American Jews and Israel at a Time of Crisis
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The concept of clal yisrael teaches that the Jewish people are bound together in mutual experience, responsibility and destiny. In the United States and Israel, the countries in which the vast majority of the world’s Jewish population dwells, it has not always been easy to apprehend our shared experience. Israel has struggled against hostile neighbors since its modern rebirth. American Jews, by contrast, have enjoyed domestic harmony and freedom from anti-Semitism for half a century. During the 1960s, however, the lives and culture of American Jews and Israelis finally seemed to be converging. Israel’s economy was booming, anchored by the same high-technology sector that propelled the American expansion. A generation of Israelis, raised on the dreams of Oslo, basked in a “peace dividend” marked by a decidedly American-styled culture. There was hope that once a final peace settlement was reached, Israel would be freed from its ongoing struggle for both existence and acceptance, and would achieve a degree of democratic stability not unlike America’s.

In the past two years, the Palestinian war of terrorism has offered a bracing rejoinder to this dream. Not since the early 1970s has the daily experience of Israelis and American Jews diverged more. Despite the attacks of September 11, American Jews do not live in the same shadow of potential violence as do Israelis. Nor are we facing the fury of our neighbors or the same ostracism on the part of the international community. Although daily life in Israel is nowhere near as miserable as it appears in the media, the distance between the experiences of American Jews and Israelis has given rise to a sense of guilt and powerlessness on this side of the divide. We yearn to connect with Israelis, to do what we can to ease the pain of crisis and war. We have memories of the 1940s, when too much of American Jewry stood silent during the Holocaust, and we are determined not to let history repeat itself. If Israel means that we are one people, then it is impossible for American Jewry to be at peace while Israel is at war.

This issue of CONTACT explores various ways American Jews are connecting to Israel during a period of ongoing crisis. For some, this means experiencing Israel physically through Israeli programs and Aliyah. For others, it means engagement on campus and with our elected representatives. Each of our contributors offers personal and programmatic reflections on increasing the strength of clal yisrael during a period of crisis for the Jewish people. Solidarity with Israel need not necessitate a demand for blind allegiance. It is an understandable if distressing product of crisis that our community has been less open to dissenting opinions in the past two years. Those who oppose Israeli policies or who sympathize with the suffering of Palestinians have often been labeled disloyal, self-hating or traitorous, even when they espouse positions favored by a majority of Israelis. Unfortunately, our leaders have not taken steps to quell the intolerance and indeed have adopted policies that inordinately express the views of a small but vocal segment of the community. While the advantages of a united leadership front are clear, we must ask ourselves at what cost we are advancing a unified agenda. It is time for the leaders of Jewish organizations to demand that the vilification end, and for our organizations to adopt policies representing not just the views of an extremist minority, but of all the American Jews they purport to serve.

REFLECTIONS

The connection between Israel and the Jewish people has been essential to the healthy Jewish soul for millennia. While surface feelings for Israel are more volatile and subject to the vicissitudes of daily news, the deeper attachment is undiminished.

The true picture emerges in moments of crisis, when the full intensity of Jewish feeling for Israel erupts. The fierce rallying around Israel in 1967 retroactively debunked claims by leading American Jewish spokesmen that American Jews were “Americans first,” and that Israel’s importance had declined. Similarly undercutoff were those spiritual spokesmen who diminished Israel’s importance, arguing that Diaspora Jew was important of and superior to the schools of Jerusalem. In parallel fashion, the closing of ranks and the overwhelming solidarity of American Jewry with Israel since Intifada II began in September, 2000, is a strong indicator of the unbroken bedrock of the connection.

The logic of Jewish attachment to Israel has grown stronger since 1948. The actualized state has proven to be even more magnetic than the commonplace fantasized in Jewish dreams for two thousand years. This is because Israel is the realization of Jewry’s deepest beliefs. From earliest biblical days, Jewish religion taught that Jews have a special connection to the land of Israel. Rabbinic culture emphasized that, once national independence was restored, the history interrupted by exile would come to life again. Even more: the Jewish soul was so attuned to Israel that once the people was replanted in the promised land, the ground would sustain a higher demographic and cultural vitality. The evidence of five decades is clear. Israeli Jewry is the only Jewish community whose population is growing by internal biological energy and not just by immigration from abroad. The majority Jewish population has created a comprehensive national culture in which
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In the past two years, the Palestinian war of terrorism has offered a bracing rejoinder to this dream. Not since the early 1970s has the daily experience of Israelis and American Jews diverged more. Despite the attacks of September 11, American Jews do not live in the same shadow of potential violence as do Israelis. Nor are we facing the fury of our neighbors or the same ostracism on the part of the international community. Although daily life in Israel is nowhere near as miserable as it appears in the media, the dissonance between the experiences of American Jews and Israelis has given rise to a sense of guilt and powerlessness on this side of the divide. We yearn to connect with Israelis, to do what we can to ease the pain of crisis and war. We have memories of the 1960s, when too much of American Jewry stood silent during the Holocaust, and we are determined not to let history repeat itself. If you yizkor means that you are one people, then it is impossible for American Jewry to be at peace while Israel is at war.

