



Jewish Education and Jewish Identity in the Post-modern Era

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Introduction

The survival of the Jewish People is one of the most fascinating phenomena in the annals of human history. The Jews were exiled from their land (the Land of Israel) over two millennia ago and dispersed to the four corners of the earth, yet succeeded in persevering as an ethnic unit with clearly definable cultural and identity features. Mighty empires (such as Rome) arose and were wiped off the face of the earth, but the Jewish People, that suffered pogroms, annihilation in gas chambers and persecution as a religious and ethnic minority throughout history managed to survive against all odds and contrary to all predictions.

Nations generally form as a group of people with a common language and culture, living within the boundaries of a certain territory, seeks recognition for its legitimate right to national realization therein. The development and national emergence of the Jewish People, however, was different from and even diametrically opposite to that of other ethnic bodies.

The account recorded in the Book of Exodus declares that the Israelites first became a nation and developed ethnic awareness while still in Egypt. Following their departure, while still wandering through the desert, they accepted the set of Jewish laws and rituals at Sinai and only some time thereafter reached the territory allotted to them in the Biblical narrative, the Land of Canaan, that they were bidden to conquer and settle.

Over the years, Jews have generally concurred that the Jewish religion constitutes the cultural cement that preserved the Jewish People throughout their exile. At present, however, accelerated global modernization and secularization have given rise

to two dichotomous identity groups in Jewish society, particularly in the State of Israel:

(a) A secular group with a democratic-liberal outlook that adopts and emulates Western (primarily American) culture as its most significant reference group; it adheres to the laws of the state, perceiving them as the ultimate authority and accepting the constitutional seal of approval granted them by the Supreme Court.

(b) A religious group that considers the Torah (Pentateuch) to be of Divine origin, perceives the Land of Israel as a supreme value and maintains that only return to the authentic Jewish religion can save the Jews from absorption and assimilation among the world's nations. This group perceives *Halakha* (Jewish religious law), as interpreted by rabbinic instances, to be its highest authority, exceeding that of the secular state.

Countless subcategories lie between these two extremes, of course, each with its own blend of secular and religious features, as described below.

These sociohistoric processes exert a profound effect on the nature of Jewish education and its response to various challenges. This study focuses on a description of the characteristics of Jewish identity and Jewish education, detailing the key problems they face and describing the manner in which they address them.

Metamorphosis of the Concept of Judaism

Until the Renaissance, Judaism was accorded a comprehensive definition that incorporated both religious and ethnic-national elements. Since the destruction of the First Temple and the subsequent exile of the Jewish People by Nebuchadnezzar, Jewishness was manifested primarily in observance of Jewish religious laws and customs.

Herman¹ defined Judaism as an identity comprising both religious and national elements. Sklare² claimed that any attempt

¹ Herman, S.N. (1979). *Jewish Identity. A Social Psychological Perspective*. Jerusalem: House of the World Zionist Organization and Sifriat Poalim. (Hebrew).

² Sklare, M. (Ed.) (1958). *The Jews: Social Patterns of American Groups*. NY: The Free Press.

to separate these two foundations would be tantamount to splitting the atom. Kahana³ discerned a pluralistic pattern of Jewish identity that includes a permanent element of conflict among different schools of thought in different times, perceiving differentiation and confrontation as fixed and irresolvable features imprinted in the definitions of self- and national identity in Israeli society. Bar-Lev and Kedem⁴, following Rosenberg (1976), define Judaism as a concept comprising three elements of independent Jewish identity that are modified constantly by political, social and cultural changes affecting the Jewish People in Israel and the Diaspora:

1. Ethnicity (i.e. descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) – Speaking Hebrew as the Holy Tongue and as a secular everyday language.
2. Religiosity – Belief that the written Torah and oral traditions were Divinely ordained at Sinai and acceptance of *Halakha* as mandatory.
3. Territorialism – Settlement of the Land of Israel according to the Divine Promise expressed in the Bible.

Until the Emancipation of the Jews in the nineteenth century, these elements were conceived as an inseparable unit. Although they lacked both the territorial-political component and linguistic uniformity, the Jews of the Diaspora perceived themselves as a „nation” in a superterritorial and superpolitical sense, maintaining attachment and historic awareness of the Land of Israel and considering it a unique homeland to which the nation yearns to return.

Since the Emancipation, Jews began to concern themselves with the boundaries of Jewish identity and their extensive implications, viewed in the context of the above three basic elements. From an ethnic-national point of view, questions were raised regarding criteria for inclusion in the Jewish People, such as residence in Jewish territory (the State of Israel), acceptance according to *Halakha* (i.e. only one born to a Jewish mother) or

³ Kahana, R. (1980). Types of National Identity in Israel. In: Kahana, R. & Kuperstein, S.(Eds). *Problems of Identity and Legitimation in the Israeli Society*. Jerusalem: Akademon. Pp. 296-314 (Hebrew).

