

## **Zionism - A Successor to Rabbinical Judaism?**

*By Gol Kalev*

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## INTRODUCTION

“Palestine for the Jews!” That was the headline of *The London Times* on November 9, 1917, the week after the British government issued the Balfour Declaration. A mere 30 years later, the headline turned into reality with the establishment of the State of Israel, homeland of the Jewish People.

The return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland has driven Rabbinical Judaism, the form of Judaism practiced for the last 1900 years, to a unique challenge.

After all, Rabbinical Judaism’s formation coincided with the Jews’ exit to the Diaspora, and to a large extent was developed to accommodate the state of exile. Much of its core is based on the yearning for the return to Israel. The propensity of its rituals, prayers and customs are centered on the Land of Israel, from having synagogues face Jerusalem to reciting a prayer for return three times a day.

A question arose: Now that the Jews are allowed to return to the Land of Israel, how will Judaism evolve?

During the 20th century, the Jewish people re-domiciled and concentrated in two core centers: Israel and the United States. In Israel, the Jewish nation indeed evolved due to circumstances. A new identity was formed, the Israeli. And a new philosophy, Zionism, became the dominant framework religious and secular life oriented around.

Yet, for the other center of Jewish life, America, Judaism evolved in a different way: By transforming Judaism from a “nation-religion” into a more narrowly defined “religion” (“The Jewish Church”). The seeds for such transformation were planted in Western Europe earlier in the 19th century, but it had resonated with only a small minority of Jews. The propensity of Jews at that time lived in closed Jewish-nation communities in Eastern Europe defined by common language, customs and community. The attempted transformation from “nation-religion” to “religion” of the masses did not occur until the 20th century, merely a hundred years ago, and it was mostly limited to the new world - America.

One hundred years since this transformation, Judaism in America is facing severe challenges. This is due to the failure to keep the majority of American Jews actively religious and the failure to hold them through substitute community and cultural glues. This has subsequently resulted in vast assimilation, which serves as existential threat to American Judaism.

American Judaism’s survival challenge, coupled with Zionism’s preservation success generates an urgency to readdress the relationship of Rabbinical Judaism and Zionism. Will Zionism be a successor to Rabbinical Judaism? Could Zionism expand and serve as the architecture under which Rabbinical Judaism would be preserved? And can it do so without compromising the religious aspects of Judaism?

This paper will strive to develop these questions, exploring why such transformation did not occur in the first century of Zionism, and why now, at the beginning of its second century, may be a ripe time for such transformation.

This paper serves as a basis for discussion to be developed at the AIFL Think Tank. The views expressed are those of the author, and not of the American Israel Friendship League.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Judaism to Zionism**

Judaism went through a dramatic transformation about 1,900 years ago. Biblical Judaism which had been practiced for nearly 1,500 years, was succeeded by Rabbinical Judaism. This transformation coincided with the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion of Jews to the Diaspora.

Rabbinical Judaism radically shook the core of Jewish life. Moving away from the previous focus on the Temple, sacrifices and customs based on the physical presence in the Land of Israel, Rabbinical Judaism developed to accommodate the new Jewish life in exile. The Oral Torah was canonized to complement the Written Torah, an infrastructure for setting rules and laws was put in place (Halacha), a set of rituals and customs was developed, and the yearning for the return to the Land of Israel became a cornerstone of Jewish life. The transformation to Rabbinical Judaism at that fork in the road was successful: Nearly all Jews (with the notable exception of the Karaites), adopted Rabbinical Judaism, and Judaism prevailed throughout the next 1,800 years of exile. Consequently today, the terms Judaism and Rabbinical Judaism are essentially interchangeable.

The Jews stayed a closed nation-religion in their various host countries until modern times, their strong national identity being a key contributor to their unlikely survival. At the end of the 18th century, about 80 percent of the Jews lived in Europe, the vast majority of them in Eastern Europe. But during the course of the 19th century, immigration began to take place - first to Western Europe, then to America.

Around the same time, developments took place which affected the closed Jewish nation-religion: For the first time, Jews in the West were offered emancipation - though such emancipation was conditional on agreeing to shed their national character and narrowing Judaism to a religion. In addition, secularism was on the rise and the Enlightenment challenged much of the conventional thinking.

These developments contributed to the 19th century split of Rabbinical Judaism into three main streams: Orthodox (the incumbent stream), Conservative and Reform. The latter two became popular in the United States, primarily with German Jews who immigrated at the end of 19th century. When the large wave of Eastern European immigrants followed, many of those previously-Orthodox Jews joined those new streams, resulting in today's American Jewry being primarily Reform or Conservative.

Also in the last decades of the 19th century, the quest for the collective return to Zion turned from a dream into an organized movement - Zionism. Theodor Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in 1897 and passed the Basel Program, a manifesto for the creation of a Jewish home in the Land of Israel. Debates immediately ensued in the Zionist movement between the Political Zionists, who sought to fulfill the program

through diplomatic means and the Practical Zionists, who sought to fulfill it through land-purchase and settlement.

The Political Zionists' major hurdle was the Ottoman Empire's unwillingness to cede Palestine (the name given to the land in the 1st century by the Romans, and commonly used since). Circumstances changed in World War I due to the conquering of Palestine by the British, ending 400 years of Ottoman rule. The British government issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which viewed with favor the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The declaration was later solidified in the 1920 League of Nations British Mandate for Palestine. Such political events along with practical Jewish immigration to Palestine set in motion a historical process that led to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Prior to the establishment of Israel, the Holocaust had all but eliminated European Jewry. Beyond the horror of the genocide, Zionism was depleted of its potential pool of immigrants. A few years later, nearly the entire Jewish population of the Arab Middle East was forced out, and nearly all of them immigrated to the newly established State of Israel. Towards the end of the century, Soviet Jews, held behind the Iron Curtain for decades, were finally allowed to leave and immigrated en masse in the 1990s to Israel and the United States.

Consequently, by the early 21st century a binary Jewish world emerged: Over 80% of today's Jews reside in either the United States or Israel.

## **Zionism as Successor to Rabbinical Judaism? Why It Has Not Happened So Far:**

The notion that the return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland would lead to a transformation of Judaism was immediately met by insurmountable hurdles. This was due to a number of hindering circumstances, on both sides of the ocean.