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The Meaning of Israel Today

by RABBI YITZ GREENBERG

ever since the modern state of Israel became a reality, there have been recurrent claims that Israel is losing its emotional centrality in American Jewish life. In recent years, Steven M. Cohen has published surveys charting the declining intensity, by generations, of identification with Israel. Others cite the negative media images of Israel as alienating younger generations from the Jewish state. Both claims fail to measure the depth of the relationship between world Jewry and Israel. Indeed, the connection between Israel and the Jewish people has been essential to the healthy Jewish soul for millennia. While surface feelings for Israel are more volatile and subject to the vicissitudes of daily news, the deeper attachment is unshaken.

The true picture emerges in moments of crisis, when the full intensity of Jewish feeling for Israel erupts. The fierce rallying around Israel in 1967 retroactively debunked claims by leading American Jewish spokesmen that American Jews were “Ameri- cans first,” and that Israel’s importance had declined. Similarly underestimates were those spiritual spokesmen who diminished Israel’s importance, arguing that Diaspora Jewry was important for and superior to the schools of Jerusalem. In parallel fashion, the closing ranks and the overwhelming solidarity of American Jewry with Israel since Intifada II began in September, 2000, is a strong indicator of the unbroken bedrock of the connection.

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If Not Now, When?

by MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT

I am a student of the Pardes Educators Program, and I live in Jerusalem. This past August, while I was in America for my wedding, a terrorist’s bomb killed two of my classmates while they sat eating lunch in Hebrew University’s Frank Sinatra Cafe.

Ben Blumenthal’s funeral was on Friday, my wedding was on Sunday, and Marla Bennett’s funeral was on Monday. My wedding will forever be associated with this communal trauma. A number of our guests were at one or the other funeral. Rabbi Daniel Landes, the Rosh Hashana of this parochial and our efficient, traveled from Rest in Harirsh in Harrisburg to our wedding in New Jersey and then immediately to Marla’s funeral in San Diego.

Our community came together for our wedding — some in spite of the pain, and others because of it. We had no idea how to proceed under the circumstances, but our friends insisted. They needed to dance and sing just to keep from crying. They needed to fulfill the mitzvah of gladdening the bride and groom. They needed to celebrate as well as mourn. And nobody knows better how to do that than those who care about the situation.

My parents, and all those present at the wedding, felt the power of our community — the power of people drawn together by ideology and learning, shared danger and shared joy, but most of all by shared commitment. In tears at the end of the wedding, my parents told me this: ‘Israel is a reminder that I live in. And why: and again despite the danger, I return. To live in Israel, in Jerusalem, is to experience how important, how precious and how sacred life can be.’

The sadness of our friends and family at our departure was clearly deepened by their fear for our safety. But while we could understand their feelings, my wife and I did not feel a need to separate. Diaspora Jews, they became profoundly aware of the Jewish, as opposed to the exclusively Israeli, aspects of their identity. The leadership of the Army was so impressed by the character building effectiveness of the Israeli service that it granted soldiers five days to spend with birthright groups. By the second year, the scale of birthright had been expanded. Ninety-five percent lasted between two and ten days. Mifgashim now form the heart of birthright trips. They emphasize the dual-pronged approach employed by birthright to inculcate Jewish identity: reuniting with Jewish values and history, and reuniting with the people of clal Yisrael.

At this critical juncture, we must do more than buy Israeli goods and write to Congress. It is time for all of us — individuals, philanthropies, Federations — to commensurate to programs that bridge the gap between the wide varieties of American life experience and that through tangible, peer-to-peer experiences, that each of us is responsible for the other. 

Marla, who, prior to dying tragically, lived in America, is my point of reference, and I don’t know exactly when or how that happened. But I do know that my formal change of status simply defined what had existed for a long time, been implicit — that being a citizen of Israel means something more to me than living an American. And whether or not I planned to live the rest of my life in Israel, the clearest expression I could find for this epiphany was formally changing my status. It was an act aimed at harmonizing my ideological and learning, shared danger and shared joy, but most of all by shared commitment. In tears at the end of the wedding, my parents told me this: ‘Israel is a reminder that I live in. And why: and again despite the danger, I return. To live in Israel, in Jerusalem, is to experience how important, how precious and how sacred life can be.’

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According Kant received a BA and MA from Stanford University in 1996, and PhD in politics from Princeton University in 2003. He is an associate in a variety of Jewish institutions. He and his wife Emily Shapira make their home in Jerusalem.

Michael H. Steinhardt is Chairman of Jewish Life Network/Stamford Foundation.

If Not Now, Then When?

by ANDREW KATZ

NOW MORE THAN EVER:

Whistleblower in Israel

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In Israel, Jews will come together as a group]

Growing up in suburban America, the idea that “you can’t take it with you” did not mean one should store valuables. It was an act aimed at harmonizing my ideological and learning, shared danger and shared joy, but most of all by shared commitment. In tears at the end of the wedding, my parents told me this: ‘Israel is a reminder that I live in. And why: and again despite the danger, I return. To live in Israel, in Jerusalem, is to experience how important, how precious and how sacred life can be.’

