



## The Common Israeli Destiny

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Our Common Destiny, the new Israeli project launched during Chanukah and to be headed by President Rivlin, aims to strengthen the national solidarity of the Jewish people as a whole and within Israel in particular. This project is praiseworthy on condition that it is based on the Jewish moral values of freedom and justice and not on those of European liberalism.**

Unlike other democracies where social solidarity is based on the idea of the “social contract,” the solidarity of the Jewish people is grounded—including in the Jewish democracy—in their “covenant of destiny,” which seeks to impart to humanity the humane moral values of freedom and justice that Abraham brought to the world some 4,000 years ago. Conveying this morality requires the “Chosen People” to serve as a model of moral life that is built upon the values of the civilization of Abraham and thereby to be a “light unto the nations.”

This destiny entails a “covenant of fate” of the common endurance of suffering that has prevented Judaism from disappearing from history as many other cultures and peoples have disappeared. In order to instill morality in individual behavior, after the civilizational revolution of Abraham came the legal revolution of Moses, the commandments of which were derived from morality. Adherence to those commandments from early childhood is meant to habituate the person to be aware of his drives and gratifications with the aim of restraining them so as to avoid inflicting harm on others.

When the “new Jew” in the Land of Israel was distanced from the religion and its commandments by the Labor movement, the result was a disconnection from Jewish morality and hence also from adherence to the “covenants” that unite the people. Berl Katznelson, one of the leaders of the Labor movement, understood the full import of this problem in the 1930s and launched a

national effort to return the commandment-free Israeli Jew to the “treasures of the national spirit” and the historical symbols derived from them.

This goal was achieved through a far-reaching educational effort with four main subjects of study: Bible, including oral learning of many of its chapters, as well as Talmud; Jewish history; Hebrew and Hebrew literature of the Renaissance and the “Golden Age in Spain”; and “Homeland,” which involved learning about the Land of Israel and its regions both academically and through field trips, with an emphasis on historical sites.

The formal identification of Israeli society with its ancestral legacy was embodied in the ceremony in which the state’s establishment was declared. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed that Israel would be a Jewish state with values founded on “freedom, justice, and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel.” Those values were eventually incorporated in the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty.

The fruits of this educational endeavor were apparent, among other things, in the high level of cohesion of the Israel Defense Forces during the first decades of its existence, which compensated for its quantitative inferiority. For example, during the War of Independence, military commanders Shimon Avidan and Abba Kovner (who was also a poet) inspired soldiers of the Givati Brigade with biblical quotations, and one of the brigade’s “battle pages” was made up entirely of interwoven verses from the Psalms.

On the second day of the Six-Day War, Uzi Narkiss, a scion of the Labor movement and the left-wing Palmah underground militia, hurried to announce to his soldiers that most of Jerusalem had been liberated. The next day he told them that “soldiers of our units are now stationed in the heart of the land, in the heart of the nation, in the heart of history.” On the third day, with the liberation of the Temple Mount and the Old City of Jerusalem, he proclaimed the “redemption of Jerusalem” and said the biblical land of the Tribe of Benjamin was the next objective: “Also being redeemed are the cities of our prophets.” On the last day of the fighting, Narkiss recounted the cities of the West Bank that had been liberated, blending the actual events with biblical ones: “The gates of Jericho were surrounded, its wall fell, and the city is in our hands. Soldiers of Israel are at all the crossings of the Jordan. The Cave of the Patriarchs and the Tomb of Rachel, too, are in the hands of the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

The Israeli cultural-artistic elite, too, drew inspiration for its works from the “treasures of the national spirit.” The poet Avraham Shlonsky likened the houses of the pioneers in the Jezreel Valley to the frontlets of phylacteries and the roads of the valley to their thongs. The song “From the Summit of Mount

Scopus" was written by the poet Avigdor Hameiri, an actor in the Kumkum satirical theater, and the song "I Saw a City Wrapped in Light" by the poet Yosef Sarig from Kibbutz Beit Hashita. The promise "We will not leave again" (from the song "Behold Rachel Behold") was made by the secular poet Shmulik Rozen; the song "The Chase," and the linking of combat operations in the Jordan Valley during the War of Attrition to the military history of the Land of Israel, came from the pen of secular songwriter and media personality Yaron London; and the patriotic hymns of the Shaked, Haruv, and Egoz commando units were written by the secular Dahlia Ravikovitch, Haim Hefer, and Dudu Barak—not to mention the many biblical motifs in the songs of Naomi Shemer, who was born in the secular Kvutzat Kinneret.