⁴ Bar-Lev, M. & Kedem, P. (1986). Unity and Diversity in the Jewish and Zionist Identification and Identity of the Israeli Student. In: Eisenberg, Y. (Ed.). *Aspects in Education*. Ramat-Gan: bar Ilan University. Pp. 155-178 (Hebrew).

perhaps a broader definition welcoming all who maintain a sense of Jewish identity (such as children born to a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother). Conversely, one may inquire whether Jews who do fit the Jewish religious definition and who do not identify with Judaism or who are married to non-Jewish partners and seek psychological severance from their Jewish origins are to be considered Jews nonetheless.

Various questions were posed in the religious context as well, given the mandatory boundaries delineated by *Halakha*. Is a Jew who fulfills no religious precepts considered a Jew? How many religious precepts must one fulfill to be considered a Jew and which are obligatory for inclusion within the framework of Judaism? Is the offspring of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother who maintains strong feelings for Judaism and observes some of its precepts to be considered a Jew? Moreover, is one who fulfills Jewish precepts of a folkloristic-cultural nature as an act of ethnic identification, with no religious intentions whatsoever, to be accepted as Jewish?

The religious boundaries issue also manifests certain literacy-related implications concerning the content of the so-called „Jewish bookshelf“, the literary corpus termed „Jewish literature“. Up to Emancipation, the only written works considered Jewish were rabbinic religious writings. Thereafter, various literary genres began to flourish among the Jews, under the influence of Western culture, expressing universal points of view and free of any religious intent. Is Jewish literature to be defined by language (anything written in Hebrew), writer (all that is written by Jews) or subject matter (anything written about Jews)?

The physical boundaries of the Jewish state constitute the principal issue in the territorial context. Are they identical to those of the Promised Land stipulated in the Bible, extending from the Euphrates to the Great (Mediterranean) Sea, or the borders determined by the United Nations in its Partition Resolution of 1947, the 1949 cease-fire lines or the borders of the State of Israel since 1967, including territory conquered in the Six-Day War (hereinafter: „the Territories“) – an inevitable battle for survival in which a distinction was made⁵ between control borders (all

⁵ Horowitz, D. & Lissak, M. (1990). *Trouble in Utopia. The Overburdened Polity of Israel*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved (Hebrew).

Territories conquered) and sovereignty borders (territory in which Israeli law was applied: Jerusalem and the Golan Heights). The difference between the two is not merely semantic but also ideological, reflecting a content world gap with major implications for Israeli society. Discussions about the Territories may refer to them as „liberated” or „occupied”. The difference between these concepts is not technical-linguistic alone, as it represents two types of discourse concerning identity: Defining the Territories as „liberated” establishes Jewish identity (one of whose components is the religious one – and the Territories are considered liberated from a religious point of view), whereas referring to them as „occupied” critically addresses this identity-related discourse. The gap between types of discourse reflects the challenges facing Jewish identity and delineates its boundaries.

Substantive and Constructive Jewish Identity

According to Sagi⁶, the above definitions delineate two distinct approaches to Jewish identity: Substantive and constructive.

The substantive approach originates in Western culture, likening a human being to a machine (e.g. a computer) embodying its own basic operating instructions that control its behavior and functioning similarly regardless of location⁷. According to this view, Jewish identity is a defined aggregate of components, as maintained by Sklare (1958), Herman (1979) and Bar-Lev and Kedem (1986). Differences among the various factions and ideological groups within the Jewish People are a function of emphasis accorded the respective components. The religious and ultra-Orthodox Jewish public perceives the religious component as the most significant, the secular generally considers the national element as paramount and Jews with a right-wing political orientation, for example, consider the territorial component to be supreme. Substantive perception of identity is deemed essential

⁶ Sagi, A. (2002). A Criticism of the Jewish Identity Discourse. In: Sagi, A. & Ilan, N. (Eds.). *Jewish Culture in the Eye of the Storm. A Jubilee Book in Honor of Yosef Ahituv*. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. Pp. 248-294 (Hebrew).

⁷ Sagi, 2002, p. 262.

for preservation of the Jewish collective, as without these substantive elements, it would fall apart within the various cultural contexts in which Jews live.

Obviously, the substantive approach is a static one, whereas actual Jewish identity apparently manifests a dynamic character reflecting the profound cultural and social influence of the external environment. Consequently, many contemporary scholars prefer definitions of a constructivist nature that ascribe significance to such influence on definitions of identity (e.g. Kahana, 1980).

Sagi distinguishes between two types of constructivist identity discourse: Strong and moderate. The former disassembles traditional identity entirely: „There is no connection among the various cultural contexts in which people live; they tell themselves different stories at different times and in different situations without a basic core identity that orders all these contexts into a cohesive framework of meaning”⁸. Moderate constructivist identity dialogue, in turn, claims that identity does not break down into unconnected sub-identities, positing the existence of a common core identity reflecting the initial historical-cultural-social point of departure for individuals and groups alike. This core identity is dynamic and maintains both diachronic and synchronic dialogue. The former expresses receptivity to the past and conducts constant discourse between it and the present. People confront their cultural past, constituting the infrastructure of their identity, through which they assess their present critically. Synchronic discourse constructs self-identity vis-à-vis alternative identities within Jewish space, drawing on the identity conceptions and narratives of individual Jews who structure their Jewish worlds differently from one another. It remains to be determined whether Jewish identity is a closed aggregate of components with fixed definitions or whether these definitions are diachronically or synchronically dynamic.

