



Israelis realize that *being Jewish* is no longer an automatic outcome of *being Israeli*. For the majority of Israelis who do not define themselves as Orthodox, Judaism — even in the Jewish State — can be insignificant. And more than that, the suggestion that the state address Jewish life raises serious questions about mixing religion and politics, where coercion, intolerance, and antagonism are the outcome rather than creativity and meaning. So, the hope that Israel would serve as a center of Jewish culture and spirituality has proven disappointing.

Are Israelis concerned about their personal and communal Jewish character? Some are and some aren't. Many Israelis are turning away from distinctly Jewish expressions, choosing instead to explore a secular humanistic culture or an alternative Eastern spirituality.

There are, however, a growing number of Israelis who feel that Judaism cannot be left to chance or to state-controlled Orthodox establishments. Many are reclaiming Judaism through the study of classical texts, life-cycle rituals, and innovative holiday celebrations. A young and dynamic Jewish Renaissance movement is unfolding in Israel and is changing the picture of Israeli Judaism. Israelis may not use the Renaissance terminology now popular in the North American Jewish community, but the direction and energy are similar. The characteristics of the Israeli Renaissance movement include: the search for meaning, the willingness to take responsibility and show initiative, the capacity to learn and grow, the willingness to invest time and resources, and an openness to new directions.

Five areas of Jewish creativity can be observed: a moderate brand of modern Orthodoxy that employs a more personal form of religious expression and acknowledges women's voices; secular Israeli interest in Jewish text study with concomitant community-

oriented initiatives; increasing visibility and relevance of Conservative and Reform Judaism; models of creative dialogue between religious and secular Jews; and finally, an indigenous New Age practice tied to the Jewish Renewal movement in America.

Assessing the effectiveness of these developments is not an easy task. On the one hand, Israel could be fertile ground for Jewish creativity. The cultural infrastructure — a large concentration of Hebrew-speaking Jews living in the historic land of the Bible according to the Jewish calendar — offers a good starting-point for any Jewishly related initiative. But, on the other hand, the marketplace of Jewish ideas and lifestyles is much more intense and politicized. It is not easy to bring the notion of Jewish Renaissance to the center stage because politicians and the media marginalize most attempts to show Jewish life in Israel as a positive, attractive experience.

Much of the recent creativity is a result of positive experiences Israelis had in the Diaspora, particularly with American Jewry. Israelis often return from study abroad, from dialogue and exchange programs, or from serving as *shlichim*, inspired and motivated to enrich their Jewish life in Israel. American Jews are playing an important role in the transformation of Jewish life in Israel, both through various dialogue frameworks and philanthropic efforts. The pressure from the grass roots — seeking meaning in Jewish life — together with excellent programming will enable the sense of renewal to prevail. Zionism, after all, is about the transformation of the Jewish people, yet again.

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A Jewish Renaissance Critique

Mik Moore

Some Jewish leaders have exploited the "continuity crisis" to push their oft-rejected proposals on a traditionally liberal but increasingly moderate majority. The challenge of the "Jewish Renaissance" agenda will be to mine the proposals from the past decade to separate the wheat of innovation

from the chaff of isolation. If recent events are any indication, we are off to a bad start.

When the 1990 Jewish Population Survey reported that the intermarriage rate during a five-year span in the 1980s was over 50 percent, many Jewish communal leaders expressed shock at the unprecedented num-