### **Israel-Related Hurdles:**

#### ***(i) Zionism's Secular Roots***

Zionism began as a secular movement. Moreover, secularism was its “religion.” This was not by design. It was certainly not reflected in the 1897 Basel Program, nor in other early resolutions of the Zionist Congresses. But it was indeed reflected de facto in the tone-setting of the 60,000 immigrants in Israel's pre-World War I Immigrations, who shaped Israel's narrative for years to come (The Israeli “Mayflower” generation).

In the early part of the 20th century, as Political Zionism faded into a blank wall, the balance of power had shifted from the Politicals to the Practicals and hence to some limited extent from Basel to Jaffa. Consequently the young settlers, even though a small minority of all Zionists at the time (less than 1% of Zionist Congress delegates), had set the ethos for the developing movement. This was particularly in its cultural aspects, given the absence of political progress.

When later on, post the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the Zionist political infrastructure was built again, it was already molded into a pre-shaped reality, set by the existing settlers of the Second Immigration (the term used for the second wave of pre-World War I immigrants who arrived between 1904 and 1914). For many of them, Zionism was a revolutionary movement, consistent with other revolutionary movements of the time: Creating a new Jew, that had nothing to do with his predecessor. Part of the rebellion was against religiosity, against Rabbinical Judaism. While there were various other streams of Zionism, including a religious one, the tone and ethos was shaped by those young secular settlers such as David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and Yosef Brenner, who left little room for religiosity in their Zionism. As a result, Rabbinical Judaism needed to exist outside the umbrella of Zionism in order to prevail.

The masses who came to Palestine in the next few decades took their tone from the “Mayflowers,” and therefore this early secular narrative stayed through Israel's establishment and until today. Judaism was clearly secondary to Israelism. In addition, a cornerstone of early Zionist narrative was the negation of the Diaspora. Such a Diaspora, was associated with Rabbinical Judaism - hence paradoxically, the two movements clashed, rather than converged.

## ***(ii) Zionism's Socialist Roots***

Zionism also developed as a Socialist movement. Here too, it was not by design, but de facto given the shift of power and spotlight mentioned above, from Europe to the settlers on the ground in Palestine, who eventually took control of Zionism. These settlers were mostly Polish and Russians, inspired by Socialism and the revolutionary ideologies of the time (David Ben-Gurion admired Lenin and viewed him as a role model).

At the same time that the Second Immigration settlers began their ascent in the Zionist political institutions, the Zionist leadership in Europe itself shifted from Western liberal Jews (Theodor Herzl, Max Nordau, Max Bodenheimer) to Eastern Jews more broadly exposed to, and to some degree perhaps more tolerant to Socialist ideology (Nahum Sokolow, Chaim Weizmann). Those shifts were later solidified in internal political battles that occurred in the Zionist governing institutions.

Consequently, going into 1948, Israel was founded by Socialist leaders. The internal political debate was mostly between competing Socialist philosophies. Moreover, both during the pre-Israel years and its first few decades of independence, the ruling party, through its vehicles, controlled or strongly influenced the major resources of the country.

Given that nearly half of the Jews at that time lived in the United States and the capitalist West, there was a need for Rabbinical Judaism to stay separate from Zionism.

## ***(iii) Perpetuation of the Status Quo***

Israel was invaded the day it was established. Given the external threats and the survival difficulties of the fledgling nascent state, Israel decided to defer issues relating to religious-secular relations to an unspecified "further date." Until that date, it has been broadly agreed that the status quo must be maintained. Hence, for the next 65 years, religious-secular tensions have been tested relative to the status quo (do they break the status quo or are they consistent with the status quo), not based on their merits. As a result, there is essentially a freeze of the situation that existed in 1948.

This freeze however reflects a distorted picture. This is because following Israel's establishment a broad immigration of religious and traditional Middle Eastern Jews occurred. In the early 1950s (post the abstract status quo), Israel's population doubled and in subsequent years doubled again. Therefore, the status quo reflects the dictation of the now secular minority (the founders) at the expense of the politically-weak (at the time) traditional/religious majority.

The status quo has perpetuated not only the secular tone of Israel, but also the intra-religious relations. One consequence is the State of Israel awarding a monopoly to the Orthodox stream of Rabbinical Judaism, while completely excluding the Reform and Conservative streams. This is despite the fact that the Reform and Conservative

streams account for over a third of Rabbinical Judaism world-wide, and are the flagship streams of Jews in America.

#### ***(iv) Rejection by the Haredis***

Early on, much of the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) establishment rejected Zionism. While some accepted the notion of a return to Palestine as a tactical method to save the lives of Jews in Europe, many others utterly rejected it, believing that the return of the Jews to Israel could only be accomplished as part of a Messianic process. Zionism, in their view, violated the sacred "Three Oaths," by attempting to accelerate the arrival of Messiah, and hence it was blasphemy. (According to Jewish faith, the Three Oaths were a commitment made during Talmudic times, which included the oath not to rise from the exile prior to the arrival of the Messiah).

With a powerful rejection from such a meaningful part of Rabbinical Judaism, it was clear that Rabbinical Judaism could not reside under the Zionist umbrella.

#### ***(v) No threat to Jewish Nature of Israel***

Israel's Jewish character was not under any serious threat. Until recently, it has been adamantly clear that Israel is and will always be a Jewish state. Hence there was little incentive to change the relations of Zionism and Rabbinical Judaism.

## **America-Related Hurdles:**

### ***(i) New Religion – Judaism without Judea***

At the same time that Zionism shaped its course, a radical Jewish transformation occurred across the ocean in the new Jewish center - America.

The radical transformation included moving from a life of trepidation to that of freedom, from infringement to full rights, from being a helpless minority to becoming equal members of a new nation.

Judaism needed to be adjusted to accommodate those new realities in America. Most importantly, Judaism needed to shed the “Jewish Nation” which had accompanied it since its inception. Therefore, it needed to transform itself into the more narrowly defined “Jewish Religion.”

Suddenly, a new Judaism emerged - a Judaism without Judea. Or at a minimum, Judaism that was now based on the checkered past (“We came from Judea”) as opposed to a hopeful future (“Return to Judea”).

A small minority even suggested taking a step further into a broader universal Judeo-Christian religion. Such attempts failed, primarily because there was no need for that. That is because a new religion emerged:

### ***(ii) New Religion – Americanism***

As Jews abandoned their old ways of life, they became a member of a bigger “religion”: Americanism.

The building of the American shrine was not only a product of early Puritan philosophy, but it continued with full might throughout the next two-and-a-half centuries, as a broad but very particular type of people sought its shores: Risk takers, who agreed to leave the comfort and the known behind and make the pilgrimage across oceans; innovators who were willing to abandon tradition of the past for the hope of a better future.

