

## **Israel and the Jewish World – A New Relationship**

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*In this paper, the Reut Institute team outlines Israel's changing relationship with the Jewish World. It first presents the main ideas upon which the relationship was built, and then analyzes the changing reality that has led to a growing rift between the two communities. The main conclusion is that the ideological basis of the emerging new relationship is a Renewed Zionism which blends Peoplehood with Jewish Nationalism.*

### **Introduction and Background**

1. This paper offers a conceptual framework regarding the future of the relationship between Israel and the Jewish world. It outlines the traditional relationship – the ethos and historical foundations of the relationship – and analyzes the changing reality that has led to a growing rift between the two communities.
2. The urgency of this topic derives from the large gaps in expectations between Israel and Diaspora communities that often cause tension and friction; from the increasing financial, structural and political difficulties of many Jewish institutions in Israel and overseas; from difficulties in engaging the younger generation of world Jewry with Israel; and from the attack on Israel's legitimacy in recent years.

### **The 'Old Relationship' Between Israel and World Jewry**

3. The relationship between Israel and world Jewry has been based upon an unwritten 'covenant' that stemmed from Classical Zionism and was shaped by the Holocaust and the miracle of the rebirth of the State of Israel. This covenant generated values, priorities, working assumptions, patterns of behavior and institutions that have dominated the relationship for decades:
  - Classical Zionism negated the Diaspora and engaged in a systematic attempt to dismantle it through a strong call for Aliyah;

- State-building was the major effort of the Jewish people and the Government of Israel was the exclusive representative of this endeavor;
  - Israel was to become a model society that would make world Jews 'proud', as well as provide them with a 'safe haven';
  - The Jewish Diaspora was to provide financial and political support to Israel, as well as immigrants (*Olim*);
  - The 'blood for money' narrative legitimized a rich uncle-poor nephew mindset and a 'wealthy Diaspora' supporting 'needy Israel'. At times, the Diaspora even financed activities that were within the direct responsibilities of the Government of Israel;
  - The identity of Israelis was fully realized through their Jewish nationalism, that rejected Diaspora heritage and diminished the importance of Jewish tradition, texts or rituals;
  - The relationship was managed by an 'Old Boys Network' that included the lay leaders and key professionals of the prominent Jewish institutions, representatives of the Government of Israel and the leadership of JAFI;
  - A permanent and vibrant Israeli Diaspora did not fit with Classical Zionism, and its existence and needs were ignored;
  - While every Jew around the world was expected to be keenly interested in Israel and to mobilize for its financial and political support, Israelis showed relative disinterest in and often even arrogance towards world Jewry.
4. However, over the past years, it has become clear that powerful trends have been undermining this 'covenant' to the point of rendering it irrelevant.

#### **Trends Undermining the 'Old' Relationship**

5. Trends in North America include: growing interest in direct relationships that no longer require the existing communal institutions; increasing disinterest in

and even alienation from Israel; rise of *Tikkun Olam* as a cause that mobilizes many; and growing importance of community life.

6. At the same time, Israeli society has been transforming as well: Israel has become relatively secure and prosperous, even while its central government has been subject to a prolonged crisis of governance; community life in Israel is surging, and more Israelis are engaging with their Jewish heritage; many Israelis travel for education and work, and an Israeli Diaspora seems to be a permanent fixture for the foreseeable future.

### **A 'New Relationship': Renewed Zionism based on Peoplehood**

7. As a consequence of the above, we have seen a number of ideological, conceptual and practical developments that have altered the relationship:
  - Classical Zionism has been evolving into a New 21<sup>st</sup> century Zionism, which blends nationalism with the concept of Peoplehood and views the mission of Israel in the broader more nuanced context of the Jewish people;
  - Negation of the Diaspora is being replaced by the understanding that a vibrant Diaspora is an imperative for long-term survival of the Jewish people;
  - A strong call for 'aliyah' has morphed into encouraging lifecycles of commitment to Israel and movement between Israel and the Jewish world;
  - Israel is no longer viewed as a model society by many. For some Jews it has even become a moral liability.
  - The rich uncle-poor nephew mindset is being replaced by an expectation for synergy, mutuality and partnership among equals, as Israel ascends to first-world prosperity;

- In the past, world Jewry underwrote Zionism and the significant budgetary needs of the Israeli government. Now it seeks its unique voice in Israeli society;
- The narrative of state-building and *mamlachtiyut* ('statism') has been replaced by a focus on community-building and embracing diversity;
- Power to shape the relationship has expanded from limited purview of the Government of Israel and a few 'big *machers*' to countless direct philanthropists and peer-to-peer and community-to-community connections;
- Israelis have embraced their Jewish heritage, and Israel's public sphere has been filled with spiritual innovation. In the past, progressive Judaism was exported to Israel. Soon, Israel will be enriching world Jewry with its cultural and substantive creativity.

#### **The Six Pillars of the 'New Relationship'**

8. Numerous conversations and interviews have led us to conclude that at the ideological basis of the new relationship is a renewed Zionism, which blends Peoplehood with Jewish nationalism and focuses on the following six efforts:
  - **People's structure: a world wide network of prosperous and resilient communities** – This effort focuses on expanding and strengthening the Jewish network by establishing communities where there are Jews but no community life, connecting individuals to communities, and strengthening the connections among existing communities primarily in former communist countries, Israel and Israeli Diaspora;
  - **People's mission: *Tikkun Olam*** – In the past two decades, the powerful energy of *Tikkun Olam* has been directed toward improving the human condition around the world. This mission offers a unique opportunity for partnership and synergy, whereby Israel has the actual on-the-ground knowledge and experience of development work, while the Jewish world has the ethics and the resources that are essential for it;

- **People's state: A secure and prosperous Israel offering a unique Jewish experience** – Israel has a unique status among the Jewish people, irrespective of whether it is framed as its center. Therefore, the new relationship must promote a vision of Israel that successfully balances its security, democracy, prosperity and Jewishness, which allows world Jewry to rally around Israel and to partner for its success.

For this purpose, Renewed New Zionism must place greater significance on Jewish identity of Israelis; partner with the Jewish world to enhance Israel's prosperity; credibly commit to securing a Jewish majority by ending the control over the Palestinian population and to promoting equality and partnership with the Arab citizens of Israel;

- **People's language: Hebrew** – The Hebrew language is the tool for global communication between Jews and for engaging the richness of our history and culture;
- **People's culture and tradition** – A pillar of the new relationship is the joint commitment towards the preservation, development and dissemination of the collective wisdom of Jewish culture, rituals and traditions through text study, art, literature or poetry and in a way that enriches individuals, households and communities;
- **People's fight against anti-Semitism and the delegitimacy of Israel** – This effort includes the cooperative efforts on the part of the Jewish world, the government of Israel, and Israeli communities to combat anti-Semitism and the growing attack on Israel's right to exist.

### **From Vision to Reality: One Organization at a Time**

9. The breakdown of the old relationship is evident across the Jewish world. Significant resources have been reallocated away from those who still represent it, and large constituencies have shifted loyalties. In this reality, resistance to change and inability to adapt is perilous to the point of being existential.

10. Jewish institutions have adapted to this changing reality to varying degrees. Some have shifted their vision, mission, strategy and allocation of resources, while others have been more stagnant and resistant. At the same time, new initiatives have sprung up, philosophically based on the concept of peoplehood and embracing one or more of the pillars of the new relationship.
11. Like in any other network, effectuating change in the Jewish world requires identifying the 'hubs' and focusing on impacting them, as they have significant influence on the entire Jewish network or large sections thereof.