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When the State of Israel was established, three views prevailed among the Jewish public in Israel as to the proper relationship between the new political structure and the Jewish heritage and nationality. Each view was an extension of ideological positions inherited from the pre-1948 period. The first, the non-Zionist view, maintained that Judaism and statehood were inherently incompatible, and so repudiated the Jewish state. The second, the religious-Zionist position, held that the nascent state should be imbued with Jewish qualities that would mature and deepen, until eventually Israel would be a Jewish state in all areas of life. The third, dominant view saw the state as expressing democratic values, affording religious freedom to all citizens, while at the same time basing itself firmly upon distinctly Jewish elements in language (Hebrew), norms of citizenship (the Law of Return) and personal-status law, and upon the foundation of an integrated cultural-traditional heritage that harmonized Western humanistic-liberal culture with the literature, philosophy, ethics and values of the Jewish tradition. In the early years, the anti-Zionist view was marginalized, while secular and religious Zionism waged an (often rancorous) struggle. Despite that struggle, there was a broad consensus concerning the principal Jewish elements needed to form the foundations upon which the state would be built.

In recent decades, the picture has changed drastically. Haredi circles have tempered their resistance to the Israeli experience, to the extent of being willing to take part in it. Today they are not anti-Zionists, for the most part, but non-Zionists. With the growth of the Shas movement especially, this camp has greatly expanded and is now flourishing. The religious-Zionist camp, for its part, has undergone a dramatic transformation as well: Most of its efforts are devoted to the political struggle for Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria, with some of its members carried along by a sweeping

messianic vision. As a result of this struggle—which, following the Oslo accords, has turned quite bitter—religious Zionism has largely abandoned its previous attempts to impart a Jewish coloration to everyday life in Israel as a whole.

The greatest change, however, has taken place in the secular-Zionist camp, which in the early days cherished and fostered moral-cultural values based on Jewish tradition, and strove toward a true integration of European-American culture with the Jewish heritage. The majority of this camp—which still dominates Israeli life—has by now divested itself of anything having to do with Judaism and the Jewish tradition. Secular society today, from the public schools to the country's major science and research institutions, identifies Judaism with acts of vandalism such as burning down bus shelters, with religious and messianic fanaticism and blind nationalistic sentiment, with obscurantism, social parasitism and communal seclusion in ghettoized neighborhoods, isolated from the contemporary world. Today the areas of Judaism that this secular society has rejected have come to include not only Talmud and the halacha, but also archaeology, Hebrew literature (other than the works of modern writers) and Jewish thought of any kind. This view is not restricted to the Left; it is also found among the secular leaders of the Right, who represent a clear political-strategic aspiration that does not include the development of a Jewish-Israeli culture nourished by tradition.

Today, an outsider looking in, searching among the political and social forces that comprise the Israeli mosaic in the effort to find out just how the state's "Jewish character" expresses itself, will find no one capable of articulating a well-reasoned position. Two generations ago, when the Bialik Institute annually published dozens of excellent works on Jewish culture which could be found in every educated household in Israel, and when the Israel Antiquities Exploration Society hosted thousands at its conferences, grateful exhortations about the resurrection of Jewish culture were commonplace. Yet these things, which once dominated Israeli society, are no more, and to long for them is to indulge in nostalgia, a futile exercise in terms of historical activity.

I respect the intentions behind the loaded phrasing of the symposium's question: "It now seems that the most important task is to secure the cultural, philosophical and moral basis for the country, by asking those questions which have for so long been neglected." But with all the best intentions, this question presents a false account of reality. These issues have not been "neglected." On the contrary, they were discussed extensively and in depth, answers to them were offered, and some of the answers were even implemented in Israeli life over the course of many years. This is not a case of neglect, but of a transformed society, one which has changed so dramatically as to render the old answers ineffectual. Part of the Israeli public is building Jewish ghettos, shunning the state while living off its graces; another part, obsessed with the adoption of the various trappings—and particularly the most trivial ones—of a Western culture that is sweeping the world, regards its Jewish heritage with a strange mix of hostility and rejection, embarrassment and denigration; and yet another part devotes all its energies to the battle for the Land of Israel, having virtually nothing left for influencing the state's cultural and moral life. Slogans like "the Jewish bookshelf" are heard from time to time, like other catch phrases that have cropped up by the dozen during these fifty years—all of them part of the ongoing disintegration of the bonds linking secular Israeli society with Jewish tradition. The fact is that it has been Shas, a non-Zionist movement which sees the state as merely a source of funding, and lacking in any intrinsic value, which has created the most energetic and effective educational and spiritual undertaking in Israel in the past decade, or longer.

It is not difficult to paint a vision of an ideal future in which Jewish and European cultures will coexist harmoniously, and humanistic social values and unhindered creativity will blossom in all fields of endeavor. I do not believe in this vision. A generation ago, all the profound, sincere and serious attempts in this vein reaped only a cruel and resounding defeat. So long as we fail to uncover the reasons for this defeat and content ourselves with

duplicating the circumstances that led to it, there is precious little reason for weaving dreams about the future that are ever more remote from the bleak horror of our present reality.

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