⁸ Sagi, 2002, p. 277.

Types of Jewish Identity Discourse and Their Implications for Education

Diachronic

Five dramatic events (the establishment of the Zionist Movement, the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, The Six Day War and the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin) in modern Jewish history are analyzed according to their effects on Jewish identity and the dynamics obtaining among them, each having proved pivotal in shifting emphasis among the religious, national and territorial identity components stipulated above.

The most significant event that the Jewish People experienced over the past century is Theodor Herzl's establishment of the Zionist Movement in 1897, constituting an attempt to secure a political solution for the Jewish People before „the tribunal of nations” by setting up a political-national center that expresses legitimate national and ethnic rights of the Jewish public.

The Zionist Movement would never have arisen had it not been for the national awakening and establishment of similar movements by groups throughout Europe. Although Zionism was politically oriented from the outset, it cannot be perceived solely as a procedural or administrative phenomenon, as no more than a new type of political organization for the Jewish People, as it shifted the Jewish collective's emphasis from the religious element that had characterized it throughout its exile to a new and unfamiliar ethnic-national dimension.

Until the inception of the Zionist Movement, Jewish identity was based on religious elements only. Now, a new and previously inconceivable option was available in Jewish individual and collective identity space – the ethnic-national option that could be stripped of all religious elements and even supplant them in certain cases.

From various points of view, the Diaspora Zionist Movement represented a revolution against the Jewish religion and Jewish society, as reflected in the writings of Borocho⁹, Brenner¹⁰ and

⁹ Borocho, B. (1955). Writings. Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad and sifriat Poalim.

¹⁰ Brenner, Y.H. (1946). All the Writings of Y.H. Brenner. Tel-Aviv: A.Y. Stibel. (Hebrew).

Berdichevsky¹¹, who perceived the Jewish religion as a key cause of exile. Many secular Zionists claimed that religion fulfilled a key function in the preservation of the exiled Jewish People but was also responsible for the deterioration of Jewish society in the Diaspora. Emancipation from the anachronistic religion was perceived as a necessary condition for Jewish society's entering the twentieth century and the creation of a modern and healthy Hebrew society in the Land of Israel. Despite the perceived ideological distance, however, Zionism is immanently connected with the Jewish religion, having adopted many of Judaism's outstanding symbols and much of its content, especially since the establishment of the State of Israel, whose official emblem depicts the traditional seven-branched *Menorah* (candelabrum) that stood in the Temple (a symbol of religious ritual). Moreover, despite Herzl's proposal that the flag of the Jewish State have seven stars symbolizing the secular, socialist concept of a seven-day work week, the design ultimately selected recalls the ritual *talit* (prayer shawl) and its traditional blue and white fringes. Israel adopted Jewish religious festivals as its state holidays and the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, as its official day of rest.

The Holocaust, the most traumatic event in contemporary Jewish history, has also left a lasting imprint on Jewish identity. Hitler's quest to exterminate world Jewry as part of an overall ethnic cleansing campaign radically changed the definition of „Jew” and challenged the feasibility of Jewish integration in the modern world. During the period preceding the outbreak of World War II, assimilation had been gaining momentum among Jews throughout the world, particularly in Germany. It was in Germany that the Jewish Reform Movement flourished, seeking to separate the national-ethnic component of Judaism that Jews expressed in public from the religious one that they observed only privately, enabling them to mingle in society at large. Hitler shattered the illusion that the Jews could assimilate, escape their Judaism and become „like all other nations”. Hitler defined Jews according to both religious and ethnic criteria, consigning them to the gas chambers up to the fourth generation. All studies of

¹¹ Berdichevsky, M.Y. (1960). *The Writings of Micha Yoseff Ben-Gurion* (Berdichevsky). Tel-Aviv:Dvir.

Jewish identity¹² consider the Holocaust a key element thereof in the collective and individual dimensions alike. The secular public accords it supreme importance in the State of Israel's emerging „civil religion“¹³, as it reinforces the ethnic-national element and explains the Jews' acute need for a Jewish state. Religious Jews, in turn, perceive the Holocaust as essential to religious identity, attesting to the weakness and fragility of ethnic-national Judaism that proved to be of no avail when put to the test.

The establishment of the State of Israel reinforced ethnic-national and territorial elements of Jewish identity for individuals and the collective alike, placing these components in confrontation with the religious one under certain conditions (among the ultra-Orthodox, for example). The new Jewish state posed a challenge to Jewish identity by creating a situation unprecedented since the Second Temple Era and transforming ideological utopian Zionist identity into reality. Moreover, instead of belonging to a controlled minority and developing in a generally alienated cultural context, Jewish identity now belongs to a dominant culture. In addition, actualization of the territorial dimension in the identity space of the individual had far-reaching consequences for the Jewish world and Jewish identity. The Jews, formerly a people without a political center, had now realized their territorial desires and created a tool and vessel to contain the various elements of Jewish content.

