



The Israeli Diaspora as a Catalyst for Jewish Peoplehood

**An Emerging Opportunity within the Changing
Relationship between Israel and the Jewish world**

Executive Summary

**Adar 5772
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The changing paradigm in Israel and Jewish world relations

1. **This report offers a conceptual framework for understanding the place and potential role of the Israeli Diaspora** within the changing paradigm between Israel and the Jewish world.
2. While the 'old relationship' between Israel and world Jewry was based upon an unwritten covenant grounded in classical Zionism, **the emerging paradigm is shaped by partnership and mutuality, with the notion of Jewish Peoplehood taking center stage. This changing dynamic presents an opportunity for the Jewish people.**

The changing nature of the Israeli Diaspora

3. **The Israeli Diaspora** as a distinct entity with its own unique added value to the Jewish people **has yet to realize its potential within the 'new paradigm'**.
4. Classical Zionism was based on the negation of the Diaspora and a strong moral and ideological call for the imperative of *aliyah*. **Hence, within this framework, the traditional view of the Israeli Diaspora was characterized by the following working assumptions and patterns of behavior:**
 - **Local Jewish community viewed Israeli immigrants as 'outsiders'** – A lack of clear policy together with ideological and cultural factors resulted in an inability and unwillingness to engage Israelis in organized Jewish life;
 - **Israeli immigrants generally felt alienated from local Jewish communal life** – Many new Israeli immigrants and even 'veteran' Israeli families see themselves as culturally different from local Jewish families, and find little or no areas of overlap;
 - **Israelis tend to be a collection of individuals with little communal DNA** - Israeli immigrants tend to spend time in their informal social circles, and generally do not see value in investing in or establishing formal communal institutions;
 - **There is little sense of 'culture of involvement' among Israelis** – Israelis tend to be accustomed to a weak Israeli philanthropic culture as well as a self-perception as aid recipients rather than providers;
 - **Israelis have little or no connection to Jewish life** – A distinction between Jewish and Israelis identities makes it difficult for Israelis in North America to relate to an organized and active Jewish life;
 - **First generation Israelis view Hebrew as the most important component of childhood education** – The ability to communicate, read, and write in Hebrew is seen as a guarantee that their children's 'Israeliness' will be preserved;

- **Those who left Israel were viewed as a liability to *aliyah*.**
- 5. **This mindset is beginning to erode in light of a series of recent trends.** Our research identified the following emerging trends both within and outside of the Israeli community itself:
 - **From *aliyah/yerida* to 'life of fluid movement'** - The dichotomous relationship between *aliyah* and *yerida* is changing: an increasing number of Israelis are choosing to build a life in more than one Jewish community;
 - **Local Jewish communities are beginning to engage Israelis** - In recent years, Jewish institutions such as Federations, Jewish day schools and Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) have begun to invest resources in reaching out to the Israelis within their community;
 - **Israelis are increasingly seeking to be part of the community** - Recent years have seen a surge in the involvement of Israelis in organized Jewish life including in synagogues, Jewish day schools and even membership on the board of local JCCs;
 - **Israelis are beginning to self-organize as a community** - Local Israeli community organizations have begun to blossom in recent years, showing a thirst for a vibrant Israeli life;
 - **Israelis are beginning to develop a culture of giving** - More Israeli immigrants are beginning to see value and assume responsibility towards their community, as expressed in investment of both time and resources;
 - **Israelis are realizing that 'Israeliness' is not enough** - In the absence of a strong form of connection to Jewish culture and heritage, many Israelis are beginning to realize that the Israeli national 'container' may not be enough to ensure a resilient Jewish-Israeli identity;
 - **Jewish education is offering one possible answer to receding Israeli identity** - Many first generation Israeli parents are beginning to understand that Hebrew-language instruction is only *one* component of maintaining a Jewish-Israeli identity;
 - **From an *aliyah* liability to an asset for the state of Israel** - While in the past, Israeli immigrants were perceived as a liability to *aliyah*, today we are seeing signs of interest that go beyond attempts to bring them back to Israel.

These nascent trends are at varied stages of their emergence, and naturally their manifestation differs from community to community.