That yielded a society marked by exceptionalism. This consequently translated to military might, cultural innovation, and world leadership. Through various tests and challenges, Americanism prevailed and strengthened.

America was not only the Land of the Free, but it was also the New Zion. It was founded as the Shining City on the Hill, the New Jerusalem. Jewish participation in the new Zion coincided with the rebuilding of Old Zion, yielding some subtle synergistic themes.

As many Jews moved away from the rituals of their old religion (Observing Shabbat, wearing a Kippa, keeping kosher, going to synagogue), they felt very comfortable at the core of their new co-religion – Americanism.

Jews no longer needed to convert in order to survive or to get a particular job. They could stay proud Jews while being incorporated into Americanism. Jews have played a crucial role in shaping the American narrative, particularly in post-World War II Americanism. If Americanism was the new religion, Jews served as some of the leading cohen's in its shrines.

Yet, as newcomers and given their history, the fear of perceived sacrosanct behavior and dual-loyalty was dreaded. In this context, Zionism was perceived by many Jews not as a blessing but as a threat.

### ***(iii) Jewish Capital***

Jewish wealth, financial and political capital was centered outside of Israel. Israel was the “poor cousin” of the wealthy Diaspora Jews (only in recent years, Israel has emerged as a secondary center of capital). Jewish wealth and its perception was viewed as a source of strength, needed to protect Judaism, to support Jewish causes and to assist Israel. Such Jewish-American wealth needed to be “green” in order for it to be effective. It could not be over-affiliated with Zionism.

### ***(iv) No Immediate Threats***

The last two decades of the 20th century have been a Golden Age for Jews. The existential threats were removed. European Jews were safe, Russian Jews were no longer held behind an Iron Curtain, and Jews in Israel, while facing tactical threats, were no longer viewed as under imminent threat of extinction as they were in Israel's first two decades (the “Last one out, turn off the light” mentality). American Jews have enjoyed unlimited freedom. There has been only rare and few violent incidents of anti-Semitism and Jews have been feeling a complete sense of personal safety in America.

Political Zionism was founded to address and depend on the misery of the Jews. The hopelessness of the Diaspora was a key driver for Jews to move to the Land of Israel. But since shortly after Zionism was founded, the American Jewish community strengthened in numbers and influence, and since Americans could practice their Judaism freely, they simply did not need Zionism.

## **TRANSFORMATION OF JUDAISM: WHY NOW MIGHT BE A RIPE TIME**

*120 years since the beginning of modern Zionism and 65 years since the establishment of the State of Israel, changing circumstances prompt reexamination of the relationship between Zionism and Rabbinical Judaism.*

### **Changing Circumstances in Israel:**

#### ***Breaking of the Status Quo***

The second decade of the 21st century presents a unique opportunity in Israel. One of the decade's key themes is the concept of change. The value of change now far trumps the value of status quo.

This was reflected in Israel's 2011 summer protests, a confederacy of multiple and often competing agendas, uniting under the broad, amorphous call for "Change in National Priorities." This grassroots rise against the old guard followed the political ascent of post-ideological parties over the last two decades, which came at the expense of the traditional large parties. The value of change is also expressed through a shift away from idealization of a homogenous "Israeli icon" (needed in the early days when the concept of the "Israeli" was developed), to a wider embrace of diversity and pluralism.

The call for change is across the board, including in secular-religious relations. Such thirst for change presents an opportunity for a transformation, but it also presents a threat.

#### ***Emergence of Threat to the Jewish Character of Israel***

Once the status quo is broken, once the file of Israel's Jewish nature is opened, sacred cows are under threat. Those include various symbols of Jewish heritage and religion.

Last year, as Israelis united in spirit to mark Holocaust Memorial Day (a day of somber consensus in Israel when cafes and restaurants close and the entire country stops for a moment of silence), a former Speaker of Israel's Parliament, published an op-ed calling for the cancelation of the day, stating Israel had "overdrawn its historical account."

This example is not isolated. Other symbols of Jewish heritage and core beliefs are "on the table" once the country redefines its status quo. That includes the core belief that Israel should be a Jewish state.

Post-Zionism, defined as such negation of Israel as a Jewish state, was until recently a fringe and negligible view within the Israeli dialogue. But a dangerous main streaming of the post-Zionist narrative is now embedded in Israel's internal political and social

dialogue. While 97 to 99 percent of Israel's non-Haredi Jewish voters have been consistently voting for Zionist parties, the depth of Zionist support should not be taken for granted.

Zionism's core narrative, Israel as homeland of the Jewish people, is being increasingly challenged by the competing narrative suggesting that Israel, just like any other country, is merely the home for the Israelis. The question has recently been magnified by two aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. One is Israel's demand to be recognized as a Jewish State. This has prompted an ancillary internal debate in Israel about the importance of such recognition. The other is the shift in advocacy strategy and rationale for the two-state solution.

Proponents of the two-state solution have, in the past, advocated it to Israelis in terms of peace ("land for peace"), then in terms of justice, then in terms of end of terrorism, then in terms of avoiding the threat of isolation and now, primarily in terms of a viable threat to the Jewish nature of Israel.

A broadly accepted narrative now in Israel's mainstream is that if Israel fails to achieve a two-state reality, it will transition into a one-state in which Jews soon will become a minority and hence lose their state.

The universality and high volume of the message of "One State = The End" is certainly not intended for Israelis to start getting used to the idea of post-Zionism, nor of defeat. It assumes that the threat of the end of Israel is strong enough that it would persuade Israelis to support the two-state solution. But inevitably a byproduct of the message is the early seeds of acceptance that such a possibility exists.

End of Israel is on the table again, just like it was in Israel's first two decades, prior to the 1967 war. Back then the threat, a military one, served as calls to arms and led to increased determination of Israelis to defend their country. Now that the threat is ideological, the call to arms needs to be an ideological one. This is particularly difficult in an era when ideologies are on the decline. Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen Zionism through a boost of Judaism. In doing so, underscoring the *raison d'être* of the Jewish State.

Post-Zionism is enjoying a strong back wind from the main streaming of the Israel-Bashing fashion that has developed in certain European circles in the early 21st century. Given globalization and Israel's integrated economy, such fashion has trickled into Israel as well. Beyond the fashion, some Israelis feel they need to distance themselves from Zionism in order to participate in European circles.

Post-Zionism serves as a primary threat not only to the survival of the Jewish state of Israel, but also to the survival of Judaism. Given American Jewry preservation challenges, Post-Zionism is essentially Post-Judaism.

