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Making Jews: An Enduring Challenge in Israeli Education

PARAGRAPH #44 OF THE BASIC LAWS [*Hukei Yisod*] of the new government formed by Ben-Gurion after the elections to the Third Knesset in 1955 states:

The government will strive to heighten the Jewish consciousness of Israeli youth in elementary, secondary and higher education; to deepen the roots of young people in our nation's past and its historical heritage; and to strengthen their attachment to world Jewry out of a recognition of the common fate and historical continuity which unites Jews everywhere in their lands and across the generations.¹

That conception of Jewishness—a sense of membership in the collective of the Jewish people and a concern for its future—is readily apparent in a letter Ben-Gurion sent to the Minister of Education, Zalman Aranne, shortly after the installation of the new government:

I write to call your attention to Paragraph # 44 of the Basic Laws. My knowledge of our young people (and the best of them in particular) teaches me that they are seriously deficient in Jewish consciousness, in recognition of our historical heritage and moral identification with world Jewry. We should strive to develop a curriculum which will correct this deficiency without adversely affecting other important areas of study.²

Ben-Gurion was hardly the first person to express concern about the “Jewishness”³—or lack of it—of young people born in the country and educated in secular Zionist schools. At the time of his comment, their apparent rejection of all expressions of Judaism and their ambivalent identification with Jews in the Diaspora had already been a subject of debate and discussion among educators and others for almost half a century. Fifty

years earlier, Joseph Klausner, then the editor of the prestigious and influential *HaShiloah*, complained about the narrow nationalism of the "Young Hebrew"—a designation intended to convey disjunction with the past—who was a product of schooling which centered on the land and the language to the virtual exclusion of religion and all other manifestations of the national ethos and spirit. A conception of Judaism so limited, noted Klausner, could not possibly equal the function once performed by religion in molding sensibilities and forging loyalties.⁵ Klausner's concerns were echoed by Zalman Epstein, a well known essayist and literary critic, who complained about the neglect of traditional Judaism in the curriculum of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Jaffa, a school established by private initiative in order to prepare students for university studies in Europe which in time became a symbol of Zionist education and aspiration. According to Epstein, students who completed the eleven-year course of study—from the lowest through the highest grade—left the school without having acquired "any idea of the ritual of the synagogue, the order of prayer, the obligations of the Sabbath and the like."⁶ Epstein's comments were but one expression of a continuing public debate which centered on the role and place of religion, if any, in the Zionist oriented schools in Palestine during the period of the Second Aliyah (1904–1914).⁷

During a "public trial" of youth sponsored by the Hebrew Writers Association in 1933 with Haim Nachman Bialik as the presiding judge, the "prosecution" charged that the youth of Eretz Yisrael is without roots in the "... spirit of the nation and do not share in the development of its culture ... The problems of our people are of no concern to them, they are cut off from world Jewry and do not feel the tragedy of Jewish life in the Golah ... From a national Zionist point of view, their estrangement from the creation of a Hebrew culture and lack of understanding of Zionism are among the most negative features of our young people."⁸

Berl Katznelson, the "rebbe" of the Labor movement and editor of *Davar*, wrote in a similar vein in his scathing criticism of the leaders of a youth movement who scheduled the departure for the organization's summer camp on the eve of Tisha B'Av, 1934:

Would we today be capable of mounting a movement of national revival were it not for the sacred stubbornness of the Jewish people in keeping alive the memory of the destruction . . . in singling out the most awful of days in its memory, its sentiments and its behavior . . . [?] That the leadership of our youth should be entrusted to those who have no sense of the spiritual treasures

of the nation, no appreciation of historical symbols and cultural values . . . that is unforgivable.⁹

Ben-Gurion's own concern must surely have been fueled in part by the rhetoric of the Canaanites, a small but highly articulate group that achieved notoriety all out of proportion to its number, primarily because of the literary talent of some of its gifted leaders. The Canaanites denied all connection with Jews, past and present, and Judaism—"Whosoever comes from the Jewish Diaspora . . . is a Jew and not a Hebrew and he can only be a Jew . . . The Jew and the Hebrew can never be identical."¹⁰

As recently as 1991, a minister of education, Zevulun Hammer of the National Religious Party, appointed a committee "... to examine . . . the condition of Jewish studies in the [non-religious] State schools and to propose all manner of means for the advancement of Jewish education in Israel."¹¹

The attitudes of the young noted here are arguably a product of certain strains of Zionist ideology. As a nationalist movement whose origins were in 19th-century Europe, Zionism was influenced and even formed in significant measure by the intellectual currents of the time. Among these was the idea of progress and its concomitant rejection of tradition, and religious tradition in particular. Traditional societies were perceived as "... the cause or consequence of ignorance, superstition, clerical dominance, religious intolerance, social hierarchy, inequality in the distribution of wealth, pre-emption of the best positions in society on grounds of birth and other states of mind and social institutions which were the objects of rationalistic and progressiveist censure."¹² One of the attractions of Zionism was its promise of a society that would nurture expressions of Jewishness that did not require observance of religious rituals or participation in traditional practices.