One major question concerning the State of Israel's role as an identity reinforcement tool concerns the state's cultural character, inquiring whether it is to be a Jewish state or a state of all its

¹² Herman, 1979; Frago, U. (1978). The Correlation Between Zionist Attitude and Jewish Identity of the Israeli Youth. *Iyunim Bahinuch*, 18, 37-50 (Hebrew).; Auron, Y. (1993). *Jewish-Israeli Identity*. Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Poalim. (Hebrew).; Gross, Z. (1995). *Judaism and Kibbutz Children – Possible Connections*. Tel-Aviv: Ramot – Tel Aviv university and Yad Tabenkin (Hebrew). Gross, Z. (1999). *A Typology of secularism and Religiosity in the Secular Highschools in Israel*. Phd. Rammat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University (Hebrew).; Levy, S. Levinson, H. & Katz, E. (2002). *Beliefs, Keeping Tradition and Values of Jews in Israel*. Jerusalem: The Guttman Center, The Israeli Center for Democracy for the Avichai Foundation. (Hebrew).

¹³ Don-Yehiya, E. and Liebman, C. (1984). The Dilemma of Traditional Culture in a modern State: Changes and Developments in the „Civic Religion“ in the State of Israel. *Megamot*. 28 (4). 461-485.

citizens. The establishment of the State of Israel gave rise to a dual identity and confrontation between national and civil elements in the identity space of the Jewish citizen. This issue has become more complex for religious Zionists¹⁴, who are torn between ultra-Orthodox Jews alienated from the civil component and secular Israelis who perceive it as the principal element of their Jewish identity. Effectively, the religious Zionist public follows a pattern of compromise between the secular and ultra-Orthodox worlds, perceiving the establishment of the State as the inception of Jewish Redemption (as stated explicitly in a specially-composed Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel, recited publicly in synagogues on Sabbaths and Holidays) and granting religious approval and empowerment to Jewish national rebirth.

Dual identity is likely to prove especially problematic because the State of Israel, unlike other democratic states, does not separate religion and state. Over the years, disputes of a purely religious nature have been addressed through various political arrangements, usually ending in compromise and attempts at maintaining the *status quo* as more essential and acute problems threaten the country's physical security. The politicization of religion has often inflicted serious damage to Judaism's position and prestige, engendering hostility on the part of the secular public and decreasing the attractiveness and status of Jewish identity.

The 1967 Six-Day War put the elements of Jewish identity to a new test and reinforced the territorial element thereof. The war, forced on Israel in response to a palpable existential threat to the Jewish collectivity by the Arab armies of Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan, demonstrated that expansion of the state's territorial boundaries was the key to Jewish survival within realistic secure borders. The aftermath of this war saw a reawakening of Jewish identity in the territorial context, reinforced with the 1977 rise to power of the right-wing Likud Party, that perceived the territorial component as a religion in itself, as expressed by then Prime Minister Menachem Begin in word and deed.

¹⁴ Gross, Z. (2002). The Religious Zionist Identity of State Religious Education in Israel. In: Sagi, A. & Ilan, N. (Eds.). Jewish Culture in the Eye of the Storm. A Jubilee Book in Honor of Yosef Ahituv. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. Pp. 200-233 (Hebrew).

We maintain that territorially-based Jewish identity was tested most severely by the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. Rabin, the heroic commander of the 1948 War of Independence and liberator of the Territories in 1967, was perceived by the religious Zionist public as a national hero (Gross, 2003) who fulfills the vision of incipient redemption, whose progress was subsequently threatened by his political plans. The physical withdrawal plan that began in 1982 with the Camp David Accords posed the danger of ideological, metaphysical withdrawal from the entire concept of redemption. Rabin, who spoke of „territory for peace” in the Oslo Accords, was perceived by his assassin as having sabotaged redemption and therefore deserving of execution by the „redeemer” Yigal Amir. Note that Amir himself was considered a noxious element whose crime was inspired by a fatal combination of misinterpreted particularistic Jewish considerations and messianic activism.

The educational system perceives each of these historical events as an important component of Jewish Zionist education and addresses them in the official school history, civics, literature and Judaism curricula. Moreover, the Ministry of Education has instructed schools to conduct special extracurricular assemblies to mark these events, thereby nurturing the collective Jewish memory and strengthening Jewish national solidarity and identity despite the internal conflicts and fundamental reservations that each such event engenders in different sectors of Israeli society. The ability to compartmentalize and differentiate between consensus and conflict in the educational process is a salient feature of post-modern education.

Synchronic

A human being, according to Sagi¹⁵, is a historical and cultural creature. Diachronic discourse enables dialogue with events in one's past and their analysis with an eye towards the present, whereas synchronic discourse, in our case, opens dialogue with

¹⁵ Sagi, 2002.

a variety of voices and identity alternatives within contemporary Jewish definition space.