## **ENABLERS OF JEWISH TRANSFORMATION**

### ***(i) Shift of Power from the Secular Minority to the Traditional/Religious Majority***

Population trends in Israel provide an appealing Jewish response to the Post-Zionist threat. Like the United States (and unlike Europe), the Israeli population is predominantly religious. About 60% of Israel's Jewish population would classify themselves either as Haredi, National-Religious or Traditional (Per Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics). In addition, many of the self-classified seculars engage in religious practices to one extent or another. Furthermore, Israel's Muslim population is broadly religious/traditional, and so is the small Christian minority.

With the broad wave of rebellion against the old guard, came a form of quiet rebellion against the idealization of secularism, which characterized Israel's early years. While Israel's secularism was not as "sacred" as in France or pre-Erdogan Turkey, it was clearly the fashion and code of its mainstream. This was true not only in the early days, but through the turn of the 21st century, when seculars were already a minority.

But in recent years, the traditional and religious majority has been taking more and more leadership roles in Israeli culture, community and politics.

Politically, the National-Religious party has nearly doubled its strength in the last Israeli parliamentary elections. In the media, more and more religious reporters are seen on-screen and incorporated into the main-stream news organizations. In the military, within one decade, the Central Command has turned from adamantly secular (Kibbutz/Moshav dominated) to religious-heavy (Kippa-wearing Generals). Similarly the elite units of the army are religious-heavy and combat units across the military attract a higher proportion of religious soldiers.

The breaking of the old guard's hold towards a more democratic and pluralistic Israel, paves the way for a possible transformation whereby Zionism, no longer over-identified with secularism, can now lead global Judaism.

### ***(ii) Jewish Resurgence Amongst Seculars***

At the same time that the traditional/religious groups are attaining greater influence, a Jewish "fashion" is occurring within the secular population of Israel. Secular Yeshivas, Bible classes for seculars and Kabbalah centers are now common and considered "cool."

Israel is going through a slow process of de-sectorealization, which enables secular Israelis to have a larger religious component in their lives. The melting-pot mentality in Israel's early days and the narrowly defined idealized Israeli icon mentioned above, resulted in overly-pronounced sectorealization of those groups that did not tightly fit

such icon (such as the religious). But with the decline of the “party-voice”, end of Socialist influences and the shift to a more pluralistic and diverse Israel, an Israeli can pick-and-choose a la carte from the various Israeli experiences that suits him, including religion.

The de-sectorealization of Israel has broader implications. Politically, the large Yesh-Atid party which is perceived to carry the secular flag, has a Rabbi as its #2 person. Similarly, the National-Religious party has a secular person as one of its key leaders and Chairwoman of its party.

The de-sectorealization also has demographic effects. A mere fifty years ago Israelis almost universally married along Sephardic-Ashkenazi divide, yet today many of the secular newlyweds are of mixed heritage. According to one research (Okun-Khait-Marely study), 25% of Israeli babies today are born to such mixed-couples, compared with only 5% of babies born in the 1950s. That by itself contributes to Jewish revival. Given the previous generation of Ashkenazis were predominantly secular and the previous generation of Sephardic were predominately traditional/religious, mixed couples bring a stronger Jewish exposure to the current generation. A child born to such mixed couple is more likely to be exposed to a grandparent who regularly goes to synagogue or otherwise displays religious practices central to his life.

Perhaps the most visible arena of Jewish resurgence is in Israel’s secular Mecca, Tel Aviv: The mass domestic migration into vibrant Tel Aviv in the last decade yielded an exaggerated image of the “Tel Avivian” (some of the young emigrants sought to be “more Tel Avivian than Tel Avivian”). This was manifested amongst other things by mistakenly perceiving anti-religious behavior as posh.

But a few years out, once the migrate became the local, there was no longer a need to prove such exaggerated Tel Aviv “credentials”. Confidence levels went up and therefore natural behavior pattern resumed. This in turn has yielded a broader counter-trend against what was previously viewed as the “State of Tel Aviv” and its exaggeratedly perceived anti-religious culture.

Shedding remaining hints of anti-religious perception enables Zionism to expand its role and act as leading force in the preservation of Judaism itself.

### ***(iii) Changing Dynamics in the Religious Communities***

The increased interest in religion amongst the seculars is coming hand-in-hand with developments in the religious community. Israel’s religious Jewish population are generally categorized into Haredi (ultra-Orthodox), National-Religious, and traditional.

In the 1970s and 1980s much of the National-Religious leadership took a turn towards stricter religious tones, resulting in a meaningful portion of the National-Religious population turning into so-called Haredi-National-Religious (Hardal). This yielded a

counter-reaction and the proliferation of the so-called Religious-Light.

To a growing degree, many of the Religious-Lights are now finding more in common with the seculars, than they do with the Hardal's. This is reflected in their social networks, Facebook friends, and socializing, which in-turn, further contributes to the de-sectorealization of Israel. Such integration of the Religious-Lights into secular Israeli society is sprinkling the Israeli experience with more of a Jewish feel. The ubiquity of the Religious-Lights makes Israel look a bit more Jewish - in its bars, cafes, workplaces, concerts, beaches.

More importantly, it transplants a much-needed boost of ideology and of optimism into the broader Israeli society. The National-Religious community is today a leader in military service, community volunteering and Zionist education. To a large degree, it is holding the baton of ideology and optimism that was held in the early days by the Socialist "Mayflowers". The National-Religious community can help spread such values into the broader Israeli society given the increased integration and latent demand for the elevation of such values.

The growth of the Religious-Lights also has implication on American Jewry and its view of Zionism. Arguably Religious-Lights are more similar in their behavior (if not theology and customs) to their Modern Orthodox "cousins" across the ocean in America than they are to their Hardal "brothers" in Israel. This presents an opportunity for American Modern Orthodox to adopt or at least blend with the Israeli Religious-Lights.

In addition, with the broad American immigration to Jerusalem, there is starting to be more mixed socializing and mixed couples between Israeli Religious-Lights and American Modern Orthodox. While at the same time, there is less and less coupling between Israeli Hardals and Israeli Religious-Lights.

There is also increasing blurring of the visible boundaries between American Modern Orthodox and Israeli Religious-Lights: American Modern Orthodox often wear an "Israeli" knitted-kippa, and Israeli National-Religious often wear "American" leather or black one. More broadly, much of the religious experience in Jerusalem is turning into "Open-Architecture" (A morning class with a Litvak Rabbi, afternoon class with an American Modern Orthodox teacher, evening service with a National-Religious congregation).