In their attempt to redefine the nation, some Zionist ideologues rejected the Jewish past in which religion played so central a role and sought to affirm the peoplehood of the Jews within a different cultural and historical context—"... the past and all those who have passed on their ideas and thoughts are more than we can bear . . . we broil at a past which is the very opposite of our lives and the basis of our lives . . . what must we do, how much toil and effort is required in order to rid the past of all those things which deny life?"¹³

The estrangement, if not total disdain, of non-religious youngsters born and raised in Palestine and later Israel from Jews around the world may

be traced, according to some, to the idea of the "negation of the Diaspora," which was a part of Zionist national education.¹¹ That view of the Jewish experience led also to a denial of the dignity of Holocaust survivors who arrived in the country after World War II; they were creatures from "another planet." Jews who had survived were no more deserving of respect than their fellows who had been "led like sheep to slaughter." The very specialness of the Israeli experience is thought to be yet another source of distance; it was at the time of Ben-Gurion's comment and even now unlike anything Jews elsewhere had ever known.

Whatever the reasons for this congeries of attitudes toward Judaism, Jewish history, and Jews around the world, the idea that a school curriculum could change them reflects a deeply held belief in the power of formal education.

The demands of Zionist ideology complicated the work of schools, particularly in the years before the establishment of the state. They were expected to perform their traditional socializing function at the same time as they were asked to educate their pupils to rebel against circumstances; to nurture an appreciation of an ancient heritage while calling for a change of values and patterns of living. The conflict between past and present—and an imagined future—is evident in the statement of objectives formulated in the 1930s at the prestigious Reali school in Haifa:

The purpose of the Hebrew School is to raise the new Hebrew intellectual. Our aspiration for social renewal demands that we provide our students with a wide knowledge of ancient and modern Hebrew literature as well as of the life of the Jewish people, past and present. Our purpose is to make Jewish thought a living thing, to implant a seed of Jewish culture in the heart of the young generation from which a new Jewish activity will sprout and flourish.¹²

The "new" Jewish intellectual would also be "healthy, stand erect, strong, brave and industrious . . . he will love his homeland, joyfully work his land, risk his life in its defense . . . he will be honest, modest, loyal, trustworthy and seek justice." This, of course, in sharp contrast to the Jew born and raised in Galut who is alienated from himself, without connection to his surroundings and morally deficient.¹³

Jewish studies in national Zionist and Israeli State Schools consist of Hebrew literature, Bible [*Tanach*], History, Rabbinic Literature [*Torah SheBeal Pei*, and Geography of Israel [*Tahinat Ha'Avutz*]. Among these the most prominent are Bible and Hebrew literature, with particular emphasis

on the prophetic sections of the former. The attention given Bible is one of the major differences between the "new" education and traditional religious Jewish education which gave primacy of place to Torah and Talmud. A famous article written by a senior Bible teacher early in this century shaped the way in which several generations of Bible teachers understood the role of the subject they taught:

. . . Only the Bible reflects our glorious past. It alone is the source of an aspiration for a different life, a life of freedom and honor, for the children of a poor and impoverished nation, wandering without land and language, oppressed and trampled by its surroundings. . . . What do we have other than the Tanach? . . . Certainly not the literature produced in Galut; that literature is consumed by negativism and has no healthy basis. . . . As the institutions of our life disintegrate, the Tanach will be the new pillar of support. . . . Let it take its place at the center of our children's education. . . . they will not turn their backs on their people; a new generation will arise. . . . healthy and strong, striving for a new life, devoted to land and people. . . . a Hebrew generation.¹⁴

Such a negative estimate of rabbinic literature, no less a product of Jewish experience than the Bible, by an important educator could only fuel the complaints of students about Talmud, a subject they considered totally foreign to their lives and without any connection to events in the country as well as difficult because of its language (Aramaic) and mode of thought.

Not everyone, however, agreed with the policy that granted such prominence to modern Hebrew literature and Bible at the expense of the literary creations of other periods in Jewish history. Yehezkel Kaufman, first a teacher at the Reali school and later a distinguished Biblical scholar at the Hebrew University, felt compelled to note that "Hebrew education has committed a fatal error . . . it has curtailed the study of ancient Hebrew literature . . . what can we hope for if the next generation will not be able to draw from the folk and literary creations of the past . . . ?"¹⁵

There were also those who complained about the way in which Bible was understood and taught. The emphasis on the national aspects of the canon to the almost total disregard, if not denial, of the religious nature of the text seemed to them a particularly egregious example of secular Zionists' violation of the demands of historic tradition. They complained that the ". . . study of Bible which insults and debases the religious factor is a distortion and a disgrace. . . . To talk incessantly about the exalted morality of the prophets is hardly enough. . . . The prophets' pleading is not ordinary

moral teaching; it is religious moral teaching. . . . Moreover the words of the prophets are part of Holy Writ.²⁶ Neither nationalistic rhetoric nor religious piety, however, could satisfy those who thought of Jewish studies, especially Hebrew literature in all its varieties, as a particular instance of the humanities, the way in which Jews have dealt with the issues of living which confront humans everywhere and always.²⁷