Taylor¹⁶ maintains that individuals shape their identity through dialogue maintained with the „other” and „others” that they deem significant. In this spirit, Ahituv claims that „each individual and culture group requires discourse with the «other» and with «others» to consolidate its identity. Identity is formed in a multi-cultural and synchronic manner through dialogue with other cultures ... This dialogue, no less than dialogue with the past and the bookshelf, is what shapes the identity of the individual and society”¹⁷ (Ahituv, 2000, 173).

Who are these „others” to whom Jews relate in formulating their identity? Many recent analyses of the identity definition spectrum in Israeli society differentiate between religious and secular Jews according to the behavioral variable (Ben-Meir and Kedem, 1979¹⁸; Levy, Levinson and Katz, 2002), delineating the following three groups according to number of religious precepts performed: Religious (many), traditional (some) and secular (virtually none).

In a comprehensive study of the Jewish identity of Israeli secular youth, Gross¹⁹ claims that definitions based on the behavioral component are diffuse and misleading, as there may be some discrepancy between the objective definition of a person’s religiosity according to behavior and that person’s subjective feelings. A person may be defined objectively as secular but still possess certain feelings of religiosity, whereas one considered religious may share some of the self-definitions of the secular individual. Consequently, an innovative typological model was developed to define target population groups, comprising two new dimensions, conceptual (applying to those who structure

¹⁶ Taylor, C. (1994). Politics of Recognition. In: Amy Guttmann (Ed.). Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition. Princeton. Pp. 25-73.

¹⁷ Ahituv, Y. (2000). Multiculturalism in our religious Language. In a multicultural Society. In: Goldberg, H. (ed.). Stand Like a Lion: A Rereading in the Principles of Religious Zionism and the Modern Orthodoxy. Tel-Aviv. P. 173.

¹⁸ Ben Meir, Y. and Kedem, P. (1979). Religious Measurement for the Jewish Population in Israel. Megamot. 24, (3). Pp. 353-362; Levy, Levinson & Katz, 2002.

¹⁹ Gross, 1999.

their identity through autonomous, systematic thinking) and social (identity originating in an structured by processes of socialization), through which we may define population groups more specifically. According to this model, we found eight basic Jewish prototypes: Conceptual, social, integrative (both conceptual and social) and unfocused (neither conceptual nor social) religious Jews and four parallel types among the secular. Each conceptual and social dimension is associated with an aggregate of specific parameters that renders it unique. These new dimensions and parameters imply that there are no purely religious or secular types and that the ultimate defining factor, beyond the religious-behavioral variable, is rooted in the dominance of the parameters that characterize the two types. These eight types structure the religious or secular world differentially and thus affect the respective definitions of Jewish identity and the Jewish bookshelf. Each identity reads its own canonical Jewish text differently, with implications for the ideological and practical structuring of their Jewish world. Sound Jewish education, according to Sagi²⁰, must expose students to these differential worlds so that they gain a better understanding of their own respective religious and secular styles and the textual and cultural needs derived from them. As such, the educational system should develop multicultural discourse models, enabling individuals to shape their self-identities according to synchronic conceptions while overcoming the social rifts between religious and secular Jews that threaten the coherence of Israeli society. Such discourse should not include any negative or paternalistic components but should be „capable of exposing us to other possible interpretations of sacred texts and the entity from which we derive our identity”²¹.

The educational system pays ample attention to discourse of a diachronic type, but its handling of the synchronic variety demands improvement and expansion. No activities have been undertaken to promote synchronic dialogue other than a few sporadic, incidental extracurricular programs at a handful of

²⁰ Sagi, 2002.

²¹ Ahituv, 2000, 173-74.

schools whose staffs include teachers personally aware of and committed to this objective.

Issues Concerning the Jewish Educational System in Israel

The educational system in Israel today faces three closely interconnected cardinal problems in the ideological, social and administrative spheres, respectively.

A. Ideological

Realization of the Zionist ideal posed a problem for Jewish education insofar as the teaching of values is concerned. Once Zionism became a fact rather than an abstract object of aspiration and contribution, its heroic nature declines, making way for accelerated routinization. Since the establishment of the Zionist Movement, the Zionist ideal has constituted a key foundation in the shaping of Israel's national identity. Its realization left an ideological vacuum, demanding an alternative basis for identity.

The religious foundation on which Jewish identity had been based for so long was brought down by rapid secularization. Nevertheless, along with its revolt against the „Judaism of Exile,” Zionism upheld several principles with an overtly religious orientation. The resulting tension between revolution and continuity engendered serious practical problems and identity conflicts. Similarly, established religion gradually turned into individual religiosity²², demanding attention and receptivity to the differentiation that resulted as individuals and groups defined themselves in Israeli society. Modernization, too, caused chaos in the identity world, demanding a flexible definition system enabling each subgroup to find its place in a new and colorful identity spectrum. A sovereign state in which Jews constitute the majority was a relatively new and unfamiliar experience that somehow set up a substantive buffer between Diaspora Jews and those residing in the Land of Israel.