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visits to Israel is alarming. It calls to mind the image of a mercenary relationship: Israelis will fight for a Jewish future, and American Jews will cheer them on from the sidelines. The situation is exacerbated by the demographics. America has the most populous Jewish community in the world. Avoiding Israel incurs hardship not only by decimating Israel’s tourism industry. On a deeper level, it makes us stand by and watch as Israelis are united with Israelis only when it is convenient for us. When the situation becomes difficult, they are on their own. Now is the time to broaden our own expanding trips to Israel for adults and youth alike. The need is crucial among young adults, who lack memories of Israel galvanizing historical moments such as its heroic birth in 1948 or its miraculous triumph over annihilation in 1967. Young people are more prone to take Israel for granted or, worse yet, to view it through the lens of the media as an oppressive and unjust regional superpower. Israelis’ contemporary image as Golliath outwits over its historical experience as David. When I visit college campuses, I sense a greatly diminished interest in Israel as the bedrock of Jewish life. The only way to reverse this trend is to vastly expand our programs that bring people to Israel. The unrecognized power of visits to Israel lies not in the ancient buildings and sites, although these too are vital, but in transformative encounters between people. Birthright Israel, the revolutionary program to reconnect young Jews with Jewish identity, also serves to reestablish Israel’s centrality in the lives of Diaspora Jews. One underlying premise of birthright is that Israel is that Israel and Diaspora Jews are people who cannot exist in subsep- ration. Diaspora Jews, as a foundation of history and heritage, while Israelis need Diaspora Jews as a reminder that Jewish identity transcends space and time. In birthrightIsrael, we learned the symbolic power of peer-to-peer experiences when we confronted a major locator of birthright programs, the mifgashim, or encounters, were Diaspora and Israeli Jews. The idea was to allow birthright participants to meet with Israelis in their same age cohort. At first, because of the difficulty of scheduling time with Israelis who were serving in the Army, most mifgashim were short-lived, lasting less than a single day. But after speaking with the Education Officer of the Israel Defense Forces, I discovered a startling fact: Israelis were as moved and transformed by their encounters as were the birthright participants! By making friendships with their counterparts in Diaspora, they became profoundly aware of the Jewish, as opposed to the exclu- sively Israeli, aspects of their identity. The leadership of the Army was so impressed by the character-building nature of mifgashim that it granted soldiers five days to spend with birthright groups. By the second year, the scale of mifgashim had been elevated. Ninety-five percent lasted between two and three weeks, and the programs now form the heart of birthright Israel trips. They emphasize the dual-pronged approach employed by birthright Israel to incalculable Jewish identity: reuniting with our ancestors’ values and history, and reuniting with the people of clal Yisrael. At this critical juncture, we must do more buy Israeli goods and visit Israel. It is time for all of us — individuals, philanthropies, Foundations — to recommit to programs that bridge the gap between the wide varieties of worldviews and experiences with that which is tangible, peer-to-peer experiences, that each of us is responsible for the other. Israel is my point of reference, and I don’t know exactly when or how that happened. But I know that my formal change of status simply meant executed what had, for a long time, been implicit — that being a Jew was more central to my identity than being an American. And whether or not I planned to live the rest of my life in Israel, the clearest expression I could find for this epiphany was formally changing my status. It was an act aimed at harmonizing my internal and external realities. I believe that how we live is a function of how we handle fear of our own mortality. We can either accept it, or live in denial. We can believe in something more, or we can believe that there is nothing more. Growing up in suburban America, the choice seemed clear — mortality was no longer an issue. Instead, life is spent prolonging it. Install a security system. Buy a safer car. Go to the best doctor. Exercise and take vitamins. I did not feel part of something greater. Rather, the message seemed to be that this life is all you have; fill it with as much as possible. The idea that “you can’t take it with you” did not mean one should devalue possessions. Rather, it meant mak- ing sure to get them early so you can enjoy them before you die. I had a nagging feeling that no matter how long or full a life I might lead in America, it would still feel empty. And my fear of death is the fear of living an empty life. In Israel, I may have a higher risk of dying, but I am certain that I have far richer, and more profoundly aware of the Jewish, as opposed to the exclu-

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Ne of the ancient lessons of Jewish history is that when a Jew suffers anywhere, we all suffer. We seem to be forgetting this lesson today. While Israel continues to hold emotional resonance throughout the American Jewish community, we have yet to display the same levels of solidarity as in the past. Yes, we attend rallies. We telephone Congress and the Presi- dent. We insist, in Letters to the Editor and open debates, that Israel is fighting a war against terror launched by those who rejected the peace process. Words, however, only amount to so much. A more profound indication of our support would be a substantially increased level of philanthropy to meet the crisis. While emergency funds have been raised, the levels are nowhere near the need. Even more important than money is our physical presence. For the past 50 years, personal visits to Israel as well as the act of Alyah have served as the most pro-

found expression of solidarity with our brethren in the Holy Land. During the current crisis, American Jews have shamefully abrogated their responsibility. Quite literally, we are abandoning Israel when it needs us most. True, day-to-day life in Israel is not easy. There are dangers inherent in even mundane tasks. The most pri-

total parent-child is to protect one’s children, and it is not easy to urge moms and dads to send their kids to a region perceived as unsafe. But we must ask ourselves if we exist only for ourselves in the context of one’s own safety, if we do not stand united with Israel during its moments of crisis, what are we as a people? jew unity is not an empty cliche, but a spiritual con-

mitment to Israel I do not question.

Andrew Katz received a BA and MA from Stanford University in 1990, and a PhD in political science from UCLA in a variety of Jewish institutions. He and his wife Emily Shapiro make their home in Jerusalem.

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brate as well as mourn. And nobody knows better how to do that than those who have lived in Israel. My parents, and all those present at the wedding, felt the power of our community — the power of our cultural identification, ideology and learning, shared dignity and shared joy, but most of all by shared com-

mitment. In tears at the end of the wedding, my parents told me how they finally under-

stood why I live in Israel. And why, and again despite the danger, I return. To live in Israel, in Jerusalem, is to experience how important, how precious and how sacred life can be.