Despite the centrality of the text in both, one ought not overlook the essential difference between traditional Jewish religious education and secular Zionist national education. The fundamental purpose of the former is to initiate a new generation into the covenant with God and to validate once again the obligation to do His will. The latter by contrast is grounded in the social sphere. Education is the embodiment of the national will, the school the place that forges identification with the trials and aspirations of the Jewish people. Personal fulfillment is possible only by virtue of committed membership in the collective. Even though Ben-Gurion later expanded his conception of Jewish consciousness, the idea of peoplehood and its obligations remains central.

Ben-Gurion's confident understanding was matched by Minister of Education Zalman Aranne's own sense of the meaning of Jewish consciousness:

Were I asked to note the value our generation thought most important to transmit to the younger generation, I would reply Jewish-Israeli consciousness; were I asked to define the essence of Jewish-Israeli consciousness, I would reply: the acknowledgment of the young Israeli generation of its responsibility to the continued existence of the Jewish people all over the world.²⁸

The debate in the Knesset that followed the presentation of Aranne's bill for the introduction of a program for the heightening of Jewish consciousness in state schools expressed other meanings:

"Jewish consciousness is the commandment of the inviolability of the land."²⁹
 "There is nothing to be ashamed of whatever is written in the Five Books. To this very day there has nowhere been developed laws such as these . . ."

"The spirit of Jewish consciousness is that 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore'. . . . We must inculcate a desire for peace and friendship between nations . . . a love of freedom, hatred of servitude . . . and a sense of honor towards other peoples."³⁰

Programs for schools, it is clear, are as much political as educational statements.

Whatever the meaning of Jewish consciousness to individuals, either speaking for themselves or as representatives of a particular group, the Ministry of Education and Culture programs and materials developed by its Center for the Fostering of Jewish Consciousness provided a working definition. The Center was charged with the responsibility of developing curricula and other learning materials in three areas: history, with particular emphasis on those periods and personalities that symbolize the continuity of Jewish existence and the creative spirit of the Jewish people; the cultural, economic, and political condition of Jews around the world in order to strengthen identification with them among Israeli youth; prayers and practices of traditional Jewish life—selections from the Portion of the Week, as well as from the Sabbath and holiday synagogue service; rituals such as washing hands before eating and kiddush for the Sabbath eve, and expressions such as "Baruch HaShem" or "B'Evrat HaShem."³¹ It is difficult to discern a principle of selection—why certain things were included and others left out.

Of all the programs, materials, and activities introduced into the secular state schools by the Center for Fostering Jewish Consciousness, none caused as much opposition and controversy as those connected with prayer and ritual practice. Teachers on all levels complained that they were required to teach material that they neither understood nor believed. More broadly, the Ministry was accused of using the seemingly neutral and generally acceptable idea of Jewish Consciousness to introduce religion into schools defined by law as secular and chosen by parents for that reason.

Indeed complaints of religious coercion, always an issue in fractious Israel, were so persistent that the Ministry of Education and Culture thought it necessary to publish a public disclaimer that ". . . the program is not intended in any way to change the state school from its essential character as a national school. Just as that school does not and will not offer religious instruction, so it has not and will not offer anti-religious instruction."³²

The program of Jewish Consciousness as a solution to the problem, even as variously defined, seems in retrospect extraordinarily naive. While identification, appreciation, and loyalty to Jews and the Jewish experience in all its manifestations depend on the acquisition of knowledge, these attributes are qualities of heart, which, when they do develop, are products of a long and complicated process of socialization in which home and

environment are at least as important as the school. The attempt of the Ministry to encourage schools to promote events and ceremonies intended to create the special atmosphere of the Sabbath and holidays seems quixotic without reinforcement from home and neighborhood. This point did not escape the notice of critics of the program.²²

The material prepared for teachers was not really very different from that of the regular curriculum, whose perceived failure was the cause for the development of the program. Explication, question, and answer are the dominant mode of instruction; patterns that elicited responses of apathy and indifference to begin with. There is little evidence available to indicate that the designers of the program introduced teachers to contemporary interpretations of traditional thought and practice; neither is there empirical evidence from which we might infer the effects of the program. The public consensus at the time of its introduction was that it had not achieved its purpose. One teacher expressed the feeling of many—"Actually there was nothing new and little was changed . . ."²³

The major reason for the failure seems to have been the opposition from teachers and parents who saw the program as an attempt to introduce religious education into the state schools. What is clear is that the designers of the program had not succeeded in presenting traditional ideas and practices in such a way as to accord them a meaning independent of their religious origin. Their efforts were not sufficient to the task of investing the signs and symbols of a religious tradition with a "civil" meaning capable of forging loyalty to people and state rather than to a transcendent God.

