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# The Anomalies of Jewish Identity

## I

We all know that there are religious Jews, and we all know that there are secular Jews. There are probably a lot of Jews who would describe themselves as living somewhere between these two categories, but let's stick with these two for now. What do the two kinds of Jews have in common? The answer must be that secular and religious Jews are both members of the Jewish people. And what separates the two? Again, the answer must be that secularists are not part of (what we call in the US) the Jewish "community of faith." They are members only of the people. But what does this mean? Historically, the people and the faith were so entangled that they were virtually indistinguishable. Emancipation made the distinction possible in theory, but it isn't clear that it is possible in practice. According to Israeli law, for example, one can't join the Jewish people without converting to the Jewish religion. And yet there are many Jews who are irreligious. So what is a Jew? And what is a secular Jew? In this essay, I want to explore, without quite managing to answer those questions, the anomalies of our identity.

The Jews are a people, a nation, for a long time a stateless nation, but nonetheless a collective of a familiar kind. There are many nations, and we are one among them. And, at the same time, the Jews are a religious community – which is another collective of a familiar kind. There are many religions, and ours is one among them. The anomaly is that these two collectives are not of the same kind, and they don't ordinarily or, better, they don't, except in the Jewish case, coincide. Other peoples or nations include members of different religious communities. Other religious communities extend across national boundaries and include members of different peoples or nations.

Consider first how we differ from other peoples. The French people, for example, includes Catholics and Protestants and now Muslims – and (for a very long time) Jews too, who would certainly resent being denied



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membership. But the Jewish people does not include Christians or Muslims. It does include Jewish atheists and secularists and also all the varieties of religious Jews, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Ultra-Orthodox – and so one can say that there exists among the Jewish people a range of belief and disbelief. Converts to another religion, however, are excluded from the Jewish people. But aren't there Jewish Buddhists nowadays? And what about "Jews for Jesus" – aren't they still Jews? Maybe so, but these identities seem to involve something considerably short of formal conversion. Their status is up in the air. What is clear is that there are no Jewish Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, or Presbyterians, and no Jewish Muslims. However pro-Israeli Evangelical Christians are, they can't join the Jewish people without giving up their Christianity – which they don't have to do to join any other people. So the Jews are not a "people" like the others.

Zionism aimed to produce a normal people, and that was conceived to be a political project, much as it was in biblical times, when the elders came to Samuel and said: "Appoint a king for us, to govern us like all [the] other nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). Zionists believed that a Jewish state would make the Jews "like all [the] other nations." Given the conditions of our exile, that project was certainly a healthy one; the Zionist passion for normalcy has great achievements to its credit. Some early Zionist writers dared to hope that the Jews, considered as a nation, would learn to accommodate religious difference and come eventually to include men and women of different faiths.[1] But that hasn't happened – the Jewish people includes Jews of no faith, but not Jews of other faiths. Zionist normalcy hasn't made us like everyone else.

Nor is our religion like all the other religions. The Catholic Church, for example, is a universal religious community that includes men and women who are members of the French, Italian, Irish, Nigerian, and Korean peoples, and many others, too. The Jewish religious community isn't like that: "There is only one ethnic group," writes Ben Halpern, "only one historic nationality, in the Jewish church: it is the Jewish people."[2] It's true, of course, that the

[1] This position is sometimes attributed to Yosef Hayyim Brenner, though I don't think that he quite reached it. See his "On the Specter of *Shemad*," in *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 2, *Membership*, ed. Michael Walzer, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 401–407.

[2] Ben Halpern, *The American Jew: A Zionist Analysis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 46.