The blurring of geographical and even theological divides enables American Jewry to contribute to the strengthening of the Zionist narrative in Israel and for Zionism to be the uniting theme that encompasses the various Jewish streams and sub-streams.

#### ***(iv) Growing Acceptability by the Haredis***

Zionism's acting as the uniter of American and Israeli religious streams does not transcend to the Haredi Community, which for the most part self-classifies itself as non-Zionist.

Today, the majority of the global Haredi population resides in Israel. While they may not be Zionists in either definition or theology, arguably to a large extent Haredis are Zionists in practice. Though still a closed community, the Haredi are gradually becoming less isolated and more Israelized.

While still very early in the process, there are seeds of a subtle Haredi-Spring. It manifests itself to a very limited degree with partial dis-affiliation with Rabbinical-courts and was demonstrated in recent national and municipal elections with the relative popularity of Haredi "revolutionary" political parties such as Rabbi Amselem's Am Shalem, Rabbi Itzhak's Koah LeHashpia, and the Tov party.

Pending new legislation would allow Haredis who were previously excluded from the workforce due to legacy military exemption arrangements to join the Israeli workforce. This would further contribute to the integration themes mentioned above.

Large number of Haredis joining the workforce would have a massive effect not only socially but also economically, reminiscent of the transformational boost the Israeli economy experienced with the large Russian immigration in the 1990s. Just like the Russian entrants, Haredis could soon play a key role in the Israeli economy and in the building of the Jewish state. In doing so, turning the Haredi-Spring into an Israeli-Spring.

The flagship demonstration of the Haredis not being Zionist is through their refusal to participate in Israeli governments. But such refusal has eroded over the years. Haredi in fact did not participate in most Israeli governments during Israel's first 30 years. But since 1977, Haredi parties participated repeatedly in coalitions formed by Israeli governments and held key ministerial portfolios in Israel's cabinet. Technically, the portfolios awarded to the Haredis are held by a deputy-minister as opposed to a minister. However, such deputy-minister has the full authority of a minister, including setting policies, appointments and budgets. Through this test, Haredi parties have been a strong and integral part of the Zionist operation for the past 40 years.

The composition of the Haredi population itself has evolved. During Israel's early years, Haredis were primarily Ashkenazi descendants of communities in Eastern Europe (as well as of Jerusalemite Communities). By the 1980s, more and more Middle Eastern Sephardic Jews joined the ranks of the Haredis. These Sephardic-Haredis tended to have strong Zionist ties (many are military veterans and often self-defined Zionist). While not a direct reflection of population, in the 21st century the electoral division between Sephardic-Haredis and Ashkenazi-Haredis has roughly averaged 65% Sephardic (pro-Zionist) and 35% Ashkenazi.

Even amongst the Ashkenazi Haredis, significant fractions have demonstrated a strong display of Zionism. The Chabad fraction, some of the Breslov fraction as well significant elements of the Litvak fraction have practiced Zionism through participation in land-settlement, increasing integration into the workforce, social ties with non-Haredi Israelis and for some, even service in the military.

The non-Zionists hard-core are not as hard-core as perceived. Beyond voting and getting elected to Zionist institutions such as the Knesset, the Haredi hard-core has also participated along the gamut of Zionist activities in Israel. The 2003 election to mayor of Jerusalem of such hard-core Haredi was a strong demonstration of such participation. Haredi mayor Uri Lupolianski pursued similar Zionist policies as his secular predecessors and successor: Urban developments, housing, institutions, etc. A Haredi builder of Zion, who got the support of nearly 100% of the Haredi community.

Hence, the assertion that Haredis are non-Zionist is primarily a definitional and theological matter. Notwithstanding fringe movements (less than 5%), most Haredis are de facto Zionist or perhaps some are even “Zionists in the closet.”

More importantly, as Zionism itself becomes more pluralistic, it can incorporate under its umbrella even those who choose to label themselves as non-Zionist Jews. (Just like it embraces as equal the non-Zionist Muslim citizens of Israel, and just like non-believer Jews today are still considered Jewish). In addition, living in closed semi-autonomous communities which might have been perceived in the early days as contradictory to the homogenous Zionist narrative, should now be viewed as consistent with Zionism. Whether a closed Haredi community, closed Anglo community, or closed artist community, such communities today are an integral and important part of Zionist pluralism.

New entrants to the periphery of Haredi circles such as Haredi-National-Religious (Hardal) as well as the increasing “open-architecture” of religion in Israel mentioned above, contribute to the increasing de facto Zionification of the Haredis.

Beyond Zionification, Haredi objection had a stronger meaning in the early days of Zionism, simply because they served as the exclusive religious Jewish conscious. By now, National-Religious institutions and Rabbis have emerged, broadening such religious Jewish conscious.

The removal of strong Haredi objection, finally allows Zionism to play the uniting role in Jewish preservation that was intended by its founders.

## TRANSFORMATION OF JUDAISM: WHY NOW MIGHT BE A RIPE TIME

### Changing Circumstances in America:

*Changing circumstances in Israel are complemented by changing circumstances in the other center of the binary Jewish world - America, where new potent threats to Jewish survivability have emerged.*

### ***New Threats***

#### ***(i) Jewish Glues Ended***

In the early part of the 20th Century, American Jews were bound together primarily through religion. But as the century progressed, the primary thread connecting American Jews became not religion, but community: Memory of the Holocaust and nostalgia for the Eastern European roots (Gefiltefish, Yiddish, Seinfeld).

Such community glues have been effective while the Holocaust survivors and immigrant generations are alive. Yet, those glues are at risk of fading as the generations pass. With them, the 100 year-old attempted transformation of Judaism from a nation-religion to a religion is likely to come to a failed end.

Attempting to revert back to the original glue of religiosity is not likely to be successful. Studies, such as the Pew Research Center's 2013 survey, show erosion of religious practices as well as an erosion of the centrality of religiosity in Jewish life (The Pew survey showed that only 19% of Jews said observing Jewish law is essential to what being Jewish means to them). Hence to persevere, American Judaism needs to redefine itself back into being a Jewish nation.

Often such redefinitions are the result of a danger. Such was the case in 20th century Europe. The Holocaust was not against the Jewish religion, but against the Jewish nation. Every member of the Jewish nation was to be killed. Conversion options were not offered. Secular, atheist and agnostic Jews were killed alongside practicing Jews. Now again, a new danger has emerged that is not directed against the Jewish religion, but against the Jewish nation.