In the 1980s, during the tenure of a Minister of Education and Culture who was from the National Religious Party, continued concern about the Jewishness—no matter how defined—of pupils in the state schools led to the establishment of The Department for Strengthening Jewish Education. The task assigned the new department was "... to develop plans and new experiments in the humanities that highlighted the development and the connection between Jewish historical continuity and Jewish Zionist values." The programs of the Department include:

• *Jewish Values in a Changing World*—the purpose of the program is to introduce high school pupils to Jewish teachings on the problems confronting modern man

• *Teaching Holidays in the Elementary School*—an in-service program for elementary school teachers intended to help them develop a graded curriculum of activities and study around the holidays

• *Bar Mitzvah Project*—to provide pupils with material from Jewish sources, taught by the home-room teacher, which relate to this special stage in their lives

• *Seminar in Judaism for Teachers*—once-a-week meetings over a three-month period that deal with topics illustrative of a Jewish world view.

Some of these activities are conducted by regular teachers; others by personnel employed by the Department and trained for the purpose.

The work of the Department for Strengthening Jewish Education, while not altogether free of a religious orientation, differs from that of the Center for Fostering Jewish Consciousness in several important respects, all of which reflect changes of approach in the school system and the country-at-large. The Department, first of all, "sells" its services; individual schools decide whether or not they want to adopt available programs. The freedom of choice is in keeping with the trend within the school system to grant schools greater autonomy in developing their programs and curricula. The same tendency is apparent in the study materials—they attempt to speak to the individual and to help him/her find a place within the tradition of Judaism. The attention to the individual is at one with recent trends toward privatism in Israeli society.

The policy, which encouraged school-based curricula together with new patterns of funding, made it possible for individual schools to invite outside organizations and institutions to teach Judaism. *Habad*, more than any other body, took quick advantage of this opportunity. The incongruous consequence was the presence of *Hasidim* in secular schools. Whatever they taught about Jews and Judaism seem secondary to the major message of their being in the school: the school itself had nothing to say on the subject and was dependent on outside resources.

In addition to formal study programs, informal educational techniques have also been used in order to guide youngsters toward a sense of themselves as Jews. Seminars of a day and more, conducted away from school and by people who are not regular classroom teachers, use practices adapted from group work theory and encounter group experiences in moving participants toward an exploration of self and others. Beyond the classroom, activities have also been incorporated on a much grander scale in the teaching of the Holocaust.

As might be expected, during a school career every youngster in the Israeli educational system, state and state religious alike, is exposed to the Holocaust in a variety of ways. The treatment of this difficult and compli-

cated topic, one of the central myths of Israeli society, has undergone several changes over the years. Curricula and other materials once emphasized heroism — e.g., the Warsaw Ghetto uprising — perhaps as an antidote to the image of Jews in Europe “as sheep led to slaughter.” The current approach emphasizes, instead, the efforts of Jews to retain dignity and humanity even in the face of Nazis who had lost all image of humankind.²⁴ Most recently, the Department of Youth Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Culture has organized pilgrimages to Poland for high school youngsters. The trips, preceded by formal study in school of pertinent materials, include visits to concentration camps and former centers of Jewish life. Their purpose is the hope “. . . that participants will return . . . strengthened in their sense of belonging to Jewish history and its heritage . . . and firm in their determination to contribute to ensuring the future of the state and the Jewish people.”²⁵ Anecdotal evidence indicates that, for many youngsters, the trip to Poland is the most formative Jewish experience of their lives till then.

All these efforts notwithstanding, there were parents who felt that neither the state school nor the state religious school satisfied their needs as Jews. Using the right granted parents by the State Education Act of 1953 to determine up to 25% of curricula space, and despite opposition from religious and other quarters (the latter claiming they were avoiding school integration), volunteer groups, first in Jerusalem and then in other cities, organized what were to become known as Talis²⁶ schools. The first such school, in the French Hill section of Jerusalem, welcomed its first class in September 1976.²⁷ The Tali schools attempt to offer a Jewish education to pupils that is “. . . liberal and pluralistic, . . . [cultivates] tolerance and yet instills a sense of identification and attachment, openness together with a commitment toward Jewish tradition.”²⁸ The work of the schools is informed by the idea “. . . that each child will eventually have to decide the nature of his or her Jewish commitment. . . .”²⁹ The school’s task is to make it possible that the decision be made out of “knowledge, first hand experience and some degree of positive identification.”³⁰

As indicated earlier, there is no available evidence that might help us understand whether the efforts described here have had any effect. There are no published studies — in itself an interesting datum — that examine the relationship, if any, between the various programs and activities introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture and other agencies and the attitudes toward Jews and Judaism of youngsters in the state school system. We do, however, have a study that summarizes the findings of studies conducted over a twenty-year period (1965–1985) on the Jewish-Israeli identity of non-religious Israeli students. The data discloses that, among all the

students studied, there has been a decline in the degree of overlap and correlation between their Jewish and Israeli identities. The author of the summary study has no easy explanation for the phenomenon —