Jewish religion includes men and women who are French, English, Russian, and so on – but Jews are French, English, and Russian with a difference. The pre-Zionist and then anti-Zionist campaign to abolish this difference and create a normal religious community, consisting of Frenchmen, say, or Germans, of the "Mosaic faith," seems to me less healthy than Zionism was, but, still, it was an understandable response to the conditions of our exile. And it, too, has proven futile: French Jews continue to be Jewish in both the religious and the national sense. However "French" they are or think themselves to be, they are as anomalous as ever. Reflecting on the experience of Hungarian Jewry, and with only minor exaggeration, the novelist George Konrad writes that "Even if a Jew is utterly like his environment, even if he has learned everything that can be learned of the surrounding people's culture, he still remains somehow different."[3]

In the United States, it was Jewish advocates of cultural pluralism, Horace Kallen chief among them, who invented the idea of hyphenated Americans, so that we could add "American" to our identity without giving up "Jewish." We are not Americans who happen to be of the Jewish religion; we are both American Jews (religiously) and Jewish-Americans (nationally). We pretend that we are like American Catholics, on the one hand, and like Italian-Americans, on the other. But the analogy doesn't work in either case. Many American Catholics are not Italian, and some Italian-Americans are not Catholic, while our religious and national identities continue, anomalously, to coincide. Even those of us who aren't personally religious are Jewish in both these senses.

The existence of the state of Israel makes things even more complicated. Here is a Jewish nation-state that has a large and growing number of non-Jewish citizens. Some Jews inside and outside of Israel claim that the state doesn't belong to its citizens the way all other states do, but to the Jewish people as a whole, including Jews who are citizens of other states. This would be a greater anomaly than any of the ones I have discussed so far, but it isn't true except in a very special sense of the word "belong." Normally I have decision-making authority over things that belong to me, but the Jewish people does not have decision-making authority over the state of Israel. The state is a democracy, and democracies belong, in the normal sense of that

[3] George Conrad, *The Invisible Voice: Meditations on Jewish Themes* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1999), 27.

word, to their citizens. So Israel belongs to its citizens, including its non-Jewish citizens.

Perhaps Zionist normalcy would be realized if "Israeli" became a nationality – for this nationality would extend to members of different religious communities, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian. Doesn't it do that already? But it also extends to members of different national communities, Arabs and Jews, and it doesn't yet offer a superceding nationality. One day being an Israeli might be more important than being an Arab or a Jew, and then there would be a normal Israeli nation, with a state of its own. But this state would not "belong" to the Jewish people in any sense of the word – that's precisely what would make it normal.

## II

These anomalies are pervasive in Jewish life wherever Jews live, but they differ importantly in the two Jewries of Israel and the Diaspora, and the difference will probably grow. The common understanding of the difference is that in the Diaspora the religious side of our anomalous existence is dominant, in Israel the national side is dominant. That is probably right, and in one important sense it should be right: statehood should be an expression of the national side, and not the religious side, of Jewish identity. If those two could be distinguished, the idea of a Jewish state would be easier to explain to non-Jews. Still, the formula is too simple; I will need to suggest unexpected complications in both Israel and the Diaspora.

Before emancipation, diaspora Jewry was a unified religious-national community; it was governed by Torah law – despite the framing device of *dina d'malchuta dina* – since pre-modern kingdoms and empires commonly made room for Jewish autonomy. There were no secular Jews because there was no social space for a secular existence. This is the situation that Spinoza encountered in seventeenth-century Holland, and this is why Yirmiyahu Yovel calls him the "harbinger" of Jewish secularism but not yet a secular Jew.[4] I suspect that there were irreligious Jews in Spinoza's time, and before his time, but they mostly conformed to the legal norms of their society and so lived much like religious Jews. Despite their dispersal, and despite some

[4] Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 200.

divergence in customary practices, the Jews obeyed a single set of laws, and so they were a nation in the strongest sense. But their law was religious; they were a religious nation.

Emancipation was intended and expected, by most of its Jewish advocates and by all the gentile emancipators, to dissolve this Jewish nation and transform Jewry into a religion simply, a community of faith. Many Zionists believed that this transformation was well on its way: Jews in the West, where emancipation was most advanced, were surrendering the fullness of peoplehood for the narrow life of the synagogue or worse – so even irreligious writers thought – for the even narrower life of the Reform temple. This was Ahad Ha'am's view of German and French Jewry in the early years of the twentieth century,[5] and it was Ben Halpern's view of American Jewry half a century later: "The whole style," Halpern wrote, "is plainly that of a cult."[6] He meant: *merely* that of a cult; the sense of peoplehood was being lost.

But what emancipation actually brought about, at least at first, was not the transformation of the Jews into a religious community, but only the formal disestablishment of their exilic nation, the end of autonomy and the rule of Torah law. The sense of peoplehood and many of the practices that sustained it survived in what we might call Jewish civil society. Different forms of nationalist politics, Zionist and Bundist, actually flourished in the aftermath of emancipation. And a fully secular Jewishness, impossible before, also flourished; its political intellectuals, novelists, and poets worked in Yiddish and Hebrew and also, increasingly, in the language of the host country. Religious Jews doubted that these secular Jews could reproduce themselves as Jews beyond a generation or two. Clearly the secularists, or many of them, have done better than that, but they have probably had a lot of religious assistance in the work of cultural reproduction – in the form of the yearly calendar, the life-cycle celebrations, the tradition of learning, and much else. Still, they would certainly claim to be sustaining a "national existence, separate from religion," as Yovel's Spinoza could not do.[7]

Indeed, in an era when almost everyone believed in the idea of secularization, when an unstoppable tendency toward the "demystification"

[5] See his essay, "Slavery in Freedom," in *Selected Essays of Ahad Ha'am*, ed. and trans. Leon Simon (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 171–194.

[6] Halpern, *The American Jew*, 173.

[7] *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason*, 200.

of the world seemed visible and manifest, when faith seemed to many observers already an anachronism, what other identity could there be for the Jews except a national (or as it came to be called in the United States, with some diminution of intensity, an ethnic) identity? And if secularization was a long-term historical trend, it would naturally be most advanced among the Jews, wouldn't it? In the early 1970s, Charles Liebman reported on a study of ethnic and religious groups in Detroit, which showed that the ties binding Jews to their religion were weaker than such ties were among Catholics and Protestants, but the ties binding Jews to one another were much stronger. Even assimilated, well-off, third generation suburban Jews tended to have close ties only with other Jews.[8] Jewish history could probably offer no example of a community more ethnocentric or less religiously concerned.

But how strong were those ethnic ties, how lasting would they be? One could take this in-group solidarity to be the emotional residue of an intensely tribal religious culture – and then doubt that it could survive for long without religious reinforcement. And where would it find that reinforcement in a secular age? Soon enough, Jewish-Americans would achieve ordinary ethnicity; they would not look different, as Nathan Glazer had already suggested in the 1950s, from Italian-Americans.[9] Or maybe they would look a little different – marked, say, by a greater commitment to social justice and by participation in a left-liberal politics that did not correspond to their economic interests. But wasn't this also a residue of the religious past – of memories of persecution and stubborn faith, of Passover seders and readings from the prophets – and wouldn't this also fade with time?

Secularization, however, proved to be a false prediction – especially so in America, home to the largest diaspora community. Like other "big" social scientific theories, it failed to capture the realities of everyday life. What is most apparent, most striking, about American Jewry today is the extent of its religiosity. The social ties that bind Jews together have certainly weakened since the 1970s; the boundaries of the community are increasingly easy to cross; rates of intermarriage are sharply higher; survey research suggests that the sense of peoplehood is increasingly muffled. At the same time, the Jews as a religious community are institutionally and spiritually stronger

[8] Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew: Politics, Religion, and Family in American Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), 68.

[9] Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

than any of the sociologists writing fifty or even thirty years ago could have imagined.

The real transformation of Jewish life took place, is taking place, within the religious world. On the one hand, Judaism was Americanized: the synagogue (or temple or Jewish Center) became more and more like a Protestant congregation. I don't want to exaggerate this change; Jewish life was congregationalist well before the Protestant Reformation. But the old congregations were legal communities and miniature welfare states, and the new ones have virtually no role in the administration of Jewish law and a greatly diminished role in the provision of welfare (the American Jewish community is still organized as a welfare society, but the organization is regional and national rather than congregational). Synagogues are not singularly religious in their functions, but they are closer to that singularity than they have ever been in the long history of the Diaspora. In the United States, where emancipation is most fully realized, the nationalist parties and movements have virtually collapsed and, for most Jews, synagogue membership has become the primary form of Jewish identification – whether the members themselves are religious or secular. Of course, we continue to proliferate organizations of all sorts, but in most of the American Jewish world, if you don't belong to a synagogue, you don't have a Jewish life. Something like two-thirds of American Jews do join a synagogue at some point in their lives, and this is far more than join any other organization; it is probably far more than join all other Jewish organizations taken together.[10] But, again, what does this membership mean? Are American Jews merely a religious group of a Protestant sort – like, say, Presbyterians or Methodists?

Maybe so, but, on the other hand, the last decades of the twentieth century were marked by an unexpected Jewish revival, which was chiefly but by no means merely religious. The revival took many forms: a heightened interest in religious ritual; a drift toward traditionalism among Reform Jews (the largest American denomination); the expansion of the Havurah movement; the appearance of a number of other movements grouped together under the name "Spiritual Renewal" (the leading figures were Shlomo Carlebach, Reb Zalman [Schachter-Shalomi], and Esther Jungreis); an extraordinary growth in the number of students attending Jewish day schools (including,

[10] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 365.

as never before, Reform and Conservative as well as Orthodox schools); the flourishing of "Jewish Studies" in the American academy and an outpouring of scholarly books and articles on every aspect of Jewish history and culture; the growing number of men and women participating in adult education programs; the arrival of a group of younger novelists and poets, often but not always religious, who dealt explicitly with Jewish themes and (unlike writers such as Bellow and Malamud) seemed to be writing primarily for a Jewish audience; an enormous growth in the number of Jewish book, film, and folk festivals and the building of new Jewish museums across the US (more than fifty now exist); and, perhaps most important, the rise of a feminist movement within Judaism, which brought new energy and passionate commitment – controversy too – to American Jewish life.[11]

It isn't easy to know what to make of all this, since it goes along with growing anxiety about Jewish numbers and about our capacity to reproduce a common life in the next generation, or the next after that. But this much can be said: among those Jews touched by the revival, its effects are clearly cultural and national as well as religious. And so, perhaps, are its purposes: "The Jewish day schools that have mushroomed throughout American society," writes the sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, "are more concerned with maintaining a sense of . . . cultural difference than they are [with] reviving Jewish religiosity."[12] In fact, they do both, differently for different people. Considered in all its forms, the revival is individualist and pluralist in ways that are as much American as they are Jewish; nonetheless, the revival is characteristically and collectively Jewish. Nothing similar is happening among Presbyterians or Methodists or even among Evangelical Christians (their revivalism is quite different), which suggests that American Protestantism is not, in fact, a model of the Jewish future. Nor is any other American ethnic group experiencing a similar revival. Whoever we are, and however many we are, we are not about to lose our anomalous national/religious identity.

But there is something else that we have lost, and that is the sense of living in exile. From a Zionist perspective, that is a critical loss, from which there logically follows the collapse of nationality (and perhaps also

[11] For a full account and analysis of the revival, see Sarna, *American Judaism*, chap. 6.

[12] Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 545.

of secularism) – for a nation, so Zionists have always argued, must have a land, a geographic home, that is mentally if not physically possessed, and the loss of the sense of exile is the loss of that mental possession. But the logic here is not sociologically or ideologically certain: though American Jews are, mostly, comfortable and prosperous in America, we are not Americans of the Jewish faith. Nor are we like the other nationalities in the American "nation of nationalities." We are not in exile and we are not simply at home: another anomaly. In the long history of the Jews, full citizenship in a stable democracy, in a non-Jewish state, is something relatively new. It represents an answer to the "Jewish Question" that Zionists did not anticipate and about which many Israelis remain skeptical. Even in America, we don't know quite how to describe it, and we can't be entirely confident about its permanence. Jewish history is full of warnings. In a moment of revolutionary enthusiasm, Gabriel Riesser told the Frankfurt Assembly in Germany in 1848, "We are not immigrants – we were born here – and so we cannot claim any other home. Either we are Germans or we have no homeland."[13] I am not ready to talk that way about America, but many American Jews are, and if Riesser's lines were delusional in nineteenth-century Germany, they are not delusional in twenty-first-century America – though they may still turn out to be wrong.

In any case, their American application is inexact. For even if Jews are secure in the American homeland, we are still connected to another place – many of us to another geographic place, but also, and perhaps more importantly in the long run, to another cultural place and to another, a non-American, history. And that makes us different from most of our fellow Americans, who have no similar or similarly intense connections.

## III

And what about Jews in Israel? Are they any less anomalous than Jews have historically been? Israel is the product of a national liberation movement, one of whose aims was to liberate the Jews from orthodox Judaism and make them a nation simply. Zionism was a secular political movement. But as it turned out, for reasons that have a lot to do with the historic anomalies of Jewish existence, the Zionists didn't only establish a state, they also

[13] Quoted in Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743–1933* (New York: Henry Holt (Picador), 2003), 177.

established a religion – indeed, an orthodox religion. Perhaps because they believed in the inevitability of secularization, they allowed themselves to be persuaded that a Jewish state should (temporarily) have a clerical establishment. For the present, Ben Gurion thought, it was better to keep religion under state control, and in the long run, it wouldn't matter what the constitutional arrangements were, since religious commitment was sure to decline. At the same time, by creating a democratic Jewish state, the Zionists opened space for secular Jewishness – space that, they were sure, would progressively expand – and also for a secularist and anti-clerical politics, which is the natural response to an established religion.

What the Zionist founders didn't do, because of the establishment, was to open space for religious pluralism among the Jews. In Israel, Jews are either orthodox or secular, and secular means non-religious or anti-religious. Secular Jews in Israel can plausibly think of themselves as representatives of pure peoplehood, that is, of a normal nation that doesn't necessarily coincide with a religious community. There is nothing anomalous about them, they would say; they have achieved normalcy – except that they cannot welcome strangers into their nation; they cannot naturalize new members of the Jewish people except through religious conversion. Nor can they marry or divorce without religious sanction. Nor are they fully in charge of the public culture or the tax-supported schools of their own state.[14] And even if they were in charge, it isn't clear that they would be able to separate their national commitments from the religious heritage that is so much a part of Jewish nationhood – though they could, I am sure, improve on the current arrangements.

Charles Liebman and Steven Cohen have argued that the Israeli establishment of religion helps make possible a strong Jewish presence in the public life and the educational system of the state.[15] Clearly, this is missing in the United States. But the Jewish presence in Israel's public arena is the product of statehood, not of religion per se. Secular nationalism has made its own contribution to the public life of Israel, most importantly in the revival of the Hebrew language, and it did so and would have done so even without

[14] For a useful study of religion in Israel, see Steven V. Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law: Religion and Liberal Democracy in the Jewish State* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2008).

[15] Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen, *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 164–165, 168–169.

the establishment of orthodoxy. Jewish identity, with all its anomalies, is presumably advanced by this public presence; I doubt very much that Jewish religiosity is advanced. American Jews are less secular and probably more religious (among identified Jews, at least, the number who are religiously affiliated and engaged is considerably higher than it is in Israel), and it's the absence of state power that accounts for both these differences. First, it renders anti-clerical politics and militant secularism unnecessary. And, second, it makes for denominational pluralism, which allows a great variety of religious commitments and practices – and this pluralism in turn has heightened voluntary participation in congregational worship and then in the wide range of associations and activities clustered around the congregation, which probably serve to foster national identity more than piety. So in Israel the sense of nationhood, strengthened by state power, sustains one version of religion, while in America a pluralized religion, without state power, sustains the sense of nationhood.

State power is certainly the stronger force, most obviously with regard to language and education, but perhaps most importantly with regard to boundaries. "Who is a Jew?" is a question that has produced considerable controversy in Israel, but that's because it is possible to provide a legal answer. In the United States, there has been less controversy, because there is no possibility of any such answer. The question is answered differently in each Jewish denomination and even in each Jewish congregation – which means that the boundaries are hardly defined at all. The American Jewish community is nothing like a bounded space; it consists of a core of believers or activists, mostly religious but some of them nationalist, and then a spreading periphery of more or less or, more accurately, of less and less committed men and women. The activist center struggles to hold the periphery, some of whose members simply drift away, without ever formally converting or renouncing their Jewish membership (but perhaps their children or grandchildren will drift back). It is an open question whether the sense of peoplehood can survive or, more simply, whether a people can survive, without clear boundaries. What is the future of a Jewry whose outer spaces, so to speak, are so undefined and unguarded?

In the liberal West, and most clearly again in the US, the gentile world is entirely and appealingly open – and so is the Jewish world. High rates of intermarriage point to an appeal that obviously has two directions. "What could more clearly signal the positive evaluation of Jewish qualities,"

asks Jeffrey Alexander, "than the growing Christian interest in marrying Jews?"[16] Alexander takes the "deepening sentiments of respect and affection between members of [in-]groups and out-groups" to be a sign of the success of American multiculturalism. It might be a sign of Jewish success too, but right now only about one-third of intermarried couples join a Jewish congregation and raise their children as Jews. That percentage may be high relative to earlier times, but it represents an alarming rate of loss not only for the religious community but also for the nation. If intermarried couples don't raise their children inside the Jewish "church," the children are unlikely to think of themselves as members of the Jewish people. Secular Jewishness isn't sufficiently institutionalized to sustain itself by itself.

In Israel, by contrast, Jewish identity is secured both by the Jewish majority and by the vitality of secular Jewishness. Israeli Jews can leave the Jewish "church" and still be self-confident Jews. Like secular Jews in the Diaspora, they can also draw freely on the religious culture while denying its divine origin and refusing to observe its laws. Unlike Jews in the Diaspora, they don't have to join a religious congregation in order to have a Jewish life. The state is their congregation. It is a direct consequence of statehood that Jewish identity is much easier and much more secure in Israel than it has ever been or can ever be in the Diaspora. Statehood, of course, is not easy, but that's another matter.

Ahad Ha'am thought that a Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael would serve as a spiritual center for the Diaspora. I don't see much evidence that world Jewry is centered in quite that way. American Jews seem more spiritual than Israeli Jews, partly because of the absence of an orthodox establishment and the openness of the Jewish community to individualist forms of religious expression. Indeed, one might say that America exports spirituality (and also, I am afraid, nationalist zealotry) to Israel. But Israel is, what Ahad Ha'am did not expect, the political center of world Jewry. Of course, American Jews, and English, French, Argentinian, South African, and Russian Jews too, have their own local politics, but Israel is the only place where Jews have a high politics, a politics of war and peace, an existential politics, a politics of full self-determination. So Jews all over the world, not all Jews but large numbers of Jews, are radically focused on the news from Israel. Decisions that we have no hand in making *matter* to us; there are

[16] *The Civil Sphere*, 547.

opportunities and risks involved that are not present in Jewish life elsewhere. "I myself remain a diaspora Jew," writes George Konrad, "but I place part of my being here [in Israel]."[17] And because Israel is a nation-state, this focus, this placement, reinforces the sense of national identity. In this way, the state of Israel serves the cause of Jewish peoplehood – and sustains the anomalies of Jewish existence.

## IV

So the two normalizing projects, to produce an ordinary religion and a nation like all the other nations, have failed to overcome the weight of history and tradition. I suppose that they haven't failed definitively; they might one day be revived. And perhaps there are reasons for experimenting with what might be called bits and pieces of normalcy. Consider the question of how one joins the Jewish people/religion. Right now there is only a religious way in. But why shouldn't it be possible for prospective Jews to choose whether they say "Your people shall be my people" *or* "Your God shall be my God"? Why do they have to say both together, even in cases where one or the other isn't what they really mean? The search for a naturalization process that might sit alongside the conversion process seems to me legitimate, even sensible; it might help to clarify the meaning of Jewish statehood.[18] Still, I suspect that whether one joins the religion or the nation, one will end up, anomalously, connected to both.

But there are motives for normalization that should make us uneasy – the hope, for example, that other people might like us better if we were more like them. Anomaly isn't popular. People find us hard to understand. Pity our host nations, writes Konrad: "It's not easy to like something strange."[19] Because neither our national nor our religious community is inclusive in the standard way, we are accused of being parochial, hostile to outsiders, exclusionist, chauvinist, and, in any group except our own, disloyal and subversive. Indeed, we have all heard accusations of these kinds, and sometimes, since we are very good at self-criticism, we are driven to ask ourselves to what extent

[17] *The Invisible Voice*, 30.

[18] See the argument of Yossi Beilin in *His Brother's Keeper: Israel and Diaspora Jewry in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Schocken, 2000).

[19] *The Invisible Voice*, 13.

they might be true. Still, we should not take responsibility on ourselves for the dislike we inspire among (some) of our neighbors. We need not make excuses. We have a simple position to defend: it doesn't take all that much effort for our neighbors to live with our anomalies, if they are minded to do so, and they should be so minded. In a world where there are many ways of being different, an extraordinary diversity of customs and beliefs, what justice requires (from us, in the Diaspora and in Israel, and from everyone else too) is respect for difference – and our own differences are among those that demand respect.

To make the demand for respect effective, we must respect ourselves, and that means to embrace the anomalies. We are what we are, and we need to make a secure place for ourselves in the world – a place for ourselves *as we are*. If we succeed in doing that, one or another kind of normalcy might follow in time (or it might not).

What would it mean to embrace the anomalies? We are a single religious community, many of whose members are secular and irreligious, and all of whose members constitute a single people. Even leaving geography aside, we belong in two places at once. We have a cultural heritage that is, as Ahad Ha'am wrote in his controversy with Yosef Hayyim Brenner, "filled with the religious spirit, which free-thinkers cannot embrace" – but which many free-thinkers do embrace. I mean, we recognize the value of that heritage, even if our engagement with it is often critical or oppositionist. And similarly, Ahad Ha'am continues, secular Jews recognize the God of Israel "as a historical force that gave vitality to our people and influenced . . . the progress of its life over millennia," even if we deny that the God of Israel exists.[20] It is possible or, at least, among Jews it is possible, to stand within the community of faith without sharing the faith – another example of our anomalies. Had Spinoza not been banned by the Amsterdam community, would he have sustained a standing of that sort? I suspect that more Jews have done that over the centuries than the faithful today will acknowledge. Freethinking Jews have a religious identity because we inherit a religiously inspired culture – in which we find much to oppose but also much to admire and appropriate. We can't convert to another religion and remain members of the Jewish nation, but (mostly) we don't want to do that.

[20] Ahad Ha'am, "Torah from Zion," in *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 2, *Membership* (note 1 above), 409.

And similarly religious Jews have a secular/national identity because they live as members of a people that is organized and whose affairs are administered, in both the Diaspora and in Israel, by "lay leaders" chosen by political processes – which is to say, not chosen either directly or indirectly by God. And they accept and enjoy the benefits of this identity. They can't leave the people without giving up their religion, but (mostly) they don't want to leave.

The constant mixing of incongruous elements *is* our history, and this is what I would teach to our children. They must learn that our national history is also a religious history, which has its beginning in a covenant with God, which was regularly violated by the people who made it. And they must learn that our religious history is also a national history, driven by political and economic forces, subject to environmental and demographic constraints, exactly like all the other nations. Religious children must study secular texts; secular children must study religious texts. They must all be taught that though the memberships coincide, nation and religion are not the same thing (else there would be no anomalies).

Moving among these entangled but different identities requires constant changes in style and sensibility. Jews have gotten pretty good at making these changes, and I think that we should celebrate this ancestral talent, rather than trying to reject and replace it – as if it were better to be always the same, to possess a singular identity. That there are different, even inconsistent, ways of being Jewish is probably the crucial guarantee that some of us will always find a way. So we should not attempt to overcome the anomalies. We should insist that the world allow us to be what we are; we should act honestly in front of the others. And anomalous is what we really are.

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