



Developments in the Jewish Identity Field in Israel during 2011 **Lee Perlman, JFNA Israel, January 18, 2012**

Since the writing of 'Soul Searching and Soul Building' for January 2011's Tarrytown Group meeting, there have been a number of significant developments in the Jewish Identity Field in Israel and among involved philanthropic bodies. Goal #5* of the Field "enabling access and promoting broader legitimacy of diverse Jewish living and learning options for all Jewish Israelis", has proven a galvanizing force for many of the organizations active in the field and the broader Israeli Jewish public. This goal has been pursued amid battles regarding various dimensions of Israel's Jewish and democratic character, most notably in the public sphere. Below is a brief summary.

**One of the five goals of the Field, as described on page 9, 'Soul Searching and Soul Building: The Jewish Identity Field in Israel', December, 2010.*

Selected developments in the Field

- Jewish Identity organizations were at the center of much of the summer's social protests and follow up activities, forging a union of social justice, social action and Jewish renewal.
- The national Jewish Renewal network PANIM has gone through a reorganization process, adopting a member-driven model. Over thirty organizations have joined thus far and PANIM's board is currently completing a renewed strategic work plan.
- Jewish Identity organizations have been at the center of winter 2011 public protests regarding the exclusion of women in public areas, violent religious extremism, Israeli's democratic character and other related social concerns.
- The phenomenon of cross-cutting networks and projects continues to grow. E.g. The establishment of a forum of 25 organizations focusing on Russian-speaking Israelis; a network of Jewish Identity organizations in Jerusalem primarily functioning as an advocacy body for their shared interests; a program of 15 regional *betei midrash* for young adult communities throughout Israel; and the expansion of the *Sifriat Pijama* program.
- The Israeli Ministry of Education, thru the Ish Shalom Committee, is now, for the second year, apportioning two additional hours per class in fifth-eighth grade classes in the State (non-Religious) school system for *Tarbut Yisrael* (Jewish studies).
- Two new *Tarbut Yisrael* websites will soon be launched: the *Seventy Faces* site and a website specifically designed for teachers, a collaboration between the Center for Educational Technology, Hartman Institute, Posen Foundation, and AVI CHAI Israel.
- The Be'eri Initiative launched a teacher training program with Keren Karev, (the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Foundation), which has been recognized by the Ministry of Education.
- The Jewish Agency is continuing the ongoing development and integration of Jewish Identity education into their programmatic frameworks, focusing on Jewish Israelis.

Selected developments among and between philanthropic bodies

- UJA Federation of NY, AVIHAI Israel Foundation, Nadav Foundation, Posen Foundation and the Jacobson Foundation have taken on the Midot organization to conduct a comprehensive mapping and conceptualization of the Jewish Identity Field in Israel. Intended for all current and potential future stakeholders, a first draft report is slated for August, 2012.
- AVIHAI Israel Foundation and UJA Federation of NY will launch a second cohort of the *Psefas* (Mosaic) challenge grant initiative, aimed to engage and cultivate Israeli philanthropic involvement in the Jewish Identity Field.
- AVIHAI Israel Foundation has published and disseminated a report, 'Assessing Needs and Directions for Jewish Educational Activity in the State (Non-Religious) School System'. (Executive summary available in English).

A selection of public developments

1. Highly publicized controversy over exclusion of women in Israel's public spheres

- The increasing influence of the ultra-Orthodox population in the political and civic sphere has taken shape in the form of protests against the representation of women in advertisements, "modesty" certificates in stores, segregation of bus lines, and separation among men and women in the army.
- IDF soldiers walked out during official ceremonies in which women soldiers sang. The IDF's Chief of Staff, Head of Human Resources and Chief Military Rabbi have sharpened IDF policies against gender discrimination and exclusion of women, including regarding women singing in ceremonies. Now every soldier (including the religiously observant) must attend any formal ceremony, regardless of religious preference regarding women's singing. They do however remain able to choose attendance at informal ceremonies. Women have been prohibited from participating with men in certain festivities during Simchat Torah and other ceremonies, as some Orthodox men are forbidden from listening to a woman sing.
- A protest of reported thousands of demonstrators against religious violence and extremism in town of Bet Shemesh, December 2011.

2. Tzohar v. Rabbinat

- The Ministerial Committee for Legislation recently approved a "Tzohar Bill," in which rabbis belonging to the Tzohar organization may legally perform Jewish weddings in Israel.
- Marriages conducted by rabbis from Tzohar, a network of modern Orthodox rabbis, have been contested the Chief Rabbinat.
- Usually, couples can only get married by a rabbi approved by the Rabbinat council in their municipality. Thus, the couple cannot technically choose the rabbi or style in which they want to get married; Tzohar has granted marriages free of charge to couples, and offered a choice of rabbis.

3. Burial process

- Ultra-Orthodox Jews have argued that the state's current practice of multi-layered burials is halachically incorrect.
- In response, the Government of Israel will be launching a campaign against this claim, asserting that it is halachically permissible, and necessary given the shortage of burial spaces.