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mifgashim were short-lived, lasting less than a single day. But after speaking with the Education Officer of the Israel Defense Forces, I discovered a startling fact: Israelis were as moved and transformed by their encounters as were the birthright participants! By making friendships with their counterparts in Diaspora, they became profoundly aware of the Jewish, as opposed to the exclu-

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Israel is of paramount importance to the Jewish people. On this, many American Jews agree. Of those who agree in principle, many prefer to do what they can from America. I prefer to live and die in Israel. Unlike United Jewish Communities with whose commit-

ment to Israel I do not question.

But living here, I regularly visit places mentioned in the Bible. I speak Hebrew every day with Jews whose ancestors were, just 50 years ago, dispersed all over the globe. I celebrate Shabbat, not only with my immediate community, but with the entire country! I do not just face East when I pray. I turn to Jerusalem. I turn to the Temple Mount itself. Every purchase I make helps the Israeli economy. And, when I want to impact Israeli politics...

Most importantly, I am privileged to be surrounded by people who are let up by the dawn. People like Ben Blumenthal and Marla, who, prior to dying tragically, lived heroically.
Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once observed that religion arises in the consciousness of human beings when life addresses us with questions that touch the very core of our being, issues that define our character as souls created in the image of God, and as members of a community. Sometimes the quotidian tasks of ordinary life provide the testing ground that reveals such essence of who we are both as individuals and as members of a community. On a basic level, Israel provides an unparalleled laboratory for the acquisition of modern spoken Hebrew by our students. More profoundly, Jerusalem introduces our students to the reality of a diverse and vibrant Jewish people who have returned to our ancestral homeland from the four corners of the earth—an experience that they could never be matched in the Diaspora. Allied to this is the recognition that the State of Israel occupies a central position in the life of the Jewish people and religion today, and HUC-JIR therefore asserts that all persons whom the College-Institute educates for roles of leadership in the contemporary Jewish community must have an extended first-hand acquaintance with the reality of Jewish national rebirth as evidenced in the State today.

Our students’ sojourn in Israel therefore ultimately bespeaks a religious-spiritual commitment that Shimon Rawidowicz captured in his famed work, “Jerusalem Today.” In this piece, the late head of the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University employed the metaphor of an elliptical arc to capture the integral connectedness that binds Jews everywhere into one people. The ideals of achdut and areivut—Jewish solidarity and mutual responsibility—that emerge from these teachings are the foundation upon which this piece informs our course of study at HUC-JIR. Our students must recognize that their responsibility extends to the Jewish family everywhere.

All this has been at stake in the discussions that have tested the ongoing commitment of the College-Institute to our Year-in-Israel program. Our Board of Governors and I are keenly aware of and have been deeply distressed by the marked escalation in the cycle of violence in Israel during these past two years. At the same time, members of our Board of Governors and I have made numerous trips to Israel during this time, and we have seen that life continues. We have had countless searching discussions with colleagues and students both in Israel and in the Diaspora. In the end, we are convinced that our unanimous decision to maintain our Year-in-Israel requirement for our students is both correct and responsible. It is also consistent with the religious mandate and moral underpinning that inform the mission of HUC-JIR.

Speaking on March 13, 1948, at his inauguration as President of Hebrew Union College, just a scant two months before the State of Israel was born, Nelson Glueck observed in the face of the current matzav, the need for Israel education is greater than ever. We face a time when few teens and young adults are traveling to Israel. They lack the experience of personal engagement with the land that often leads to a lifetime love for the people and the state of Israel. The question is, how do we “harmonize” the American Jewish community to intensify its connection to, understanding of and support for Israel? This requires new approaches to Israel education that reflect the complex realities of the 21st Century.

The Jewish Renaissance and Renewal alliance of United Jewish Communities (UJC) and the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) has been struggling with just these questions. We began almost two years ago with the development of the Israel Education Resource Book. The book, anchored with the Israel NOW Solidarity Response Curriculum developed by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, is a compilation of curricula, one-time programs, bibliographies and website listings. It serves as a resource aid to day schools and supplementary schools across the country. An online, regularly updated version of the book is available at www.ujc.org/content_display_articleID=3820

The Jewish Renaissance and Renewal alliance sponsored the North American Alliance for Jewish Youth “Israel In Our Lives” summer camp retreat, in which teen leaders learned about Israel advocacy. We have also embarked on Israel Education Month (January 1-February 28, 2003), a collaborative effort between the Jewish Renaissance and Renewal alliance and the Jewish Agency for Israel’s Education Department in cooperation with a host of religious education and communal organizations. Israel Education Month is the launching pad for a wide range of activities reaching children, youth, college students and adults. This endeavor will galvanize the community to renew and sustain educational engagement with Israel in North America.

Andrea Fram Plotkin is Staff Associate for the Jewish Renaissance and Renewal alliance of United Jewish Communities (UJC) and the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA).
We call upon our graduates to recognize that they are part of a people, that Jews throughout the world share a covenant of destiny, and that the soon-to-emerge Jewish State was “literally under fire.” We go on to state that “to abandon” an embryonic Israel would grant “license to terror.” Dr. Glueck refused to do so. We who have inherited his mantle can do no less.