It’s possible that the emphasis on the traditional elements of Jewish identity distances the student from the elements which constitute Israeli identity; it’s also possible that our findings are an expression of increased polarization, intensified since the war in Lebanon. Or perhaps it is due to the distances from Diaspora Jewry which has taken place. It’s also possible that this is a long term generational matter which appears largely in the second generation of Israeli born, particularly among non-religious youth, where there is greater emphasis on Israeli identity, a comparative weakness of Jewish identity and a low correlation between the two which expresses itself in a decline in the sense of connection between Israel and Jewish history.³¹

These findings seem to be corroborated by those of a study conducted in 1990, which examined the Jewish-Israeli identity of a sample of 564 students in teacher training institutions. Participants were divided into four categories: non-religious (secular); traditional (positive orientation toward religious tradition); national, religious (Zionist); ultra, orthodox (non-Zionist). Religious identification, it appears, is the most significant factor affecting Jewish-Israeli identity. The non-religious students considered themselves more Israeli than Jewish, did not feel themselves part of the Jewish people in any meaningful way, and thought that the most important events in Jewish history were those related to the State of Israel — the Holocaust, the establishment of the state and the country’s wars. The findings also indicate that the Israeli component of their identity tends to weaken as Jewish elements become more pronounced. The more religious a student, the stronger the identification with the Jewish people and all periods of its history.³²

What we have brought thus far is a summary sketch of the major efforts of the Israeli State Schools to shape forms of identification between their pupils and the Jewish people, past and present. The activities may be divided into two general categories: (1) curriculum development in Jewish studies for the regular, ongoing work of schools; and, (2) special activities, inside and outside of the school, conducted by teachers and others. The intensity of these efforts rises and falls in a rhythmic pattern, perhaps connected to events outside of the school. They are spurred by the uneasy sense of those who care about such things that Israeli youngsters, who lack the memories and ambience of a traditional home and who are rooted in the

encompassing reality of the state, are drifting away from the Jewish people and Judaism. Zalman Aranne, in his own time, understood the difficulties created by the obvious contradictions of circumstance:

The national school in this country has had to contend with a number of educational contradictions since its very beginning. How to educate youngsters here for loyalty to the Jewish people when the overwhelming majority of the Jews are in other places? How to implant in youngsters here a feeling of being part of Jewish history when half of that history took place outside the land of Israel? How to inculcate Jewish consciousness in Israeli youth when Israel consciousness and the revolution it demanded denies the legitimacy of exile and dispersion? How to educate Israeli youth who receive their education in a non-religious school to appreciate the cultural heritage of the Jewish people which for most of its time has been suffused with religion?²²

Attempts over the years to resolve these contradictions are not matters of academic interest alone. To the extent that schools contribute to the development of a sense of self and a coherent complex of identification, the issue at hand is the influences that shape the world-view of Israel's non-religious population and the future character of the state.

This concern is readily apparent in the report of the Shenhar Committee²³ which contends that the diminished status of Jewish studies in the state school can be understood only within the context of sweeping cultural, political, and social changes affecting schools in general. Recognizing that the task of transmitting attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors from generation to generation cannot be left to the school alone, the committee calls upon the families whose children are in state schools, hardly homogeneous in attitudes toward Judaism, to assume the ultimate responsibility for their Jewish education.

The Shenhar Committee was appointed in 1971 by the then Minister of Education, Mr. Zevulun Hammer of the National Religious Party, "... to examine the standing of Jewish studies in the state school and to offer recommendations regarding approaches and goals, curricula and other initiatives capable of advancing Jewish education in Israel."²⁴ The immediate background to the appointment of the committee, composed of academicians, school people, and public figures of diverse orientation and outlook, was the worrying decline in recent years in the number of high school pupils who elected a subject from among Jewish studies in their Matriculation Examinations and, perhaps, even more troubling, a significant decrease in the number of university students preparing themselves to teach one of



Second Grade Class in a Jerusalem elementary school, 1970.
(Courtesy of the Israeli Government Press Office)



Pupils of the Nitzanim Elementary School
in Ramat-Aviv Celebrating the Festival of Trees (Tu B'Shvat), 1967.
(Courtesy of the Israeli Government Press Office)



The Pupils of the Moaz Aviv Elementary School
Reenacting the Exodus from Egypt, Passover, 1963.
(Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office)

the disciplines of Jewish studies.³⁵ The report was presented in 1994, three years after the appointment of the committee and to a new Minister of Education, a member of the liberal Meretz party.

We do not know whether the Shenhar Committee attempted to determine if non-religious Israeli youth was indeed as estranged from Jews and Judaism as claimed and, if so, why. Nor do we know whether or not the committee examined and analyzed the outcomes of earlier efforts, both those noted here, as well as others.