The Israeli Diaspora as a catalyst for Jewish Peoplehood

- 6. **The major conceptual shift is that the Israeli Diaspora has ceased to function as a source of shame to the Zionist project, and is now beginning to be courted as a political, economic, social and cultural asset to the State of Israel.**

7. **However, within this mindset shift lays an even greater opportunity that may far exceed the borders of the State of Israel, and can in fact serve the Jewish *people* on a global scale.**
8. **This opportunity lies in the emergence of a newly formed identity constellation – the North American Jewish Sabra – that includes a combination of North American, Jewish and Israeli components.**
9. **The ‘N.A. Jewish Sabra’ includes any Israeli who identifies (whether consciously or subconsciously) as an Israeli-North American Jew.**
10. **There is no formal definition of the nascent ‘N.A. Jewish Sabra,’ however, this individual tends to possess the following characteristics:**
 - Spent at least a decade in North America;
 - No longer 'living from their suitcases';
 - Willingness to invest resources into the community;
 - Represents a new wave of Israeli immigration;
 - Self-identifies as Israeli-American-Jewish.
11. **By virtue of this tri-dentity, the 'N.A. Jewish Sabra' is able to leverage the unique added value of each of the three identities, as well as play a role in bringing all corners of the Israeli Diaspora into conversation with one another, thus serving as a catalyst toward Jewish Peoplehood.**

Building and supporting thriving Israeli Diaspora communities

12. **Recent trends together with the emergence of the N.A. Jewish Sabra provide fertile soil for building thriving Israeli Diaspora communities.**
13. **The importance of a thriving Israeli Diaspora community lies in its ability to understand and respond to the needs and challenges of its members. This requires a significant effort on the part of three key players - the Government of Israel, the local Jewish communities and the N.A. Jewish Sabra.**

The role of the Government of Israel

14. **In an effort to build thriving Israeli communities, the Government of Israel, should undertake to engage Israelis living abroad as a viable Diaspora rather than a moral liability.**
15. **This effort to engage Israelis living abroad requires cohesive government policy.** Currently, there are a number of government departments that serve Israelis living abroad, each working according to its own internal organizing logic. A coordinated approach involving the relevant government bodies will ensure maximum effectiveness and is important in avoiding mixed-messages.
16. **A thorough evaluation of policies that pose hurdles to a strong and empowered**

relationship between Israel and Israelis living abroad is required. These policies include (among others):

- **'Brain drain' to 'brain circulation'** –The government can begin to engage the Israeli Diaspora as an opportunity for 'brain circulation,' rather than treat them as examples of a 'brain drain' threat;
- **Israeli Diaspora rights and responsibilities** – An assessment of the rights and responsibilities of Israelis living abroad can include an evaluation of a wide range of policies, including Israeli Diaspora voting rights and army conscription laws;
- ***Bayit HaIsraeli (Israeli House) as an Israeli Goethe-Institut*** - The Goethe-Institut model could serve as an Israeli cultural institution for fostering knowledge and providing information on Israel's language, culture, society and politics, hence serving to re-enforce the cultural ties between Israel and the Israeli Diaspora.

The Role of the Local Jewish Community

17. At the same time, **the local Jewish community has a role to play in engaging Israelis with organized Jewish life.** This involves recognizing and facilitating the needs of the local Israeli community. This role can be guided by two key principles:
- **Engaging Israelis on their own terms** – This may include investing resources into understanding and engaging the local Israeli community and assuming a coordinated approach to integrating Israelis into their leadership structures;
 - **Shifting from service provider to service enabler** - This may include calling on Jewish institutions to begin directing funds and other forms of support for programs that are initiated by Israelis themselves.

The role of the N.A. Jewish Sabra

18. **In the effort to cultivate a thriving Israeli Diaspora, the N.A. Jewish Sabra is tasked with first building and then connecting Israeli communities.**
19. In order to build the community **the N.A. Jewish Sabra needs to provide infrastructure, programming and services** in the following five domains:
- **Jewish education and Hebrew** – Formal and informal educational structures and content that enrich Jewish and Israeli identity, as well as Hebrew-language fluency;
 - **Community services** - Initiatives or support that aim to meet the basic needs of community members;
 - **Integration into the local Jewish community** - Involves integration into leadership structures, membership and general participation;

- **Communal and cultural programming** - Includes programming targeted specifically to members of the Israeli community, such as *shira betzibur*;
 - **Connection to Israel** - Harnessing the Israeli community toward strengthening and advancing Israel as well as facilitating a sustained personal connection.
20. **The success of an organized and prosperous Israeli Diaspora rests on the degree to which Israeli communities are connected** with one another as well as with the local Jewish community and with Israel. Two examples of potential initiatives aimed at connecting communities can include:
- **An Israeli-North American leadership forum** - Increased communication among the leadership of the various Israeli communities is central to connecting these communities into an organized network;
 - **A mass technological platform for community-to-community connection** - A technological platform geared toward increasing communication between communities will strengthen relationships between individuals and communities on a grassroots level.

Conclusion

21. **The leadership potential of the Israeli Diaspora presents Jewish leadership, throughout the world, with an important opportunity that should not be missed.** The Reut Institute is dedicated to working with Jewish leaders and organizations to seize these opportunities.