By ANDREA FRAM PLOTKIN

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Solidarity Breeds Responsibility

by RABBI DAVID ELLENSON

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once observed that religion arises in the consciousness of human beings when life addresses us with questions that touch the very core of our being. Issues that define our character as souls created in the image of God, and issues that touch the very core of our humanity must have an extended first-hand acquaintance with the reality of Jewish national rebirth as evidenced in the State today.

“Our students’ sojourn in Israel therefore ultimately bespeaks a religious-spiritual commitment that Shimon Rawidowicz captured in his famed work, “Jerusalem and Baby- lon.” In this piece, the late head of the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University employed the two sites contained in his title as emblematic of Jewish existence in both the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, and he utilized the metaphor of an ellipse to capture the integral connectedness that binds Jews everywhere into one people.

The ideals of achdut and avrut — Jewish solidarity and mutual responsibility — that emerge from these teachings are the foundational components of the education HUC-JIR provides for our students, and Israel constitutes the lynchpin in this educational process of religious formation. We believe that the challenge facing Jewish religious leadership is much more than an individual spiritual quest. We call upon our graduates to recognize that every person of a people, Jews throughout the world share a covenant of destiny. This conviction animates and informs our course of study at HUC-JIR. Our students must recognize that their responsibility extends to the Jewish family everywhere.

All this has been at stake in the discussions that have tested the ongoing commitment of the College-Institute to our Year-in-Israel program. Our Board of Governors and I are keenly aware of and have been deeply distressed by the marked escalation in the cycle of violence in Israel during these past two years. At the same time, members of our Board of Governors and I have made numerous trips to Israel during this time, and we have seen that life continues. We have had countless searching discussions with colleagues and students both in Israel and in the Diaspora. In the end, we are convinced that our unanimous decision to maintain our Year-in-Israel requirement for our students is both correct and responsible. It is also consistent with the religious and moral thrust underlying that inform the mission of HUC-JIR.

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around the world have left many of us lend anti-Semitism rearing its head easy to be an optimist?" The first friend asks, "An optimist, of course!" The second friend replies, "How do you always look so sad?" The first friend then asks, "Well, if that’s the case, why do you always look so sad?" The second friend replies, "Who said it’s easy to be an optimist?"

These days it certainly hasn’t been easy to be an optimist. The horrific episodes in Israel coupled with the virulent anti-Semitism rearing its head around the world have left many of us with a sense of despair and frustration. What could we do to show Israel that we care, to show Jews living in embattled areas confronting anti-Semitism on a daily basis that they are not alone? With these sentiments in mind, Blumberg, the President of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA), raised the idea of creating a coalition of American Jewish women’s organizations that would come together to help Israel. Blumberg’s vision rested on the premise that if we could harness the power of so many women, that which unites us would be greater than what divides us. And so the idea of One Voice: Jewish Women for Israel was born.

Implementing a Grass Roots Campaign

With JOFA serving as a catalyst, women’s groups from across the denominational and ideological spectrum were called together for an exploratory meeting. We could feel the electricity as women from fervently Orthodox groups broke bread with women from more progressive groups. These were women who never had a chance to meet and work together. Our goal was to establish a working coalition that could mobilize the more than one million women represented by our constituent organizations. Then, through consensus and conversation, we would draft a mission statement and devise a formula that would allow us to achieve our purpose. The perilous situation in Israel created a sense of urgency in our deliberations. Critical decisions were agreed upon in record time. However, the name One Voice created quite a stir at the start, with some perceiving the title as monolithic. With that in mind, we added the following sentence to our mission statement: A unique coalition whose strength is that it represents a broad spectrum of Jewish political and religious views in a united effort. This change added a greater comfort level for the diverse groups involved.

In a time of crisis, it was not difficult to find points of unity. We would stand in solidarity with the State of Israel and its people for a strong and enduring U.S.-Israel relationship; with Israel and America in the fight against terror; and against the scourge of anti-Semitism, bigotry and racism wherever it exists. We, in One Voice, stand always in pursuit of peace.

Debate continued on how to achieve our objectives quickly and efficiently. We decided to focus our efforts on national Call-In days, asking women to “Take Five” minutes out of their busy day to speak out for Israel. Coalition partners could easily distribute our step-by-step Take Five education/action guide on the current issue to their members. In addition, these same members could forward the message via e-mail to their own friends and relatives, thus expanding our clout exponentially.

Our first call-in day took place at the end of June 2002 and was directed at thanking Congress for its ongoing support of Israel and urging that they continue to uphold Israel’s right to defend itself against terror. We know that votes are a powerful tool and that Senators and Representatives listen to the views of their constituents. Through feedback from numerous congressional offices across America, we learned that calls for Israel were extremely high on that day.

The second call-in day took place in mid September 2002, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This day was directed toward calling the White House to thank President Bush for his support of Israel, and among other points, urging the U.S. government to bring the terrorist killers of Americans to justice. We recognized that the President listens to the views of American voters and makes decisions based upon his sense of public sympathy. Once again, through the network of our constituent membership, along with e-mails to rabbis urging them to announce this call-in day from their pulpit, the White House lines were jammed.

Most recently, in November 2002, a day was set aside to call the Finnish government to protest its decision to ban the export of sample units of a defensive chemical warfare alarm agent to Israel. The response was so great that, in a matter of hours, Finnish consulates around the world were forced to add a recorded statement about terrorism and the current situation where callers could leave their comments on this specific issue!