This was not the first time that the specific issue of Jewish studies was the focus of inquiry. A conference sponsored in 1995 by the Association of High Schools in Israel was challenged by its chairman to address four questions:

1. Is the decline of interest in Jewish studies in non-religious schools the fault of curricula and teaching methods?
2. Is it possible that Jewish studies cannot compete with other, evidently more attractive areas of study, especially with the development of the social and natural sciences?
3. How may Jewish studies maintain themselves in a world of open communication between peoples and cultures?

4. Is the crisis in Jewish studies independent of the crisis in religion—in what way should the state school deal with the religious character of much of the content of Jewish studies?

The three major addresses of the conference—two of which were delivered by observant Jews—dealt with religious issues, less in the spirit of inquiry implied in the questions noted above and more in a tone of accusations against secularism. Not everyone at the conference thought that approach appropriate to its purpose.³⁶

The recommendations of the Shenhar Committee are both suggestive and prescriptive. At their core is a conception of Judaism as “. . . a national and pluralistic culture in a continuous state of development.”³⁷ That formulation is clearly meant to challenge the widespread image of Judaism as a closed, fixed, and static system. It may also be understood as a statement that not only invites the public the state schools are intended to serve to rethink its ideas about Judaism, but also to indicate that the committee was sensitive to its needs. That embrace approach permits the conviction that “. . . a knowledge of the history of the Jewish people and its culture is an essential element in the development of the identity and the shaping of the spiritual and ethical world of the Israeli youngster.”³⁸

The committee’s proposals for achieving changes in attitudes and behavior place Jewish studies in the broader framework of the humanities, call for the development of curricula and other materials that encourage dialogue and critical inquiry, emphasize the importance of an interdisciplinary approach, and encourage the use of the media and other public forums to create an environment supportive of the efforts of the school. The role of the community is given a special place in creating the necessary climate, without, however, defining what that actually is. The new curricula and accompanying materials are to relate to four broad areas: universal-Jewish culture, Hebrew, Zionism, and Eretz Yisrael.

Nowhere else does the report define the four concepts that are central to the detail of its recommendations: identity, pluralism, interdisciplinism and culture. It is difficult to believe that the members of the committee were not aware of the consequences of using terms about whose meaning there is considerable debate. Perhaps the exact meaning of these concepts is less important for the purposes of the committee than the climate of understanding it sought to create. Culture, interdisciplinism and pluralism suggest connection with the wide world and point to the belief that Jewishness is only one component of personal identity, an amalgam of influences of all kinds. The attention to identifying these factors, no matter how defined, signals a shift from the centrality of the collective, so prominent in the

design of earlier efforts, to an acknowledgment of the importance of the individual and personal definition. This does not deny the role of the collective; it is, rather, a recognition of the role of choice and the need to deal with its implications.

The Shenhar report has spawned an industry. Some of the work is done by existing units of the Ministry; a great deal is contracted, after review, to outside agencies and institutions that have long specialized in Jewish education. Programs include: a new major in Jewish studies in teachers colleges; a center for the development of curricula in the humanities and Jewish studies closely connected to relevant university departments; topics from Oral Law for Internet; the Jewish Bookshelf; twinning between schools in Israel and Jewish schools around the world; and, workshops for parents. Established in 1995, a national center for inservice training in Jewish studies has served more than 4000 teachers and other educational personnel since its inception. The workshops, generally four days, are built around relevant themes: Jewish-Israeli identity, ethical dilemmas in Jewish sources; Judaism and democracy; the search for meaning in Jewish thought; between man and man; holidays of Tishrei; several experiments with integrated curricula. The thematic approach, both at the teacher training center and the new curricula, expresses the emphasis placed by the Shenhar Committee on the interdisciplinary approach.

It is too early to know whether or not the work of the Shenhar Committee has had any effect. Available data indicate a significant increase in the number of pupils who chose Oral Law as one of the subjects of their matriculation examinations—from 547 in 1992 to 2000 in 1995.⁴⁹ There has also been an increase in the number of students enrolled in departments of Jewish Thought in universities.⁵⁰ The principal of the Reali School, however, contends that, despite the efforts of the Shenhar Committee, the status of Jewish studies in state schools has worsened.⁵¹

Any assessment of the possible long-term effects of the committee's recommendations, if implemented, must consider circumstances in the country at the time of their appearance. It was a period of concern over rampant "Americanization" and consumerism, debate about the weight of the particular and the universal in the forming of Israeli society, the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin and elections which awarded religious parties an increase of places in parliament and government. All of these events have conditioned attitudes toward Judaism, positive and negative, among those who have not yet defined their relationship to tradition.

It is also important to note that the report appeared at the time of a massive wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union. Tens of thou-

sands of youngsters, some of them not even Jewish, entered the state schools and brought with them a brand of "secularism" not altogether comprehended by the committee. Moreover, the looseness of the construct of identity makes it unlikely that the influence of a particular program of studies can be isolated from all the experiences that shape a youngster's attitudes toward himself and others.

