, and it’s no surprise that such a definition did not disappoint as a source of pondering and confusion. In the Diaspora such a definition can exist without too many conflicts, since in any case the Jews there can associate freely with anyone and everyone. No Jew there has any control over the self-definition of another Jew, and certainly has no legal obligations toward him. But in Israel, where Jews must subject themselves to the authority of other Jews in all areas of life, this definition is problematic, and will probably remain so until the end of time.

What might save us from this immanent problem is the definition of an Israeli. Indeed, if we look up “Jew” in the Hebrew Encyclopedia, we will find to our amazement that the encyclopedia, which was edited by a religious scholar, Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, has no entry for “Jew.” In Volume 19, page 222, the following appears: “Jew – see Israel, People of.”

And so Israel and “Israeliness” will be the next stop in our analysis (which began with “Defining Zionism,” May 21), whose aim is to find a more reasonable space for defining identities and that will allow us, to the degree possible, to achieve order and clarity.

If a Jew need not live in Israel, need not speak Hebrew, need not be committed to formal communal relations with other Jews, need not believe in the God of Israel and His Torah, and does not necessarily have to be the child of a Jewish mother – who then, is a Jew?

Who is an Israeli?

Who is a Brit? Who is a Thai? Who is a Frenchman? Who is a Pole?

Every answer to such a question has two different parts, the citizenship part and the identity part, which do not necessarily overlap. For example, my nephew was born in United States to parents who were there as emissaries; he automatically got American citizenship, which requires the most minimal of efforts to maintain, but his identity is clearly Israeli and not American. If I would describe him as an American because of his second passport, he would be offended and protest.

A Pakistani who arrived yesterday at London's Heathrow Airport, and has British citizenship that he inherited from his father or grandfather, is British - even if he doesn't know a word of English and has never heard of Shakespeare or Byron. His British citizenship gives him all the same rights and obligations as the British prime minister, yet he has a completely different identity.

Nowadays, citizenship and identity are not identical. It's true that the vast majority of people who have a particular national identity are citizens of that nation. But many millions of other people around the world (among them many Jews) are citizens of a particular nation, yet see their national identity as something completely different.

Understanding the difference between identity and citizenship is the cornerstone to answering the question, "Who is an Israeli"?

In terms of citizenship, everyone who has an Israeli identity card is Israeli, and under the rules of democracy all are meant to have equal rights. But not all of these people identify as Israelis. A million and a half Palestinians with Israeli citizenship will generally identify as Palestinians. They are considered a national minority living in their homeland among a majority of a different nationality.

Such a situation, in which a national minority lives among a majority of a different nationality, is very common in today's world - you find it in Europe, Asia and Africa. In this respect, Palestinian Israelis are no different from other national minorities, like the Basques, Kurds, or Quebecois. But we must remember that the Palestinian Israeli is not a territorial minority. As far as he's concerned, all of Palestine - and all Israeli territory - is his homeland. Thus, territorial autonomy in the Galilee or in the concentration of Arab Israeli towns known as the Triangle, for example, is meaningless. There is only cultural autonomy.

There is, of course, a bidirectional flow between many elements of the national identity of the majority and the citizenship of the minority, and vice versa. The Jewish identity of French Jews is heavily influenced by their French citizenship, and it's possible that French identity is somewhat influenced by the Jewish national identity. The same is true in Israel. The Palestinian identity of Israel's Palestinian citizens contains components of the general Israeli identity (including through the Hebrew language), and it also works to shape that identity. When an Arab Israeli judge presides in a case against the president of Israel, or when an Arab Israeli hospital director establishes new hospitalization procedures, they are creating Israeli codes that are at the heart of Israeli identity, the same way an American Jewish Supreme Court justice can be a partner in interpreting the U.S. Constitution.

Still, there is a difference between identity and citizenship. Who better than the Jews have repeatedly proved this throughout their history in many parts of the world?