Creating Unity

How has One Voice: Jewish Women for Israel succeeded, in a few short months, in fostering a sense of unity in an age of fractured alliances? We take great pride in our success. Eleven women’s organizations make up our coalition including the American Jewish Congress Commission for Women’s Equality; AMIT, Hadassah, The Women’s Zionist Organization of America, Inc.; Jewish Women International; JOFA, The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance; NA’AMAT, USA; National Council of Jewish Women; Women of Reform Judaism; Women’s American ORT; Women’s Branch of the Orthodox Union; and Women’s League for Conservative Judaism.

It is a tribute to these organizations that we have been able to focus on what unites us: standing in solidarity with the State of Israel and its people and speaking out against anti-Semitism, bigotry and racism. Clearly, though, there is another set of principles governing our actions which had played a large role in our success so far.

We are ever respectful of the differences among us and always cognizant of the fact that we have equal ownership of this critical endeavor. Therefore, we have gone to great lengths to obtain consensus before we move forward with any project. While we enjoy sharing, the successes of our individual organizations at our meetings, we never promote one organization over another and, in the administration of One Voice, essentially do away with titles. Because of our commitment to advancing our mission, we have all worked hard at building trust among organizations and individuals.

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ONE VOICE: Hear Us Roar

by ADENA K. BERKOWITZ and MADELEINE BRECHER

Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz established the Hadassah National Center For Attorneys’ Councils. She is a Board Member of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance and works as a private consultant in New York. Madeleine Brecher is a National Vice President of the National Council of Jewish Women and Chair of its Strategies to Prevent Domestic Violence (Stop) initiative. Together, they are Co-Coordinators of One Voice.

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A n old Jewish joke tells the story of two friends reading the newspaper in a cafe. The first friend says, “Do you consider yourself an optimist or a pessimist?” The second friend replies, “An optimist, of course!” The first friend then asks, “Well, if that’s the case, why do you always look so sad?” The second friend then asks, “Well, if that’s the case, why do you always look so sad?” The second friend replies, “Who said it’s easy to be an optimist?”

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STUDENT VOICES ON ISRAEL: Lessons from Listening

by WAYNE L. FIRESTONE

The mood regarding Israel identification is noticeably different this year from last year, and our community’s collective approach should be guided by these positive developments even if exceptional negative cases continue to grab media attention.

This local “intelligence” is translated into regular conversations, activities and programming in popular (and populated) hot spots around campus.

Also in this category, it is worth noting the success of the Israeli student participants in the Israel at Heart initiative, where teams of three diverse Israeli students engaged their peers in dialogue regarding day-to-day life in Israel from a peer— as opposed to professional or official — perspective. For many students on campus, Jewish and non-Jewish, this was the first time they encountered a female Jewish soldier, an Ethiopian Jew, a Jew from an Arab country, etc. Almost uniformly wherever the Israelis spoke, student audiences accepted the authenticity of their personal reflections and extended to them an opportunity to participate in meaningful discussions on campus. That they were not official government spokespersons and actually differed in their particular political and religious perspectives enhanced rather than undermined their credibility in the campus setting.

Regard for methods for engagement, the community has received some interesting student feedback, albeit mostly about what does not work. From a series of the current violence against Israel.

In gauging responses from students and campus professionals regarding what is working and what is not working on campus this year, it is possible to identify some initial trends that may guide our collective reorientation and reprioritization. These trends are divided into three broad categories that relate to: (1) the peer approach dynamic, (2) methods for engagement and (3) operating parameters for college venue activity. Regarding the first category, arguably the most successful initial approaches to students on campus today are made by peers, e.g., other students or recent graduates. Hillel has identified a corps of Israel mission alumni and participants in leadership programs to operate a network of Israel fellows — The Genspoon interns — on over 50 campuses. The network is an example of a grassroots effort that is empowered by a national infrastructure. The parameters for college venue activity are divided into three broad categories that relate to: (1) the peer approach dynamic, (2) methods for engagement and (3) operating parameters for college venue activity.

Unengaged students as well as core activists consistently rejected “scripted” materials and/or one-sided encapsulated histories that are perceived as propagandistic.

Wayne L. Firestone is Director of the Center for Israel Affairs at the Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

The slogan operationally defines our organization’s “big tent” approach. Although we have been criticized for not having a uniform message, this perceived weakness can also be viewed as an asset. This is true where one views a college campus promoting debate and discussion as the raison d’etre of the institution.

Finally, it is important to recognize certain inherent parameters that guide Jewish student life programming on campus. Namely, advocacy cannot be perceived by students as drowning out legitimate discourse and even criticism. Perhaps not ironically, it was the very same University of Michigan student activism who successfully undertook the intellectual divestment conference on their campus this October, who a year earlier coined an inclusive and proactive slogan that invited students to stand with Israel, “Whatever we Stand.” The slogan has caught on nationally at Hillel for many if not all students and campus professionals. The slogan operationally defines our organization’s “big tent” approach. Although we have been criticized for not having a uniform message, this perceived weakness can also be viewed as an asset. This is true where one views a college campus promoting debate and discussion as the raison d’etre of the institution.

The challenge to our community now is to act and follow up on some of the successful introductory encounters from the Fall semester as opportunities for informal education, creative cultural and religious engagement programming, and genuine relationship and community building. All of these efforts must be guided by student voices. The latter should include an element of Jewish peoplehood that may have unwittingly faded — on and off campus — over the past several years.

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F or those in the community seeking to engage Jewish college students in Israeli advocacy and education, there are several important insights to be gleaned from recent experiences on campus. The mood regarding Israel identification is noticeably different this year from last year, and our community’s collective approach should be guided by these positive developments even if exceptional negative cases continue to grab media attention.