#### ***(ii) Failure of "End of History"***

In the 1920s German and Western European Jews lived in emancipation, in freedom. They had a sense of an "End of History," end of anti-Semitism.

Similarly, in the 2010s Jews in America and around the world live in freedom and emancipation. But regrettably, Jew-hatred is alive and well. In its current iteration it is

not directed as much against the Jewish individual, as it is against the Jewish collective (Israel).

No doubt that Jews around the world feel safer due to the existence of the State of Israel, drawing on the stability and strength of the Jewish state. Therefore, Jews around the world should feel less secure given the magnitude of Israel-Bashing.

It should be made clear that most of the criticism against Israel is legitimate and must be protected and welcomed, even the harshest ones. But equally, it is clear that the fashion of Israel-Bashing is a new manifestation of Jew-hatred.

The attacks on Israel's right to defend itself, holding the Jewish state to radically different standards than other states, and the broad and socially-acceptable fashion of Israel-Bashing, have raised red-flags amongst many Jews.

Jew-hatred has been present since the beginning of Jewish times. The form of Jew-hatred evolved as circumstances changed, with each era producing its own excuse and terminology: In the Middle-Ages, when Europe was religious, it manifested itself in religious persecution. In the 19th century, when Europe became increasingly secular, it manifested itself in ethnological hatred, leading to a new term that began to be used towards the end of the century: Anti-Semitism. The creation of Israel in the 20th century allowed Jew-haters to shift their hate to the collective of Jews. And just like anti-Semitism which preceded it, after a few decades of brewing, Israel-Bashing has now grown into a populous fashion.

Each era of Jew-hatred was marked by its own codes, symbols and snapshots: The blood libels in the middle-ages, the sleazy Jewish moneylender in the 19th century, the blood-thirsty Israeli soldier in the 21st century. In each era, the hate was disguised as legitimate (Not against Jews, only against those who slaughter Christian children to make Matzos; not against Jews, only against moneylenders; not against Jews, only against Israel).

In each era, some Jews attempted to distance themselves from Judaism in order to protect themselves. In each era it was proven ineffective - others were the ones to decide: In the 19th century some Jews thought they were immune because they were secular and the hate was only directed against the Jewish religion. In 20th century Germany, some Jews thought they were immune because they were perfectly assimilated Germans, and the hate was only directed against the Russian Jewish masses (not anti-Semitism, but merely anti-Russian-Semitism).

Similarly, in the 21st century some Jews might think that keeping a safe distance from Israel would immunize them from Israel-Bashing. History shows that they are wrong, but more alarming is that so does the present.

In the United States and around the world, the terms "Jewish" and "Israel" have been often used nearly interchangeably, reflective of popular perception. This is widespread

not only amongst Israel's adversaries but also amongst its closest friends (President Kennedy asked Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion how he can reward Israel for American Jewish voters' support in the 1960 election. Secretary Hagel made much noted mis-spoken comments about the "Jewish Lobby" when referring to the "Israeli Lobby"). In France, many Jews feel under a sudden physical threat, which is leading some to immigrate or to purchase second homes in Israel. (For some, the 2012 Toulouse shooting of Jewish children served as a wake-up call).

Just like in previous eras, the remedy that could save Jews is not the attempt to escape from Judaism, but rather the return to Judaism. In fact, many historians point to anti-Semitism itself as an enabler of Jewish survivability. Now again, the effective remedy to Israel-Bashing is not the escape away from Israel, but rather the strengthening of Jewish identity around Zionism.

### ***(iii) Dispersal of Jewish Capital***

Jewish Capital has served as a bastion of strength in supporting both the viability of the Jewish-American Community and of Israel. But such strength is now fading. This is in part due to a long-term shift of Jewish philanthropy from primarily supporting Jewish causes to primarily supporting community-wide charities. But mostly, this is since Jewish capital itself is diminishing.

Inter-generational wealth of Jewish families is decentralizing, wealth of new American groups is emerging, and significant amounts of foreign money is pouring into the previously perceived centers of Jewish power (for example: High-end Real Estate in New York is now widely purchased by Asian, Russian and Middle Eastern investors).

Politically, the perception of a collective Jewish capital such as the widely perceived notion that a significant portion of Democratic Party fund-raising is coming from Jewish donors, is likely to dissipate. Over the long-term, so will the importance of fund-raising itself as further democratization of American political process is inevitable (campaign finance reforms, shifts of power away from NY/DC/LA as demonstrated by the Occupy and tea-party movements). The dispersal of Jewish capital creates a void which needs to be filled by another perceived source of community strength.

The dispersal of Jewish capital has a profound effect not only on the Jewish-American Community, but also on Israel's stance. Perceived Jewish wealth was key to the establishment of the State of Israel, both on the political front and the practical front. On the political front, Zionism's approach to the Ottoman Empire around the turn of the century was based on Jewish capital solving the Ottoman debt issues, the 1898 conversations with Kaiser William II, German's Emperor were capital-heavy in content, the perception of Jewish capital contributed to issuing the Balfour Declaration, and Prince Faisal's Arab support of Zionism was based in part on perceived infusion of capital to the region. Similarly, the remission of British support in 1921 was based in part on the disappointment that Jewish capital failed to arrive to Palestine, per High

Commissioner Herbert Samuel's own statements on such remission. On the practical front, land purchases in Palestine enabled the establishment of the Jewish state.

Israel's survival even today is helped by a perceived backing of such amorphous Jewish capital. With greater world transparency and information flow, as well as with shifts of wealth structure described above this is likely to dissipate as well.

At the same time, wealth in Israel is beginning to accumulate. The high-tech sector, military conversions, the entrepreneurial spirit and the recent discovery of natural gas have dramatically elevated Israel during the 21st century from a Developing Country to a new center of Jewish capital. Israel today is no longer the "poor cousin" viewed primarily through a philanthropic prism. It is a center of innovation with an abundance of attractive investment opportunities.

## **ENABLERS OF JEWISH TRANSFORMATION**

### ***(i) Emergence of Virtual Zionism***

Jewish re-nationalization around Zionism is more feasible now than it has ever been given the broadening definition of Zionism.

In Israel's first 65 years, the promotion of Aliya was core in its relations to the Diaspora. Israel encouraged Diaspora Jews to move to Israel, and maybe even exhorted a guilt-feeling towards those who did not. The clear message Israel sent was "we need every Jew in Israel." This was exemplified by the army of Jewish Agency delegates paid by the State of Israel converging on the various Diasporas to convince local Jews to move to Israel.