The severance of Israel from its Jewish identity and from the "treasures of the national spirit" that underpinned the strong social cohesion occurred after the political upset in 1977, when the intensive, ongoing cultivation of the bond between the secular public and the cultural-historical legacy of the nation was gradually curtailed.

Into the cultural-educational vacuum that resulted flowed religious content, which the secular public rejected because of its fear of "religionization." Instead, liberal advocates aiming to replace "the old Israel," which was too nationalist for their taste, with a "new Israel" that would be liberal-progressive were able to fill this ideological space with great success.

Between the original Jewish liberalism and modern European liberalism yawns a deep intellectual and moral chasm:

- The Jewish moral value of freedom is meant to prevent social injustices that stem from the innate inequality between human beings by implementing social justice; European morality seeks to prevent such injustices by creating social equality despite the fact that nature makes its creatures unequal.
- The values of Jewish liberalism stem from the laws of the absolute and eternal truth of nature; hence they accord with human nature and are humane. The values of European liberalism are drawn from the utopian ideas of existentialist philosophy, which contravene nature and its laws, including human nature. Therefore, this liberalism, which flaunts its humaneness and may be compassionate and sensitive to injustice, has to impose its values, causing new injustices in the process. That is why European liberalism, since the French Revolution, has been inhumane and thus patently immoral. And indeed, its removal from the yoke of the Christian-biblical morality of truth was what enabled, in full view of leading liberal philosophers, the legitimizing of the communist and Nazi ideologies, whose first victims were those

signifying the moral world they sought to replace with their “new” world devoid of morality: Jewish civilization first, and then the Jews themselves.

The distancing from Jewish civilization has a further aspect that is linked to the moral legitimacy of the state of Israel’s existence. Democracy is like an imperfect fabric. It has warp threads—that is, values entailing the decentralization of governmental power—but not weft threads, meaning values of morality in whose light democracy must be conducted and must make its decisions.

This problem was addressed by Kant when he warned that a thoroughly kosher democratic process could result in a state for the sons of Satan. David Ben-Gurion, for his part, wrote in his diary that Western democracy was insufficient because “we have a special Jewish content that must be the patrimony of the world.” This special content, which the world acknowledged, underlay the moral legitimacy of the Jewish State’s establishment and of the sacrifices that were made to ensure its existence. Replacing this unique Jewish content with European liberal content severs the Zionist endeavor from its roots and makes it an arm of European colonialism, thereby negating the moral foundation of Israel’s existence and the justness of the great sacrifice that was involved in establishing and defending it.

Renewing Israel’s national solidarity and moral legitimacy in light of those national “covenants,” then, is the need of the hour and requires activity on three main fronts:

- Maximum exposure of the cultural-moral dimension of Judaism, which Moses’s revolution inculcated in the halakhic dimension and which the Zionist movement inculcated in Israeli Judaism, and which was gradually obscured after 1977.
- Restarting the educational effort, launched by the Labor leadership in the previous century, to inculcate the “treasures of the national culture,” which was halted for no good reason.
- Conducting an animated dialogue with the liberal-progressive camp, which, for lack of any capable opposition, has taken over the cultural-moral discourse in Israel and in the Diaspora Jewish communities, not to mention democratic discourse in general. In this discourse, which this camp engages in mainly with itself, it does what is good in its own eyes, which is not necessarily what is morally right and good. Given the grave moral failures of European liberalism in the recent past, there is a moral obligation to make this camp face up to its own errors.

Strengthening national solidarity mandates linking the people, primarily the secular public, to the “covenant of destiny” by means of the cultural-moral dimension of Judaism. Because this dimension is pre-halakhic and, hence, free of the residue of divisive halakhic controversies, it has a high potential to unify not only the secular and the religious but, in particular, the religious sectors from all the different streams.

The effort to unify the people around the cultural-moral dimension must be conducted, then, in three key domains:

- **Content:** Preparing the content related to the cultural-moral dimension of Judaism, clarifying its connections to the halakhic dimension, explicating the difference between its values and those of European liberalism, and inculcating the permanent, constitutive values of the Basic Laws of the state in the form of a “National Code of Ethics.”
- **Guidance:** Preparing the tools needed to teach this content in Israel and the Diaspora, training teaching staffs to use them, and helping to spread the content intensively.
- **Supervision:** Establishing a “moral-democratic observation post”—a body that, in real time, will provide assessments and moral analyses of the implementation of democracy in Israel in light of the universal values of the Jewish morality of freedom and justice. In Israel, it should again be mentioned, the values of this morality are enshrined in law and hence are compulsory, like the law itself.

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