²² Gross, 1999.

The Jews of the Diaspora generally require religious precepts to preserve their particularistic identity as a minority group. Consequently, most Diaspora Jewish education is of a religious nature. However, most Jews living in the State of Israel perceive no need to maintain identity content of a religious character, as their very presence within a Jewish political framework generally fulfills their need for Jewish definition.

The new Jewish identity offered no alternative content to replace religious values. As such, the religious population and religious schools found it relatively easy to develop a curriculum that develops Jewish identity, as the requisite elements are clear and well focused, as are their curricular derivatives. On the other hand, these schools find it difficult to emphasize the particularistic component at the expense of universal, global values, an approach that often renders Jewish religious education parochial²³ and at times even culturally chauvinistic.

Alternatively, Israeli secular public schools still experience difficulty defining Jewish identity that is not of a religious character. A study of secular kibbutz schools²⁴ found that students base their Jewish identity on the Bible and Jewish holidays, wherein their basic approach is ethnic-national, eliminating the religious component from this content. According to Schweid²⁵, contemporary secular Jewish identity is based on two fundamental values: Democracy and peace. The transformation of these two principles into founding principles of identity is a source of frustration for the secular public despite Israel's desire for peace, as daily confrontation with traumatic Palestinian terror divests these principles of content, leaving secular Judaism and Jewish education in an ideological vacuum.

²³ Gross, Z. (2003). „State Religious Education in Israel: Between Tradition and Modernity”, *Prospects* 33, no. 2 (2003): 149-164.

²⁴ Gross, Z. (1997). Agents of Jewish education: Their significance and influence on the religious components of Jewish identity of secular kibbutz youth. *Panorama*, 125-136.

²⁵ Shweid, E. (2000). Jewish Education in a Post Modernist Israel. In: Hakelman, I. (Ed). *To Zvulun. A Collection of articles deDedicated to the Late Zvulun Hammer*. Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education. Pp. 272-290 (Hebrew).

B. Social

The State of Israel is a country of immigrants that continues to welcome varied Jewish populations from all over the world. During the pre-State period, the Jewish Community was a homogeneous and selective society for whom ideology was the principal unifying platform. This homogeneity disappeared, however, as a result of non-selective immigration of Jews from Asian and African countries, as well as Holocaust survivors, up to the 1960s. Subsequently, the major waves of immigration from Ethiopia and the Soviet Union in the 1980s and 1990s led to extensive sociodemographic changes that were reflected practically in the results of various national elections. Apparently, the conventional components of common national Israeli identity did not appeal to many of the new immigrants, who had come from different cultural worlds and brought new identity components with them that had a profound effect on shaping Jewish identity in the State of Israel. Immigration from the Former Soviet Union, for example, introduced several components of secularization that changed the face of Israeli society.

On the other hand, many of the immigrants who belonged to the lower socioeconomic strata and required government support and social welfare benefits enrolled their children at religious schools. This massive influx upset school socioeconomic balance and adversely affected religious school functioning and image alike, leading to a perceived congruity of poverty and religiosity²⁶. This overlap exacerbated damage to the prestige of Jewish identity whose religious component, as indicated, was deemed pivotal and essential.

C. Administrative

Effectively, until the establishment of the State of Israel, the educational system was decentralized, comprising four sub-systems that paralleled various political schools of thought –

²⁶ Schwartzwald, J. (1990). A research Perspective on Religious Public Education in Israel. Ramat-Gan: bar Ilan University.

General (right and center), Labor (left), National Religious (modern Orthodox) and Independent (ultra-Orthodox) – and addressed the pedagogical needs of different political outlooks and ideologies. On the establishment of the State, David Ben-Gurion decided to eliminate separate systems for the sake of national unity. He nationalized education, creating a State system whose slogan was national unity and whose declared policy was a melting pot ideology.

Ben-Gurion anchored the process of educational centralization in the 1953 State Education Law. Transition from a decentralized educational administration to a centralized one created an apolitical educational system with a monolithic character, operating according to statute and instituting its own instructional procedures and content.

Historical literature displays are two principal interpretations of Ben-Gurion's plan. Kafkafi²⁷, for example, criticizes Ben-Gurion for eliminating the different systems, claiming that nationalization is a form of charlatanism originating Ben-Gurion's characteristic drive towards control and manipulation. Zameret²⁸, in contrast, considers this fateful decision a direct consequence of Ben-Gurion's political acumen and the only way to achieve the national unity necessary for state-building.

This administrative change was not only a technical-procedural measure, as it had obvious and extensive ideological and social implications. It is only natural for the State Education Law to have been diffuse, without defining the population's varied needs, as no centralized system could satisfy such heterogeneous demands and maintain differential identities, as described above. The official approach is unable to respond to the needs of minority groups and generally gives rise to a policy of discrimination and deprivation towards them. Consequently, experts inquire whether this system should be maintained or replaced by a decentralized system capable of differential response to the various

²⁷ Kafkafi, E. (1991). *A State is Looking For People*. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew).