According to campus professionals and student activists across the country, some of the polarization, intimidation and general apathy that has characterized the campus environment for much of the al-absolute period of violence has started to subside in favor of a more inquisitive Jewish populace. Discussion and dissemination of information on the Middle East conflict is reportedly meeting less resistance, although the method and approach to such encounters often determine whether a student will be “turned on” or “turned off” to the message.

A central question that Hillel and other campus organizations are addressing is how to increase Jewish student identity and solidarity with Israel during a time of crisis. To be sure, efforts to fortify and refocus Israel education and advocacy efforts on campus should be prioritized in spite of, not necessarily because of, the current violence against Israel.

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Regarding the first category, arguably the most successful initial approaches to students on campus today are made by peers, e.g., recent or current college graduates. Hillel has identified a corps of Israel mission alumni and participants in leadership programs to operate a network of Israel fellows — the Grinspoon interns — on over 50 campuses. The network is an example of a grassroots effort that is empowered by a national — in this case, the Grinspoon — perspective. For many students these are their first extended conversations with someone who do not sign, but expressed willingness to receive more materials, or attend educational initiatives, it is important to recognize the strong negative attitudes regarding a number of top-down initiatives. Students specifically criticized the generic use of lecturers, rabbis, official spokespersons and other experts as well as national advertising efforts transplanted to local campuses. Moreover, unengaged students as well as core activists consistently rejected “scripted” materials and/or one-sided encapsulated histories that are perceived as propagandistic.

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Regarding methods for engagement, the community has received some interesting student feedback, albeit mostly about what does not work: from a series of the current violence against Israel.

The mood regarding Israel identification is noticeably different this year from last year, and our community’s collective approach should be guided by these positive developments even if exceptional negative cases continue to grab media attention.

Wayne L. Firestone is Director of the Center for Israel Affairs at the Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

Unengaged students as well as core activists consistently rejected “scripted” materials and/or one-sided encapsulated histories that are perceived as propagandistic.

empower local activists by circulating student-generated petitions and then publishing them in the local newspaper on sixty target campuses nationwide. The significance of this campaign is less about the number of students who actually sign, but more about the dialogue it has created. This effort should not be viewed as a limbus test or poll for Israel support on campus. The organizers of the effort report that for every signature they receive there are at least two students who do not sign, but expressed willingness to receive more materials, or attend educational programs in the future in order to become informed on the topic. To date AIPAC estimates that over 100,000 such conversations have taken place, some in Hillel houses, but many outside.

Finally, it is important to recognize certain inherent parameters that guide Jewish student life programming on campus. Namely, advocacy cannot be perceived by students as drowning out legitimate discussion and even criticism. Perhaps not ironically, it was the same University of Michigan student activists who successfully undercut the intellectual divestment conference on their campus this October, who a year earlier coined an inclusive and proactive slogan that invited students to stand with Israel, “Wherever we Stand.” The slogan has caught on nationally at Hillel for many if not all students and campus professionals. The slogan operationally defines our organization’s “big tent” approach. Although we have been criticized for not having a uniform message, this perceived weakness can also be viewed as an asset. This is true where one views a college campus promoting debate and discussion as the raison d’etre of the institution.

The challenge to our community now is to act and follow up on some of the successful introductory encounters from the Fall semester as opportunities for informal education, creative cultural and religious engagement programming, and genuine relationship and community building. All of these efforts must be guided by student voices. The latter should include an element of Jewish peoplehood that may have unwittingly faded — on and off campus — over the past several years.
The Necessity for Unity, the Place for Dissent

by MICHAEL SONNENFELDT

T he past two years have been difficult for Israel and deeply troubling for all those who care about her future. In one respect, times like these present unique challenges for Jews in the Diaspora that do not confront policies or concerns about the vicious cycle of violence that nobody — neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians — seems able to stem. We must ask ourselves: Are demonstrations of support sufficient? Do we not need to find additional ways to help achieve peace and security? I think we can and we must.

I admit I was an unpatriotic supporter of the cause Yitzhak Rabin chose when he began the Oslo process. I do not categorize myself as left or right. Perhaps I would consider myself a “security hawk,” a term Rabin applied to himself.

It was out of a concern for Israel’s security that Rabin made the decision to recognize the PLO and begin the process of negotiations. He did not do so out of an altruistic love of Palestinians, but only after concluding that a new relationship with them (and, in fact, with all of Israel’s immediate neighbors) was essential to neutralizing the existential threat posed by weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terror networks. Rabin also believed that Israel would only succeed in eliminating the threat posed by Palestinian terrorism when the Palestinian mainstream joined Israel in fighting it. He believed that any security benefits that might accrue from possession of the West Bank and Gaza were more than outweighed by the continuing violence and the multitude of threats to Israel that reten-

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ning with Israel before.

That all ended when Yasser Arafat rejected Prime Minister Barak’s offer at Camp David. Subsequently, he made no effort to end (and there is ample evidence he even encouraged) the violence that broke out. This violence was a rejection of Oslo’s key tenet, which was that disputes would be resolved through negotiations and not violence.