But recently there is a change in policy in the Jewish Agency which no longer aggressively advocates for Aliya, as much as for maintaining strong connections between the Jewish Diaspora and the Jewish state.

In addition, Israel's improved security situation, relative economic prosperity and programs such as Birthright allow a large number of Jews to have stronger ties to Israel: Visit on a regular basis, spend a year in Israel, and even own vacation homes.

Social networks, digital connectivity and global transformation to a cloud mentality, contribute to the greater connectivity of Jews to Israel. For example, Jerusalem Post readership is now predominately abroad, unlike 30 years ago which was overwhelmingly domestic Israeli.

Israel's strides at de-politicizing its image ("Rebranding Israel"), and the array of superb Israeli products (From high-tech to art to music to people), enables Jews to more easily embrace Israel. Connection to Israel is no longer driven by charity or guilt. It is driven

by interest and want. To some degree, an “Isrophile” trend is beginning to emerge outside of Israel.

And so, while the overall Israeli national narrative remains Aliya-driven, an opportunity is beginning to emerge for an American Jew to center his identity around Zionism, without leaving the United States.

### ***(ii) Emergence of the Israeli-American***

The American Jew’s ability to center his identity around Zionism is aided by a new entrant that has showed-up to the core of the Jewish-American community in the 21st century: The Israeli-American.

While Israelis have been immigrating to the United States since Israel's establishment, they tended to be in the fringe of American Jewish life. Their demographic (“Taxi Drivers/Movers”), combined with the negative image they had in Israel (“Defectors”), distanced them from American Jewish circles.

The last two decades have produced an abundance of Israelis earning their MBA’s in top US Schools, as well as advanced Law degrees and PhD’s. Many Israelis are getting senior positions in American high-tech companies and are present across the American business spectrum. Israeli society no longer views Israelis living abroad as a negative (a former Prime Minister’s children lived in the United States, and that was not an issue politically). The American Jewish community has found it easier to embrace an “Israeli MBA” than an “Israeli taxi driver.”

The Jewish-American mother, living by the fear of inter-marriage, discovered the remedy of the Israeli-American. And with the advent of J-Date and other on-line dating services, Israeli-American marriage today is beginning to serve as a key back-stopper to intermarriage statistics.

Israeli organizations are beginning to emerge in America, and prominent Israelis are entering key positions not only in business and academia but also in politics and community. An Israeli-American has even been mentioned as a potential candidate for President (arguably, one of the most prominent Jewish-American politicians is an Israeli-American, Rahm Emmanuel).

The growing prominence of Israeli-Americans has had a profound effect on the Jewish-American community and its ability to relate to Zionism:

- (1) It presents an alternative role model for young American Jews (e.g. go to an Idan Raichel concert as opposed to Matzah-ball night). For many young Jews, the strong Israeli product far out-trumps the old Jewish product.
- (2) Non-Jews are more easily integrated to Jewish culture via Israeli culture. Given the

contemporary integration of American Jewish and non-Jewish society, the more non-Jews embrace Jewish themes, the easier it would be for the American Jew to do so himself. As mentioned above, the popularity of the Israeli product allows the non-Jew to give much-needed credibility to it.

- (3) There is a growing connection of secular American Jews to Israel. Not surprisingly, for a secular Jew, connecting to secular themes is much easier than connecting to religious themes. Similarly, connecting to the present (High-Tech, Innovation) is easier than connecting to the past (Yiddish), and connecting to happiness (Art, Wine) is easier than connecting to tragedy (Holocaust).

The gradual Israelization of American Judaism would fill the vacuum that is inevitable with the De-Yiddishization of American Judaism (as the “grandmother generations” pass-away). With the growing penetration of Israeli culture into the US Jewish community, suddenly Judaism (e.g. Israelism) is “cool.”

### ***(iii) American Cultural-Pluralism***

Such re-nationalism of Judaism is consistent with unfolding trends in the United States. As Americanism evolves through the early 21st century, it increasingly embraces values of pluralism and diversity.

American ethos is no longer shaped by the “Mayflower narrative,” but with a pluralism narrative incorporating broad input from the various branches of Americanism, centered around the strong core trunk.

Beyond ethos, the American society and its electorate have evolved as well. In the 20th century, over-embrace of Zionism could have been considered a loyalty reducing characteristic, raising concerns of dual loyalty. Today, such overt love of Zionism would be a positive loyalty-enhancing characteristic, given the evolution of the American electorate, and the next derivate of its multi-culturalism ethos.

This is in part due to the rise of two new centers of power in American Politics:

- (i) Christian-Right – without Israel seeking it, the Christian-Right has turned into a political-base for Israel. For significant portions of it, Israel is a core-issue of its agenda. By extension, for many, Zionism, the Jewish people’s right to live freely in Israel, is an unshakable American value.
- (ii) Latino-Americans - not just in numbers, but also in fashion, the Latino sector is now a major force in American politics. Some Latino politicians are considered amongst Israel's strongest supporters (for ex: Sen. Bob Menendez, Sen. Marco Rubio). But more than political positions, the rise of the Latino constituents solidifies the Cultural-Pluralism trend that enables Jews to more strongly center their identity around Israel.

Loyalty to Mexico or to Columbian heritage is not in any way considered contradictory to loyalty to the United States of America.

Similarly, the behavioral patterns of the Latino community is such that for most, in spite of relatively high religiosity, the national characteristic is stronger than the religious characteristics. As manifestation, Mexican-Catholic churches are different than Puerto-Rican Catholic churches, even though the theological nuances are small. This is simply because the “national” value is the dominant one.

Therefore applying the Latino-American model to the Jewish-American community, identification around Zionism, is much more consistent than around the synagogue. Or taking it one step further, let the synagogue identity (“Rabbinical Judaism”) reside within the Israeli identity (“Zionism”), just like for a Mexican-American, the Mexican church is a byproduct of his Mexican heritage, and not the other way around.

Hence, given America’s demographic trends, a second-derivative of Cultural-Pluralism has evolved in the early 21st century. Not only has the hyphenated American been making a come-back, but he is now encouraged to maintain loyalty to both sides of the hyphen without compromising one another.

Early in the 20th century, Horrace Kallen discussed the concept of the American Symphony, with each heritage group essential to the success of the great Symphony. In his time, the ethnic identity was far more dominant than the emerging “Americanism.” The Symphony was bottom-up. But in the 21st century, Americanism is the dominating tune. The Pan-American “religion” has a much stronger gravitas in America, than religion per church. Therefore having the confidence and bandwidth to encourage the further development of Cultural-Pluralism.