Therefore, the term "Israeli" does not touch only upon the common citizenship of Jews and Arabs in Israel, but is a concept of identity in and of itself. Even if there wasn't a single Palestinian Arab in the State of Israel, the state is called "Israel" and thus its people are Israelis and not Jews. The state is Israeli and not Jewish; after all "Israel" was the original name of the Jewish people, while "Jew" (or Yehudi in Hebrew) is a name that was appended later: It appears for the first time during a period of exile, in the context of Mordechai the Jew who lived in Shushan, the capital of Persia, and who brought his niece to King Ahasuerus, allowing her to intermarry.

If Moses, King David and the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Samuel were to visit the Knesset and be asked by its speaker, "Who are you, gentlemen? Please identify yourselves," they would undoubtedly reply, "We are Israelites" or "We are from the children of Israel." And if the surprised Knesset speaker would press the point by asking "Are you Jewish [Yehudim]?" they would answer, "We don't know what you mean by 'Yehudi.' Do you mean someone from the tribe of Judah [Yehuda] or something else?" The word "Yehudi" doesn't appear in the Jewish prayer book even once, and the sages of the Mishna insisted on using only the term "Israelite" and not the term "Yehudi".

According to tradition, the name "Israel" was bestowed by God himself. That's why the territory associated with the people is called the Land of Israel. Israeli universities teach mahshevet Yisrael (Jewish philosophy), the history of the people of Israel, the literature of the people of Israel and of course – the name of the state is Israel. So one wonders what happened over the past 20 to 30 years to repeatedly turn the words

Yehudi, Yehudiyut (Jewishness) and medina Yehudit (Jewish state) into identity indicators for Israelis, relegating the word “Israeli” to some corner for civil purposes alone.

Is it possible that a Spaniard living in Madrid will see his Spanishness as merely a civilian common denominator between him and the Basques or the Catalans, and not a deeply rooted identity that stands on its own?

Confining Israeliness

I believe the process of confining Israeliness to such a civilian corner has to do with at least four different factors that at times contradict each another, each with its own internal logic.

(1First, there are the different streams of religious observance. Although the concept of “Jew,” as I’ve already shown, doesn’t necessarily contain any religious component, it’s clear to the religious that the more they restrict “Israeli” to a concept with only civil significance, the more the concept of “Jew,” which has been emptied of civilian obligations, will take on religious characteristics.

Let us imagine a chaplain in the Israel Defense Forces asking a soldier, “What are you?” and the innocent soldier replying, “I’m an Israeli, I serve in the army and I speak Hebrew.” The rabbi will then say, “That’s all? Then the Druze is an Israeli just like you; he serves in the army and speaks Hebrew. If that’s the case, what’s the difference between you?” Then, when the embarrassed soldier begins to stutter, the chaplain will suggest that he fill the void in his Israeli identity with some “Jewish heritage,” namely, religion.

This tactic not only has the cooperation of those affiliated with Habayit Hayehudi and the entire spectrum of the ultra-Orthodox, but also of Reform Jews and all those seeking their “roots” who are looking to convert their Israeli identity using religious concepts, which they glean primarily from books and midrash.

(2The second element pushing Israeliness into a civilian corner is Diaspora Jews and everyone who engages with them. Now that the term “Israeli” is perceived as referring to a specific citizenship, Jews in the Diaspora have to differentiate themselves from it, to avoid formal identification with Israel. Yet at the same time, all those who cultivate the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, seek partnerships and encourage aliyah use the term “the Jewish people” as the only concept through which to connect and share. However, rather than suggest that Diaspora Jews upgrade and deepen their

Jewishness by adopting the Israeli identity, they convey: Come strengthen the Jewishness of the State of Israel as a bulwark against its Arab citizens.

(3The third factor helping restrict Israeliness as an identity is actually the Arabs. They say to Israelis, “Look, you’re basically Jews, just like Jews in America or England or Argentina, and the Jews who lived around the world for more than 2,000 years and maintained their heritage and identity. Why did you come to crowd into our land, expelling us and endangering yourselves? “After all, you are part of the Jewish people. Jewish identity (either as a religion or limited nationality) does not need territory and sovereignty to shape itself. Moreover, for centuries, Jews whose way of life and aspirations were no different from other Jews living around the world lived in the Land of Israel and throughout the Middle East. Why do you suddenly need sovereignty and an Israeli identity”?)