Still, I have no compunction about actively supporting American efforts to encourage Israel’s re-engagement with the Palestinians, at the earliest practical moment, while simultaneously demonstrating my solidarity with Israel. There still may be at odds with Israeli policies. As an American, I know that my primary role is as an advocate within my own country. That is why my main efforts are designed to encourage the U.S. government — our government — to fulfill its dual role in the Middle East: as Israel’s most important friend and ally, and as a credible mediator of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

These views have not always been popular with leaders of the American Jewish community. With respect to the complex issue of the American role in the peace process, some have at times found themselves on a high wire act, trying to represent the views of the Government of Israel — even when such views were clearly out of sync with the views held by a majority of American Jews. Today, as Israel is threatened to a greater degree than at any time in the recent past, these differences have narrowed.

But still, it is important to remember that these differences do not hinge on the goals of security and prosperity, but rather the best methods to achieve them. There’s nothing wrong with that. Dissent is embedded in American history. Israeli political life and Jewish tradition itself. Zionism itself was an act of dissent against a mainstream that was anti-Zionist. During the Holocaust, those American Jewish activists who were most vocal in promoting the rescue of European Jewry dissented from mainstream Jewish organizations that deferred to the American government.

Nevertheless, we must distinguish between those who differ on how Israel should confront her enemies, and those who differ on whether Israel has a right to exist. These are critical distinctions. Motive does matter.

Each of us who cares about Israel must find the course of solidarity most in keeping with who we are as Jews and as human beings. At times like these, silence or busi-

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The past two years have been difficult for Israel and deeply troubling for all those who care about her future. In one respect, times like these present unique challenges for Jews in the Diaspora who do not confront Jews in Israel. After all, an Israeli does not have disagreements with specific Israeli Jews in the Diaspora that do not confront the Israelis nor the Palestinians — seems able to stem. We must ask ourselves: Are demonstrations of support sufficient? Do we not need to find additional ways to help achieve peace and security? I think we can and we must. I admit I was an unapologetic supporter of the course Yitzhak Rabin chose when he began the Oslo process. I do not categorize myself as left or right. Perhaps I would consider myself a “security hawk,” a term Rabin applied to himself.

It was out of a concern for Israel’s security that Rabin made the decision to recognize the PLO and begin the process of negotiations. He did not do so out of an altruistic love of Palestinians, but only after concluding that a new relationship with them (and, in fact, with all of Israel’s immediate neighbors) was essential to neutralizing the existential threat posed by weapons of mass destruction in the hands of the terror-backing states. In the number one threat to Israel’s existence, while the success that security cooperation had in reducing terrorism during the years following Oslo demonstrated that without Palestinian cooperation, terror will continue to be a blight on the Jewish state.

Nothing that has occurred over the past two years has altered the fundamental soundness of Rabin’s beliefs. Events have certainly called into question the achievability of Rabin’s objectives, but not the benefits of his plan. During the few years prior to the Camp David summit of 2000, Israel endured far less terror than before. The economy was booming with foreign investment. Hotels were built to accommodate the sharp increase in tourism. Trade and diplomatic relations were opened with nations in Asia and Africa (including Arab states), which had never considered dealing with Israel before.

That all ended when Yasir Arafat rejected Prime Minister Barak’s offer at Camp David. Subsequently, he made no effort to end (and there is ample evidence he even encouraged) the violence that broke out. This violence was a rejection of Oslo’s key tenet, which was that disputes would be resolved through negotiations and not violence. Still, I have no compunction about actively supporting American efforts to encourage Israel’s re-engagement with the Palestinians, at the earliest practical moment, while simultaneously demonstrating my solidarity with Israel.

The question is sometimes asked about the legitimacy of promoting positions that may be at odds with Israeli policies. As an American, I know that my primary role is as an advocate within my own country. That is why my main efforts are designed to encourage the U.S. government — our government — to fulfill its dual role in the Middle East: as Israel’s most important friend and ally, and as a credible mediator of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

These views have not always been popular with leaders of the American Jewish community. With respect to the complex issue of the American role in the peace process, some have at times found themselves on a high wire act, trying to represent the views of the Government of Israel — even when such views were clearly out of sync with the views held by a majority of American Jews. Today, as Israel is threatened to a greater degree than at any time in the recent past, these differences have narrowed.

But still, it is important to remember that these differences do not hinge on the goals of security and prosperity, but rather the best methods to achieve them. There’s nothing wrong with that. Dissent is enshrined in American history. Israeli political and Jewish tradition itself, Zionism itself was an act of dissent against a mainstream that was anti-Zionist. During the Holocaust, those American Jewish activists who were most vocal in promoting the rescue of European Jewry dissented from mainstream Jewish organizations that deferred to the American government.

Nevertheless, we must distinguish between those who differ on how Israel should confront her enemies, and those who differ on whether Israel has a right to exist. These are critical distinctions. Motive does matter.

Each of us who cares about Israel must find the course of solidarity most in keeping with who we are as Jews and as human beings. At times like these, silence or business as usual is almost unimaginable. We need not all choose the same route. But as long as we have Israel’s best interests at heart, and we remain true to ourselves, we should each draw the courage to continue to support and pursue efforts to ensure that the Jewish state will find peace with her neighbors, and be free of the threats that, sadly continue to threaten her very survival.
True, day-to-day life in Israel is not easy. There are dangers inherent in even mundane tasks. The most primal parental instinct is to protect one’s children, and it is not easy to urge moms and dads to send their kids to a region perceived as unsafe. But we must ask ourselves: if we exist only for ourselves in the comfort of American safety, if we do not stand united with Israel during its moments of crisis, what are we as a people?

—MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT