

CHAPTER III

FORCES CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL IDENTITY - NATIONAL UNITY

"The value of Judaism
is the spirit of the Jews"

- Moses Hess to Leopold Leff (1862) ¹

Israel is the world focal point for 'the spirit of the Jews'. Whether one is a Jew in the narrowest sense of Orthodox definition: 'born of a Jewish mother',² or in the broader context of a convert to Judaism, there is some sense of identity with the historical land of Palestine. Placing religious-political persuasions aside for a moment, one will still hear a worldwide community of Jewish people say "Next year in Jerusalem" as part of their annual 'Pesach' (Passover) celebrations. For the Jew living in the Diaspora, his primary identity is his Jewish Identity. There might be a secondary identity with Israel as 'a-nation-over-there', but National Identity for the diasporic Jew is with the nation in which he resides. For the Jew living in Israel the situation is different. His primary identity is with Israel. He is Jewish and Israeli. His Israeli Identity and his Jewish Identity become his National Identity. The three terms appear to merge into one for the Jewish citizen of Israel.

Appendix F contains selected responses to 'Seven Primary Questions' that relate to this chapter. They are: Who is a Jew? What is Israeli Identity? Who is an Israeli? What is Israeli Identity? What is Zionism? What is National Identity? and What Affects National Unity? The responses are randomly presented to offer a sample of the wide range of opinions presented by the primary personnel and other sources (readings, literature review, etc). The code that follows each quote is the researcher's identification code. The names of the 'sources' are coded to maintain the 'impression' value rather than adding weight to the comment by identifying the spokesperson.

The intent of this chapter is to present how the primary personnel perceive and assess adult education as a strategy for National Identity and National Unity. It will be necessary for the primary personnel to first 'speak for themselves' in terms of how they understand the terms 'national identity and national unity'.

Ben Sason, Head of Torah Culture, Ministry of Education and Culture, in Jerusalem, has developed a definition of 'national identity' in his book entitled, Israel, Jews and Judaism.³ He offers the following definition for the purpose of discussion, without any intention that it should be recognized as a scientific definition.⁴ The meaning of National Identity is:

- * The character of the nation and its essence.
- * Identifying characteristics which define membership in it.
- * Conditions for the nation's existence and its continuity as a social identity. (5)

These three texts define national identity from several aspects.

"First from its general features and its uniqueness, second from the viewpoints of the individuals and groups of which it is composed and third, from the viewpoint of historical existence." ⁶

To rephrase these ideas in the form of questions would be to ask: 'What is the character of Israel - and what makes it unique?', 'What constitutes membership in the nation?' and 'What attachment must one have to Israel's historical existence - and continuity as a social reality?' The answers to these questions would move us towards an understanding of how a Jewish citizen might consider himself identified with the nation. To recall the phrase used by one of the primary personnel, 'I am speaking only about Jews'.⁷

Before examining these questions in greater detail, this chapter examines how the primary personnel view the concept of National Identity. The following is a series of component factors within a definition of National Identity. The first phrase of each statement identifies one of the component factors under observation, as it related to Israel Identity. The second phrase

in each statement links this factor to a broader identification with Jewish Identity. The intent of this coupling is to show how National Identity for the Jewish citizen living in Israel is a merging of the concepts and terms found within Israeli Identity and Jewish Identity. The coded comments come from the primary personnel.

* The Land of Israel is named after the Jewish patriarch Israel (Jacob). National Identity requires a geographical identity with the land promised by God in the Torah to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and purchased, tilled and lived upon today by the Jews.

"...there is a physical and meta-physical aspect to identity, which is a combination of land and people. People came to this land from 102 countries of the world. Twelve tribes were dispersed, but the goal upon their return was to have the people living in Israel today, identify with the people who lived here 4,000 years ago. As our slogan said, the returning of the people was called 'The Ingathering of the Exiles'." (32.13)

"...we Israelis are a continuity of Judaism. We are at a new stage which is 'sovereignty'. For this the land has a very important element - much more than in any other nation - the land symbolizes the nation." (32.31)

"...to be a Jew without Israel would have no meaning. I would have no identity, or else my identity would shrink to almost nothing..." (32.36)

"...our goal was to have people identify with the land, the history and the people. It is insufficient to identify yourself only with the land for the land can be adjusted..." (32.12)

* The Flag of Israel bears the emblem of the Jewish Star of David. National Identity requires an allegiance to a State whose flag bears

a historical Jewish symbol.

"...the flag has the Star of David. The identity of the citizens of Israel is with the values of that State." (32.21)

* The People of Israel have a majority identity as Jewish people. National Identity requires a personal identification with the past, a concern for the present and a support for the future of the Jewish people.

"...Israeli Identity is the belief of a Jew in Israel as the only solution to the Jewish people. There are Jews who are born in Israel as Jews who are not necessarily Zionists, nor are they religious, but they carry with them their Jewish Identity." (32.24)

"...it is easier to come to National Identity with Israel as Israel within the Jewish population, than with the Arab population." (32.3)

"...the war strengthened my identification with Judaism and Zionism ...'this country is the only country I would fight for'...I am committed to the people. To me, the heart of Judaism is the Jewish people." (32.37)

* The Citizenship rights (post 1948) in Israel are granted almost exclusively to Jewish immigrants returning to Israel under 'The Law of Return'. National Identity in post 1948 Israel requires a Jewish Identity to be recognized for citizenship.

"...Israel is not the name of a place or a State. It is the name of a person. It is the name of Jacob and the name of a community of men, the people of Israel. Call it 'Eretz Israel' - the land of Israel. Call it the 'Holy Land', or Palestine or Canaan but not Israel...A Muslim can be a citizen of the Jewish State but 'Israeli' is a special category." (32.17)

* The Language of Israel that is recognized as the primary official language is the Jewish historical language of Hebrew. National Identity requires a linguistic identification with the

Language of the Jews.

* The History of Israel is an extension of Jewish history, traditions and culture. National Identity requires a historical identification with the History of the Jews.

"...they (the Jewish immigrants) need to identify with the History of the Jews. It is the history of a small nation having to struggle to be one." (32.32)

"...National Identity for a Jewish citizen living in Israel is an identification with his past...ours is a long history and one must identify with it..." (32.33)

"...Israeli Identity is the identity of the citizens of Israel with Israel. But the Jewish identity of the Jewish people is an identity with Jewish civilization and the Jewish people. Israeli identity when you take the Arabs and the Jews together, only goes back to 1948 with the formation of the State of Israel, but Jewish Identity goes back 4,000 years to the beginnings of the Jewish civilization." (32.27)

"...all our life we have been concentrating on the slogan, 'What are we doing to make the people ONE?'. to make them feel identified with the land, not only today, but in the past with the history of Israel." (32.11)

* The Ideological beginnings of Israel is Zionism. National Identity requires a philosophical identity with Zionism as the framework for the Jewish solution.

"...Zionism is the possibility to fulfill ourselves as a group." (45.1)

* The Future of Israel is seen as the Jewish home for survival and independence in the world. National Identity requires a visionary identification with the future of the Jewish people, and a commitment identity with the State of Israel being the solution for the Jews.

"...Israeli Identity is the belief of a Jew in Israel as the only solution to the Jewish people." (32.24)

"...anyone who believes that Israel is the ultimate solution to the existence of the Jewish people, has a different view than the ones who see the existence of the Jewish people being possible throughout the world. I believe Israel is the only solution to the existence of the Jewish people. Therefore Jewish Identity (the existence of Jews outside of Israel) and Israeli Identity are not identical. Anyone who believes in Jewish Identity outside of Israel does not believe in Israeli Identity." (32.23)

"...I identify with a people who were put into exile in 70 AD and 138 AD and who have been persecuted...If Jews are going to be treated that way in countries where they are called 'citizens', then a State of their own is the only thing possible." (32.18)

* The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) is open only to Jewish citizens, plus some Druze and volunteers. National Identity requires an acceptance of the Army in Israel as an exclusive Jewish army.

"...there are some stereotypes of what is this Israeli Identity. Some say the Israelis are vigorous, they are courageous, they are noisy, they are 'chuzpadic'. Such are the stereotype images that would come into an overall self-image of what an Israeli would think of as his National Identity. The IDF is important because it fits into all of that. It is a modern entity. There is 'kashrut', there are Jewish holidays, (people do drive on Shabbat) so it is a Jewish army in a somewhat declaratory way. The land is important to the army - it defends it!" (32.31)

* The Civil Law in Israel controlling the 85% Jewish segment of the population is the Jewish Halachic Law (ie for marriage and divorce). National Identity requires an adherence to or recognition of the control of Halachah over all civil aspects of life for a Jewish citizen - and for a recognized conversion to Judaism - regardless of their own personal religious persuasion.

* The Religion of Israel is overwhelmingly Judaism. National Identity requires a traditional identity with the Jewish religion.

"...I cannot see Israel becoming a State in which the religious views of the Orthodox are forced on the great majority of the citizens, but rather a modis operandi has to be worked out in which we will have a religious pluralism among the Jews." (32.20)

"...I think the people who stay in this country are religious." (32.8)

"...for Jewish people, religion and nationality are identical. These aren't major sectors of religion in Israel as in India, therefore national identity is complete in that Jews identify with Judaism and with Israel as a solution." (32.22)

"...I am religious. People who are religious know more about why they are here. For other people, what is there to connect them to the country?" (32.25)

* The Archeological discoveries in Israel tie the Land to a Historical Jewish presence. National Identity requires an acceptance of the Jewish claim to the land as the primary historical claim.

"...there is in Israel a society for the Bible and an archeological society...thousands of people take part. In other countries Bible societies are for the religious and archeological societies are for the academic world but here thousands of ordinary people come to hear about the latest archeological discoveries...I think this is looking for one's roots in this country." (48.4)

"...some are interested in archeology because it is the 'in thing'. But in Israel there is a connection between seeing what this soil tells us about the past and our present national identity with the land." (32.7)

"...When the Dead Sea Scrolls were found this was almost a national event. It was a national event. It was announced in the Knesset (and a special museum called the 'Shrine of the Book' was built). Here is a symptom of national identity." (32.6)

Although not a quote from a primary personnel, the researcher found the following admission by an Israeli government publication

to be humorous - and insightful.

"...It has been said that, of the two national sports topping the Israeli's list, archeology is second only to talking; by uncovering the artifacts of his ancestral past the contemporary Israeli constantly relives the history of his people in the Land." (Facts About Israel, 1980, p. 146).

* The Day of Rest in Israel is the Jewish 'Shabbat' or Sabbath (Saturday) from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. National Identity requires an acceptance or recognition of Shabbat as a Jewish day of rest.

* The National Holidays in Israel are primarily the Jewish Holy Days. National Identity requires an observance, understanding and or commitment to the Holy Days of the Jewish religious 'year'.

"...in Israel, each holiday has its own sign and is part of the geography and the history and is in some way connected with the land. "(When asked by the researcher if adult educators were consciously trying to develop that identity in their interaction with adults, the respondent who is a prominent author and practitioner in literacy programs said, 'Yes, especially in the Ulpanim'.) (32.10)

"...the festivals of Israel have a double significance. They are not only religious and cosmic, but also historical and national." (32.40)

* The Food prepared in Israel in most public places and all government cafeterias is prepared according to the Jewish 'halacha' (dietary laws) ie 'kashrut' (English: 'koshered'). National Identity requires a public observance of 'halacha' in most major hotels, government and public eating establishments. (ie no milk served with meat, no unapproved foods such as pork etc.)

These fifteen component factors suggest an answer to the questions asked earlier in the chapter. First, 'What is the character of Israel - and what makes it unique?' Israel is a Jewish State. The essence of its National Identity is found in its Jewish Identity. This makes it unique among the nations of the earth. David Ben-Gurion is quoted as saying:

America has adopted the convenient solution of separating church from State, not for antireligious reasons but on the contrary because of a deep attachment to religion and the citizens - but this would not solve the problem if it were to be applied in Israel. (8)

On the contrary, it appears that a separation of synagogue and State in Israel would complicate the problem for the Jewish people. While many admit to being 'non-religious' ⁹ few of the Jewish citizens of Israel are ready to 'open the doors' of the land to anyone desiring citizenship - be they Muslim or Christian - and possibly have the country controlled by a non-Jewish majority. This is an unacceptable option for the Israeli-Jewish citizen to consider. The alternative is an ongoing corporate commitment to a National 'Jewish' Identity - under the oversight of the Orthodox Jews and 'Halachah'. The commitment of the overwhelmingly majority of the Jewish citizens of Israel to maintain the State of Israel as a Jewish homeland establishes its character and makes it truly unique. The second question is 'What constitutes and identifies membership

in the nation?' To answer this question requires a brief recall of the historical facts of the period 1947-1948. No one is able to look back and say they 'know the mind' of the leaders of that day. But we have their words to review and their actions to assess. Prime Minister Ben Gurion recognized that a solution to living in peace with the Arabs had to be discovered. He noted:

These two semitic peoples, Jew and Arab share one mission in this corner of the world. The Jew will not budge, neither will the Arab change his place. History has pronounced us neighbors and it is not merely a geographical proximity. There is a nearness in language, culture and history. Cooperation between the Jewish people in its land and independent Arabia is a historical necessity. (10)

Peace was and is a pre-requisite for the full development of the State of Israel. Whether the early founders thought this would be achieved by all Arabs in Palestine 'exchanging places' with all the Jews in Islamic Arab countries; or with Arabs remaining in Israel as well treated but 'limited' citizens is unknown. Two things are known. One, the founders of Israel were deeply aware of the problem. Ben Gurion said in an address delivered to the Executive of the Palestine Worker's Party (Mapai) on December 3, 1947 - before the formation of the State, "A great problem - perhaps the greatest - is the problem of the Arabs and without a persistent effort to win them over to mutual trust and bonds of reciprocity there will be no security." ¹¹ Secondly, the decision was made to make Israel a 'Jewish State' regardless

of Arab support or presence in Israel. Israel defines itself as "a secular, parliamentary, democratic republic,"¹² but with limitations that make it different from Canada or the United States where immigration and citizenship are unrelated to one belonging to the State religion. In Israel, 'membership' in the fullest sense of citizenship requires a Jewish identity. The third question is 'What attachment must one have to Israel's historical existence and continuity as a social identity?' To belong to Israel, one must believe in Israel. Only a Jew, an Israeli-Jew can have that attachment of commitment. A Muslim Arab, a supportive Christian, even a sympathetic Diaspora Jew can only observe National-Jewish-Israeli Identity as a spectator - he is not part of the 'team'. Perhaps Ben Sason summarized a definition of National Identity in the title of his book. National Identity is 'Israel, Jews and Judaism.'

For this paper National Identity will be defined as :

Endorsement of the right for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to establish an independent self-governing Jewish State on land apportioned to their forefathers and purchased, tilled and lived upon by their fathers. (13)

Two emergent questions from this definition will remain beyond the scope of this study. First, 'Who is a Jew?' will be left for the religious and non religious leaders to debate. (See Appendix E)

Secondly, 'What constitutes the land apportioned to their forefathers' will remain for politicians and international lawyers to decide.

The term National Unity is more complex to define. Dispersion of the Jews from Palestine in the First Century, meant that the re-gathered exiles brought with them certain assimilated cultural distinctives of language, dress, customs and values from their 102 host countries. To achieve a 'oneness' certain factors must be prevalent. They are:

the readiness to defend the Jewish homeland.

the ability to communicate in modern Hebrew.

the willingness to contribute one's strength and resources for the development of an independent, self-sufficient Jewish nation.

the understanding of historical and geographical root attachments that Jewish people have to the land, and

the acceptance of all Jews as 'brothers in a common cause' regardless of physical appearance, historical background, economic prosperity or degree of religious observance. (14)

Appendix E lists comments of primary personnel offered in answer to the question 'What Affects National Unity?' Two categories emerge from the list, first the positive factors that tend to build national unity, and second the negative forces that tend to reinforce national unity. Included in the first category

would be the following factors:

- * A strong corporate identity: "...whether the Jew is from Russia or Morocco - he is Jewish..." (39.5)
- * The collective 'I': "...all of us as Jews have a common memory of a common past...that is 'part of us...'" (39.6)
- * A common language: "...Hebrew is not an 'innocent' language ---it is a blending of culture, history and religion." (11.16)
"...Hebrew is the first uniting factor, because without Hebrew we cannot communicate..." (5.4)
- * The land: "...National Unity for Jews can only occur in Israel..." (5.11)

Included in the second category are:

- * The 'struggle for survival': "...with the population doubling and tripling within a few years there was pressure on the people to survive..." (39.5)
- * Arab neighbors: "...as long as we have pressures from the outside (from Arab neighbors) part of our problems will be overshadowed by the security problems..." (39.2)
- * Muslim attitude: "...they try to put a wedge between the Oriental and Ashkenazi Jews by calling the Oriental Jews, 'Arab Jews' and therefore part of the Arab people..." (5.13)
- * Common hardships: "...like common suffering in the cold in the army."

* War and its economic results: "...the victories of 1948 and 1956 and 1967 were due to moral and spiritual consequences..."

Both the positive and negative factors in some manner influence National Unity. Whatever one's personal philosophy of life as a citizen of Israel, there is a 'national faith' required for the development of National Unity. This faith is more of a 'trust', than a religious or spiritual faith. It is a trust or faith in the leaders of the nation in their development of the country. It is a faith in the ability of the Israeli people to overcome their difficulties and find appropriate responses to new challenges. For some it is a faith in the ongoing personal interest of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the current activities affecting the 'Children of Israel' today. The greater the development of this National Faith, the greater the sense of National Unity. For this paper, National Unity will be defined as:

A oneness in purpose and direction with the development of the Jewish homeland, the Jewish History, the Jewish people, the Jewish Language and the Jewish Religion. (15)

The closer one moves towards the acceptance of both definitions, the greater one's sense of National Identity and National Unity with the modern State of Israel.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER III

1. Forum, Fall 1978, No. 32-33, p. 78.

Forum is the quarterly publication of the World Zionist Organization, Department of Information in Jerusalem. It has numerous topics on the Jewish people, Zionism and Israel.

2. Yeheskie] Cohen - personal interview (31.7-YC)

"...the logic behind the Law (of Return) is that you can know or determine the child's mother, but you may not know who is the father."

3. Y. Ben Sason, and A.A. Orbach. Israel, Jews and Judaism. Published (in Hebrew) by the Department of Torah Culture in the Ministry of Education and Culture, 1977, p. 11.

The researcher appreciates the assistance of Dr. D. Epstein from the Department of Torah Culture (Jerusalem) for his assistance in translating segments of the book into English.

4. Ibid, p. 11.

5. Ibid, p. 11.

6. Ibid, p. 11.

"The return to Zion comes after two thousand years of wandering over the entire world. Therefore the cut is deep and the renaissance is wondrous, almost 'something from nothing'. But any creation of something from nothing entails a danger. With something from 'something' it is possible to imagine the 'something'. We must therefore decrease the 'nothing'. This generation must increase the Jewish 'something' in Israel. The connection between religion and nation, between natural membership and spiritual membership is the root and foundation of the Jewish 'something' which we have inherited from our ancestors." - (Ben Sason quoting M. Meisels from "Who is a Jew?" p. 15.) Ben Sason, (1977), p. 31.

In reference to Jewish Identity, Ben Sason quotes Rabbi Soloveitchik who defines it thus: "Jewish Identity can only be understood under the aspect of singularity and otherness." (from J.B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation", Tradition, 1967, p. 67.)

"This is the essence of the fate of Jewish existence at present. The 'something' - that is the religious identity - must be preserved. The 'nothing' that is expected for Jewish existence in the future is unknown, therefore people of this generation today are commanded to guard and increase the Jewish 'something' and to establish Jewish partnership. Tomorrow, when the 'post-modern' period will shine in actuality, it will find, already prepared, the Jewish society in

partnership, as it searches for its paths, when it is lighted by the light of generations of values of history and values of belief. In this lies the hope for a new era." (Ben Sason, p. 31.)

7. Appendix C - page 7, line 16.
8. Amran Ducovny, (ed.), David Ben Gurion: In His Own Words. (1968), p. 99.
9. The figure of 70% is used by Sammy Smooha from his definition of the term 'nonreligious'.
Smooha (1978), Israel: Pluralism and Conflict, p. 3
10. Ducovny, op. cit., p. 113.
11. Forum, Winter, 1979, No. 34. Quote from front cover.
12. Facts About Israel, (1980), p. 113.
13. Researcher's definition of National Identity.
14. Researcher's list of 'Evidences of National Unity'.
15. Researcher's definition of National Unity.