The provenance of the committee, connected as it is to schools, and surely informed by the idea so deeply rooted in Jewish tradition that right knowledge leads to right behavior, accounts for the many recommendations in the committee's report that relate to curriculum. Even though more sophisticated and less doctrinaire than earlier programs designed to promote Jewish Consciousness, the new material is engaged in a similar task—selling Judaism.

The history of curriculum reform suggests that new methods and materials do not always guarantee changes in attitude toward what is. When the problem of engaging the disinterested and the disaffected is understood as an issue of enculturation rather than only a matter of supplying information to the ignorant—as important as that might be—the educational effort assumes a different character; affective and behavioral components are no less important than the cognitive. The learning of a "foreign" culture—as Judaism surely is for many children and families in the state schools—requires more than formal schooling.

The examination of almost one hundred years of concern about the Jewishness of non-religious youngsters in Palestine and then Israel discloses a number of issues that reflect significant changes in the society that sponsors and supports the schools they attend. At the beginning of the century, as we have shown, Jewishness was defined in religious terms; young people, many of them from homes still connected to tradition, were faulted for their ignorance of the details of religious observances. The creation of the state heightened the emphasis on the importance of the collective; youngsters were taken to task for their apparent lack of identification with the Jewish people—past, present, and future everywhere. The latest effort to inculcate Jewishness—initiated in 1991—centers on the individual, the focus is on the development of a personal identity which includes Jewish elements. The path to Jewishness has led from the transcendent to the social and from there to the personal.

The remedies suggested over time to change attitudes and modify behavior have been conceptually alike—new programs in schools that emphasize cognitive learning without reference to the experience of earlier efforts. The litany of youth's deficiencies, always intense but with different

accents, has not been accompanied by a thoughtful examination of the changes in the nature of the centrifugal forces that pull youngsters away from Jews and Judaism. Even if their influence may all be products of modernity and its aftermath, there is enough of the specific in each of them to warrant the design of differential strategies. It is unlikely that treatment that is appropriate to a generation whose disaffection is rooted in the ideological conviction that it is "the last of the Jews and the first of the Hebrews"—but a generation that was still personally acquainted with examples of traditional Jewish life and learning—is similarly fitting to the young people of today, who lack any experience of living Jewishly and who are further estranged by the behavior of religious zealots who claim to represent authentic Judaism.

The task Israel has taken upon itself of "making" Jews—primarily that aspect of Jewish life that emphasizes identification with the past and the present of the Jewish people—permits its classification as a "visionary" state. In states of this kind, the government does not restrict its activities to supplying necessary services to its citizens. It also strives to educate them to identify with the values of the state and their purpose; to recruit them to participate in activities that lead to their achievement and to unite them into a "moral community" of mission.⁴² Israel, as the center of the Jewish people, is perhaps the most complete expression of the Zionist vision.

Israel is also one of many states to have attained independence after World War II. All of them share some problems in common, especially those composed of various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups.⁴³ Israel's signal success in establishing Hebrew as the national language distinguishes it from those other countries whose populations speak different languages. At the same time, the Jewish state is not unlike others that have had to define anew the meaning of a traditional culture and its place in the formation of a national consensus.

Modern states may react to traditional cultures in a variety of ways: 1) *conformation* (rejecting important aspects of the tradition); 2) *selection* (choosing aspects of the tradition suited to the needs of the state); or 3) *reinterpretation* (providing new meaning to the contents of the tradition).⁴⁴ The program of Jewish Consciousness and the more recent recommendations of the Shenhar Committee reflect all three.