²⁸ Zameret, Z. (1997). *Across a Narrow Bridge. Shaping the Education System During the Great Aliya*. Sde-Boqer: The Ben Gurion Research Center.

Horowitz

groups comprising Israeli society. Some even consider a centralized educational system to be wholly inappropriate in a post-modern, democratic society.

How the Educational System Addresses Contemporary Ideological, Social and Administrative Issues

A. Ideological

Israel has established several State committees, headed by elected representatives of society, to assess studies of Judaism and Jewish identity from an ideological point of view. The key strategy adopted by these committees called for avoiding unequivocal decisions and allowing room for broader definition and clarification of issues. This policy of intentional non-definition enabled determination of a lowest common denominator that could constitute the minimal basis for contact among various sectors of the Jewish People.

B. Social

Israel's heterogeneous social structure requires the educational system to invest considerable energy and resources in designing various intervention programs aimed at achieving social integration. Curriculum planners now seek to address students' pluralistic identities and their need for self-expression and alternative definitions.

C. Administrative

The State educational system grants autonomy to various minority groups, thereby guaranteeing their rights and attention to their need for self-definition. One outstanding example is the Religious Education Department of the Ministry of Education, that

supervises Israel's State Religious school system and maintains some measure of administrative and educational autonomy within the Ministry. The system also allows for the introduction of special curricula at individual school initiative, responding to the ideological needs and demands of various social groups. Some of these curricula even included matriculation examination units, thereby anchoring them solidly within the system and according official recognition to the specific needs of different population groups.

Discussion

Description of the emergence of Jewish identity from a socio-historic point of view raises three basic questions in the sociological, psychological and ideological realms, respectively, all with implications for the design and future of Jewish education:

A. Can the gap between traditional religious culture and accelerated modernization be bridged? Liebman²⁹ enumerates four strategies for dealing with modernity: Rejection, adaptation, compartmentalization and expansion. Most of the ultra-Orthodox population adopts the rejection strategy, the radical secular population tends to prefer varying degrees of adaptation, while most Jews, especially those who define themselves as traditional and situated „somewhere in between”, opt for compartmentalization, whose practical manifestation is alternate or simultaneous differential attention to the traditional or modern aspects of Jewish life, depending on the issue and circumstances at hand. The religious Zionist public and some traditional Jews choose expansion, entailing application of sacred principles in secular matters and effectively rendering the profane holy.

Translation of these strategies into practical school language is a complex process. Although no official public discussion of these complex issues has taken place to date, it appears that the secular State school system generally adheres to com-

²⁹ Libman, C. (1982). The Development of Neo-Traditionalism among Orthodox Jews in Israel. *Megamot*, 27. Pp. 231-250 (Hebrew).

partmentalization whereas the State-Religious system prefers expansion.

B. The second question is of a psychological nature and relates to the study of identity. An examination of studies of Jewish identity from the 1960s through the 1980s³⁰ reveals a longing and aspiration for Jewish identity of a coherent nature. As of the mid-1980s and primarily during the 1990s, however, studies tend to concentrate on conceptual identity. Bar-Lev and Kedem³¹ found characteristics of differentiation and unification in the identity of adolescents, while Gross³² indicated that secular adolescents can manifest a certain sense of faith and define themselves as religious even though their practical behavior is wholly secular. Alternatively, Schechter³³ (2000) found that religious adolescents tend to perceive themselves as practically observant but secular in ideology and outlook (in sexual matters, for example). Contradictions in coherence of Jewish identity were also noted by Cohen³⁴, Bat-Ami³⁵ and Waxman³⁶. The absence

³⁰ Herman, S. (1970). *Israelis and Jews – The Continuity of Identity*. New York: Random House. Levy, S. & Guttman, L. (1979). *Values and Attitudes of Studying and Working Youth in Israel*. Jerusalem: The Institute for Social Research; Herman, S. (1979); Farago, U. (1989). *Contemporary Jewry*. 5. Pp. 259-285.

³¹ Bar Lev and Kedem, 1986.

³² Gross, 1999; Gross, (2001), „My Mind is My God – Images of God and Self Definition”, in: *Imagining God: Empirical Explorations from an International Perspective*, ed. Hans-Georg Ziebertz. Münster: Lit Verlag; Gross (2002). „The World of Zionist Religious Women in Israel: Between Charisma and Rationalization”. Research Report, Bar-Ilan University, Institute for the Research and Advancement of Religious Education. (Hebrew).

³³ Schechter, E. (2000). *The Development of a Coherent Identity in a Conflictual Situation: The Case of Religion and Sexual Development Among Young Adult Modern Orthodox Jews*. PHD. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (Hebrew).

³⁴ Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

³⁵ Horowitz, B. 1996). *Beyond Denomination: Emerging Models of Contemporary Jewish Identity*. Paper Presented at the annual Meetings of the association for the Sociology of Religion. New York.