(4A fourth factor is the post-Zionists, who aspire to a new Israeli people, detached and disengaged from any Jewish identity linked to exile, history or religion (in the spirit of “Canaanism”). For them, Israel as a “state of all its citizens” is not only a just demand for full civic equality, but to some extent an effort to intensify and expand the overlap between citizenship and identity. In other words, they want to blur the historic Israeli identity and replace it solely with a general version of citizenship, like that of the American or the Australian.

These four factors (along with various others) undermine the concept of Israeli identity as a full Jewish identity, which these essays are striving to define.

Common Jewish identity

“There is no Jew in the Diaspora, even a Jew like yourself who lives totally through his Judaism, who with Judaism can be a complete Jew, and there is no Jewish community in the Diaspora that is able to live a complete Jewish life. Only in the State of Israel is a complete Jewish life possible. Only here will a Jewish culture worthy of the name emerge, one that will be both 100 percent Jewish and 100 percent humane. The book is nothing but one part, a chapter of a culture. The culture of a people comprises a field, a road, a house, an airplane, a laboratory, a museum, an army, a school, self-government, the vistas of one’s homeland, theater, music, language, memories, hopes and so forth. A complete Jew and a complete human being, without any gap or partition between the Jew and the human being, between the citizen and the public, is not possible in a foreign land”.

These profound statements, which were brought to my attention recently, were written by Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in the 1950s to a Jew in the Diaspora named S. Ravidowitz. Remarks that I made in a similar vein a few years ago during a lecture to members of the American Jewish Committee in Washington provoked a stormy response; after all, no one likes to hear that his cherished identity is essentially a partial one.

But when I realized that there were also many objections to my remarks in Israel, I understood that something has gone awry in understanding the fundamental change to Jewish identity that occurred with the establishment of the State of Israel. This is surprising, since in the past, during the early years of Zionism and with the founding of the state, the perception of Israeli identity as a complete Jewish identity was natural for many people. But in recent years there has been a disturbing reversal, which is being led, as noted, by different elements that contradict one another, first and foremost by the religious, in their various permutations.

Indeed, for some 2,000 years there was only one pattern of Jewish identity. Jews lived among the nations, in countries that the Jews saw as foreign territories, controlled by different religions and peoples who spoke foreign languages. The Jews, as a wandering national minority, more or less participated in the societies they lived in, with their Jewish identity touching on only specific aspects of their lives.

Moreover – and to me this is the fundamental change brought about by Jewish sovereignty in Israel – in exile or in the Diaspora no Jew rules over another Jew, nor is he obligated to him in any way, unless he chooses to be so. In the Diaspora, a Jew can relate to another Jew freely. Jewish life is heavily influenced by non-Jews and is subordinate to them. Collective responsibility is entirely voluntary. Harm done to a Russian Jew does not necessitate help from an Italian Jew, unless the latter chooses to help.

So talk about a common Jewish destiny is far-fetched. When London was bombed during the German blitz, Englishmen from Liverpool or Leeds participated in its defense, and an Englishman from Manchester was liable to be sent to fight the Germans in the Arabian Desert. When Britain imposes a government austerity plan, it affects all citizens, whoever or wherever they were.

That's what is meant by a common destiny, and in that sense it can be said that there is a common Israeli destiny, or a common Palestinian destiny. But when Jews were sent to the death camps in Poland, for the Jews of New York, Brazil or Iran, life went on as

usual. And when the Jews of Spain were expelled, Jews in Iraq or Germany were peacefully going about their business. Throughout history the fate of the Jews has been determined, for better or worse, solely by the lot of the nations among which they lived. Israeli identity returns the control over Jews to Jewish hands, and restores the mutual commitment between Jews that prevailed during the First and Second Temple periods. In Israel, Jews pay taxes under laws passed by Jews, are sent to war by Jews, and Jews determine the social strata and welfare laws for their fellow Jews. Jews send soldiers to protect settlements that they're fed up with, and at the same time Jews send other soldiers to evacuate settlements that are sacred in the eyes of their inhabitants. This holistic attitude creates a rich and existentially meaningful identity that is infinitely more moral than that which exists in the Diaspora, where disputes are verbal, with no ability to compel anyone to do anything.