NOTES

1. *Proceedings of the Knesset*, 2 November 1955, p. 230 [Hebrew].
2. 11 November 1955. As given in Chaim Navon, *Jewish Consciousness in State Education*, unpublished Master's thesis, School of Education, Bar-Ilan University (Ramat-Gan, 1982) 123 [Hebrew].
3. Joseph Klausner, "The Young Hebrew," *HaShiloah*, 20 (1909) 401-5 [Hebrew].
4. Zalman Epstein, "The Hebrew Gymnasium in Yafó," *HaShiloah*, 25(4) (1911) 351-60 [Hebrew].
5. Walter Ackerman, "Religion in the Schools of Eretz Yisrael, 1904-1914," *Studies in Zionism*, 6(1) (1985) 1-13.
6. "The Trial of Eretz Yisrael's Youth," *Mazmanim*, No. 59-60 (1933) [Hebrew].
7. Bert Katznelson, "Destruction and Detachment" in Y. Eretz (ed), *The House of Labor* (Tel-Aviv, 1965) 502-4 [Hebrew].
8. Barnuch Kurzweil, "The New Canaanites in Israel," *Judaism*, 2 (1933) 3-15.
9. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago, IL, 1981) 6.
10. Micah Ben-Gurion, "Regarding the Question of the Past," in *A Change of Values* (Leipzig, 1922) 49 [Hebrew].
11. See Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover, NH, 1995) 321-6.
12. The Real School, *Proposals for a Curriculum for the High School* (Haifa, 1930) [Hebrew].
13. See Mark Rosenstein, *The New Jew: The Approach to Jewish Tradition in the High Schools of the General School Trend from its Inception until the Establishment of the State*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Jerusalem, 1983) [Hebrew].
14. Ben Zion Moseosohn, "Bible in the School," *HaChinuch*, 1 & 2 (1915) 23-32; 110-19 [Hebrew].
15. Yehetzkel Kaufman, "Concerning the Study of Ancient Literature in School," *HaAretz*, 28 December 1930 [Hebrew].
16. Shlomo Dov Goiten, "Regarding the Philosophical Foundations of Teaching Bible in the Hebrew School," in Chaim Roth (ed), *Hebrew Secondary Education in Eretz Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1939) 66 [Hebrew].
17. Meir Shapiro (ed), *Jewish Values in Secondary Education* (Tel-Aviv, 1956) [Hebrew].
18. Zalman Aranne, *Paths of Education* (Jerusalem, 1971) 103 [Hebrew].
19. *Proceedings of the Knesset*, 3 December 1957 [Hebrew].
20. This section draws on circulars distributed by the Ministry to teachers and principals. See Government of Israel, *Degpening Jewish Consciousness* (Jerusalem, 1959) [Hebrew].
21. *Davar*, 19 November 1957 [Hebrew].
22. *Davar*, 20 September 1957 [Hebrew].
23. Zev Igeret, "Inculcating Jewish Consciousness," *Heb HaChinuch*, 39 (1965) [Hebrew].
24. Ruth Firer, *Agents of Zionist Education* (Tel-Aviv, 1985) 90 [Hebrew].

25. *Circular of the Director General*, January, 1991 [Hebrew].
26. *Tali is an acronym for Tigbur Limmudei Yahadut* [Augmented Jewish Studies].
27. Lee Levine, "The Tali Schools," in Walter Ackerman (ed), *Origins: Studies in Jewish Education*, VII (Jerusalem, 1995) 259-77.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
30. Uri Ferago, "The Jewish Identity of Israeli Youth," *Yahadut Z'Maanenu*, 5 (1989) 259-85 [Hebrew].
31. Yair Auron, "Jewish Israeli Identity among Israel's Future Teachers," *Taruken Letter / Viewpoints*, No. 334 (1996).
32. *Proceedings of the Knesset*, 15 June 1990 [Hebrew].
33. So called after its chair, Prof. Aliza Shenhar, then the rector of Haifa University. The title of the report is "A Nation and the World—Jewish Culture in a Changing World" [Hebrew].
34. Ministry of Education and Culture, *A People and the World: Jewish Culture in a Changing World* (Jerusalem, 1994) 1 [Hebrew].
35. Between 1980 and 1992, the number of students majoring in Bible in all the universities declined from 75 to 23, while the number of graduates overall increased by 500%.
36. *Jewish Values in Secondary Education*.
37. *A People and the World*, p. 5.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
39. *Kan YChinuch*, 9 June 1996 [Hebrew].
40. *Kan YChinuch*, 16 June 1996 [Hebrew].
41. "Leaving the new ghetto," *HaAretz*, 13 June 1996 [Hebrew].
42. Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "The Dilemma of Reconciling Traditional Culture and Political Needs: Civil Religion in Israel," *Comparative Politics*, 16(1) (1983) 53-66.
43. See Edward Shils, "On the Comparative Study of New States," in Clifford Geertz (ed), *Old Societies and New States* (New York, 1963) 1-26.
44. Liebman and Don-Yehiya, "The Dilemma of Reconciling . . ."

The Education of Israel's Negev Beduin: Background and Prospects

INTRODUCTION

THE EDUCATION OF BEDUIN-ARAB TRIBES has historically posed a unique challenge, especially given their nomadic/semi-nomadic lifestyle. During the last half century, Beduin life throughout the Middle East has undergone many changes. This is particularly true for the Beduin-Arabs of the Negev Desert in southern Israel, whose social, economic and political life has been altered quite radically since the establishment of the state of Israel. This article reviews the development of the educational system for the Negev Beduin-Arabs over the past five decades in relation to their changing environment, and evaluates its effectiveness in meeting the new challenges of educating this community.

TRADITIONAL BEDUIN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND EDUCATION

Arabs of the Middle East have developed three predominant settlement patterns from which they also take their identity: town dwellers [*mudani*], villagers [*qarawi*], and desert-dwellers or Beduin [*badni*]. Desert, village and city have been intimately related to each other in Arab society culturally, socially, and economically. Though the Beduin constitute only a small and declining proportion of the Arab population, they have played an important role in creating the values of Arab civilization, as well as holding important economic functions.¹ Traditionally, the Beduin adapted to their harsh desert environment by engaging in pastoral nomadism, and thus they served the vital role of the stock-breeders of the Middle East. Nomadic pastoralists have been classified into two types: nomads, who depended