Given that Americanism is the dominant tune, each instrument in the symphony now has even further importance for the success of the symphony. Therefore, a Cuban-American choosing to celebrate his Cuban identity makes him an even better American. Similarly a Jewish-American choosing to emphasize his Judea identity (e.g. Zionism) makes him a better American as well.

This certainly does not mean that the hyphenated-American needs to agree politically with his heritage nation’s government (Marco Rubio does not agree with Raul Castro), but caring about and celebrating his heritage nation’s affiliation is a profound manifestation of 21st century Americanism. A recognition that ethological national identify is not to be confused with political nationality.

## JUDAISM 3.0

The 20th century produced a massive shake-up to Jewish Infrastructure. The Jews universally re-domiciled geographically (over 95% of them), nearly universally changed their attitude toward religion (70-80% turned more secular), and nearly universally began speaking a new language and adopting a new culture.

Yet Rabbinical Judaism has not shadowed the magnitude of this shake-up, resorting to issue-specific patches in lieu of a transformation. As a result, there is an inevitable disconnect.

Old mechanisms of preserving Judaism may no longer be sustainable. In America, religiosity is detrimentally weak and not a sufficient glue to hold Judaism (vast majority are non-observant). Substitute glues applied in the 20th century to preserve Judaism in America while the Holocaust and immigrant generation were alive, are now gradually fading.

As a result, the current comparatively low 50%-60% intermarriage rate in the Jewish community is not likely to be sustainable. Absent a new glue, it is likely to emulate intermarriage trends of other integrated American ethnic groups who came to America around the same time as the Jews. This could turn Judaism in America within a few generations into a brand, and could diminish American Judaism to the small group that observantly practices it on a regular basis.

But a historic transformation of Judaism could possibly limit the dangers of such massive assimilation.

Arguably, previous transformations of Judaism were reactionary and reluctant. The transformations occurred to address an existential crisis of the time. In the 21st century, there exists an existential crisis: Assimilation. Therefore, a reluctant reactionary evolution might need to be considered.

Simplistically, one could point out to three stages of Judaism. In each, a reaction to a threat:

**Judaism 1.0: Temple/Biblical Judaism** – reaction to paganism. Therefore, some pagan influences were refashioned and incorporated to allow the Jews to embrace Monotheistic Judaism.

**Judaism 2.0: Rabbinical Judaism** – reaction to the exile as well as to the rise of other competing streams which sought to succeed Judaism. Rabbinical Judaism succeeded Biblical Judaism by incorporating it into itself, not replacing it. By complementing the Written Torah with the canonization of the Oral Torah, as well as incorporating new technology, creating a philosophical/ideological infrastructure and validating new de facto realities.

### **Judaism 3.0 (Pending): Zionism** – reaction to Assimilation.

It is important for Jews to recognize that assimilation is likely to stay. It is highly unlikely to be defeated. It is the Jew's desire and nature to assimilate, and it is consistent with the overall global environment. History shows that when assimilation was a viable option, many Jews have assimilated, such as for Western European Jews in the late 19th century and early 20th century. (For example, intermarriage reached 56% in Copenhagen in the 1880s, over 50% in Germany in the 1910s, and 70% in Amsterdam in the 1930s according to Walter Laqueur's History of Zionism). Assimilation was not an option for Eastern Jews, the majority of Jews during this time, and stopped in the West only due to mass migration and the Holocaust.

While assimilation is not likely to be stopped, an open question is what would the Jew assimilate to. The binary nature of Judaism that exists today provides attractive alternatives: The Jew can either assimilate to Israelism or to Americanism.

Assimilation into Israelism (Zionism) should be welcomed as long as Rabbinical Judaism finds a suitable home in the Zionist tent. If it does not, Israelism might become a vehicle for its own self-destruction (end of Zionism).

A pre-requisite to such successful incorporation of Rabbinical Judaism into Zionism is the outcome of the battle of narratives in Israel between the incumbent narrative of Israel being homeland for the Jews vs. the challenging narrative of Israel as homeland for the Israelis. It is therefore imperative to boost Zionism with an infusion of Judaism. Strengthening Jewish identity (including secular Jewish identity) is strengthening of Zionism. Conditions in Israel may now be in place for such strengthening, given demographic trends, increased leadership of the religious community and greater integration of religious and secular societies in Israel.

Assimilation into Americanism (as opposed to into Christianity or agnosticism), should also be welcomed since as discussed above, it is no longer inconsistent with a strong embrace of Zionism. If Zionism is a successor to Rabbinical Judaism, the "assimilated" American Jew can have Israel as his point of orientation which will in turn strengthen his Judaism (e.g. Zionism).

Transformation to Judaism 3.0 could turn controlled-assimilation from an existential threat to an enabler of survivability. (Just like in Judaism 2.0, when the exile itself was turned into an ethos of survivability).

Zionism could turn into the architectural framework that binds world Judaism. It could serve as a successor to Rabbinical Judaism by incorporating it into itself. (As in the previous transformation, in which Rabbinical Judaism succeeded Biblical Judaism - certainly did not replace it).

For Zionism to serve as such a mechanism by which Judaism would be preserved, it needs to become more pluralistic. It should embrace a wider range of narratives, Jewish religious streams, cultural, and residential preferences. Zionism should also slightly “de-Israelize” and more broadly embrace the notion that Israel is the national homeland not only for its citizens, but also for Diaspora Jews.

Israel could then become the old-new point of orientation for all Jews. That includes Israelis living in Israel, Diaspora Jews living full-time or part-time in Israel (whether they choose to culturally “Israelize” or to keep their American/European cultural behavior), Israeli expats living abroad as well as Diaspora Jews not living in Israel, nor ever intending to move to Israel. For them, centering Jewish identity around Judea is much more relevant than centering it around the synagogue.

Rabbinical Judaism in both Israel and abroad should consider getting behind new realities, even at the cost of bold risks. Just as the reality in the previous transformation was that Jews are now in the Diaspora and therefore there is no point in continuing rituals and behaviors that are only relevant in Israel, the reality in this transformation is that Jews are no longer in the Diaspora and therefore there is no point in continuing rituals and behaviors that are only relevant when outside of Israel.

With a delay of 120 years, the conditions might now be in place to turn into a reality a vision carefully articulated by Theodor Herzl in the first Zionist Congress in Basel: “Zionism is the return to Judaism.”

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