Israeli vs. Jewish morality

All at once, all elements of life became open to the influence of Jewish identity and thus assumed an Israeli identity. Now a slew of new ethical questions that a Jew never dealt with and still needn't deal with in the Diaspora pose challenges to the Israeli, who must make real-life, practical decisions and not just analyze and interpret the issues as a course of study.

What, for example, should an Israeli prison look like? How large are the cells? What are the imprisonment procedures? To what extent and how moral is it to torture a dangerous terrorist to obtain important information from him? Is one allowed to sell arms to an African country ruled by a despotic regime to prevent unemployment in the Israeli arms industry?

National values are determined not by talk, but by action. It's easy for a rabbi at a Chicago synagogue to take "Jewish morality" out of its lovely etrog box on Shabbat, deliver a pleasant sermon about it to his congregants, and then return it to the box. But in Israel, Jewish morality is sometimes determined by the angle at which a soldier holds a rifle while confronting a Palestinian demonstration in the territories. This morality is tested every day and every hour through a thousand different acts. That's why today it's easier to be a Jew in the Diaspora, because on the bigger questions a Diaspora Jew participates only as a citizen (often a rather aloof one) of another nationality.

A religious Jew in Israel must also vastly broaden his identity, and is required to make decisions and forge relationships that are not demanded of the Diaspora Jew. A religious Israeli must decide, together with the secular Jew, whether to buy another

fighter jet or build another hospital wing. He might be able to support his position using religious sources and it's even desirable that he do so, but he will have to grapple with the evidence and support that others bring from their sources. What is decided essentially becomes the new halakha (Jewish law.)

In a lecture Haim Nahman Bialik gave at Nahalal in 1932, two years before his death, he expressed himself in the spirit of what Ben-Gurion was to write later on.

“It's very simple: The concept of culture for every people includes all elements of life, from the lowest to the most sublime. Cobbling shoes - culture, sewing pants - culture, tilling the soil is most certainly culture. Everything is culture - culture in different forms. There are those who, to make things easier, separate material culture from spiritual culture. This is a somewhat artificial division, because if we're talking about culture, there is already a joining of matter and spirit... Here in the Land of Israel the concept of culture assumes its full significance. Everything that is created in the Land of Israel by Jews becomes culture”.

Therefore, a Talmud lesson in a yeshiva or at an institute like Alma, the self-described home for Hebrew culture, has no more Jewish identity than a debate by the Committee to Prevent Road Accidents. Any differentiation between them is artificial and dangerous. Because Israeliness is what brings about a total integration between matter and spirit, from all the aspects that Bialik indicated.

The process of turning Israeli identity into a skin instead of a garment is a new and revolutionary process for the historic Jew, who for most of his history slipped in and out of the national clothes of others. We are only at the beginning of the struggle for the place of an Israeli identity in our lives. The “Jewish” processes that have returned to overwhelm us are only delaying and damaging the establishment and deepening of the Israeli identity. When we define ourselves as Jews - and not as Israelis - then even before we get another passport from some foreign embassy, we already have a global Jewish passport, and in a world that is becoming a global village, this passport makes it easy to move from one country to another and emigrate from Israel.

I believe that former Israelis and present-day Jews will also be citizens of the space colonies that will be built in a few decades. Perhaps even there, Chabad emissaries will help them maintain a modicum of their Jewish identity, as they do now all over the world. Out there, in those space colonies, they will surely say, “Next year in Jerusalem.” And once again, the fear returns. Will Jerusalem return to being an abstraction as it was

for hundreds of years of Jewish history or will it remain a living entity? This will depend not on our Jewish identity, but on the Israeli identity alone.