³⁶ Waxman, C.I. (2001). *Jewish Baby Boomers. A Communal Perspective*. New-York: State University of New York Press.

of coherence is a clearly post-modern feature, as a person's ability to live simultaneously in conflicting situations characterizes the existentialist, post-modern experience. Consequently, it would be wrong to characterize the identity conflict as an educational failure, as this conflict indeed conforms with the spirit of the times. In the post-modern era, one should accept the built-in, irresolvable conflicts of Jewish identity, as defined by Kahana³⁷ (1980). One may inquire whether the educational system is capable of creating special mechanisms to absorb and institutionalize these conflicts so that they become an integrative force in society rather than a fragmenting factor.

C. The third question addresses the normalization or non-normalization of the Jewish People. Attention to the conflictual structure of identity essentially constitutes part of an attempt to deal with the abnormal situation of the Jewish People and its identity-related implications. As noted in the Introduction, Jewish life has always been entirely different from that of other nations. In a certain respect, the Jews live „outside history,” as claimed by Arieli³⁸. Processes of secularization and nationalism essentially introduced them into history, following which they have undergone accelerated normalization³⁹ in three respects:

1. *Political*: The establishment of a democratic, secular Jewish state rather than a state conducted according to Jewish religious law has transformed the Jewish People into an integral part of the normal system of the world's nations and compelled it to act according to the accepted political codes and rules of the game of international political interaction.

2. *Professional*: One innovation of the Zionist Movement is the desire to build a „new Jew”⁴⁰ (Shapira, 1997) and change the professional structure of the Jewish People. According to the traditional Jewish conception, the Torah scholar stands at the head of the occupational hierarchy, as contrasted with the Zionist ideal

³⁷ Kahana, 1980.

³⁸ Arieli, Y. (1992). *History and Politics*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved

³⁹ See also Kahana, 1980.

⁴⁰ Shapira, A. (1997). *New Jews Old Jews*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew).

pioneer who conquers the wilderness, drains swamps and guarantees physical, national fulfillment for the Jewish People. Jewish professional normalization was enabled by integration of the Jews in secular processes of socialization and their exposure to sources of information and education of a universal character.

3. *Cultural*: The Jewish People had a traditional particularistic culture that focused primarily on the synagogue and the Jewish village. Clearly, increased receptivity, exposure and access to various cultural sites throughout the world and the desire and temptation to be part of them led to an entertainment culture and youth culture of a universal (and primarily American) nature that also gave rise to such deviant patterns, such as narcotics and alcohol addiction, crime and prostitution. Throughout history, the Jews maintained their uniqueness by emphasizing the differences between themselves and other peoples. The Jewish dietary laws, for example, were intended to impose an *a priori* buffer between the Jewish People and other nations. Precluding Jews from dining with people of other nations minimizes the risk of mingling and subsequent loss of identity. Obviously, in the present age of globalization and secularization, there is an increasing tendency among some secular youth to emulate this vast universal culture, resulting in attrition of that unique moral dimension that characterized the Jewish People as the People of the Book.

Conclusions

The Jewish national revolution that began in the early twentieth century and persists to this day engendered a conflict between two Jewish civilizations and traditions: The traditional and the modern. The founding of the Jewish national movement was accompanied by an attempt to create a new Jewish collective identity and a new Jew with a secular ethos and values derived primarily from Western culture, that provided the models and archetypes for the new Jewish identity. One basic principle of Western culture that adversely affected the Jewish ethos is individualism. The gradual transition of Jewish society from a collectivistic orientation to an individualistic one laid the groundwork

for the dissipation and privatization of consensual collective Jewish identity. This shift in orientation led to a differentiation process that affected Jewish identity as well, according Jews the option of conscious, legitimate distinction between their national and religious identities, according the former a value independently of the latter. This process shattered collective memory and legitimized the emergence of different and varied narratives through which one could conduct dialogue with Jewish history and culture. The collapse of the Jewish metanarrative characterizes the post-modern era and is typical of the dramatic changes that occurred in Jewish identity and Jewish education, as indicated above. To adjust to this new reality, Jewish identity and education had to develop differential strategies for accepting the different and employ a systematic socialization process to transform divisive conflicts into challenging dilemmas.

Education has always been perceived as the key to shaping the society of the future. For example, Rousseau's ideas about a new person (Emile) with a new education were adopted by the leaders of the French Revolution. In our generation, the Israeli educational system needs to create a new, multicultural Jew, embodying the various identity conflicts that originated in historical and cultural processes affecting human beings and their environment. Such Jews will develop a dialectical rather than paternalistic or negative approach towards these built-in conflicts, employing various identities as the basis of a flexibly-structured identity capable of facing the special challenges of traditional society and adjusting itself gradually to ensure integration in the post-modern world.

→ **KEYWORDS** — POSTMODERNISM, JUDAISM, JEWISH IDENTITY, JEWISH EDUCATION

Homogeneity hypothesis
