

A Language for Zionist Reciprocity

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These thoughts have been adapted since the struggles of summer, 2006, although I have maintained my basic point of view about what Israel means to American Reform Jews. My thoughts were expressed in an ARZA symposium in the summer of 2005. American Reform Jews have trouble establishing a profound contact with Israel and Israelis, and a language to enrich that contact remains both an opportunity and an impediment in the search for that contact.

Americans who enthusiastically support Israel (let's call them Zionists) sometimes want Israel to remain a fixed entity—something permanent to which to be attached—whereas we American Jews are permitted to evolve and express dynamic responses to our passions and the culture in which we live and help form. But the Jews of Israel have also resisted ontological fixity for themselves, and have evolved just as we have, out of their instinctual natures, their physical and political realities, and their brute and sometimes confused sense of survival. Hanging on to classic affirmations of an ancient heritage and of loosely adhering to Zionist foundations, Israeli economic and cultural/intellectual life moves forward in complete independence from that heritage and those foundations. Although its very legal system is nurtured by biblical and rabbinic values, and its popular cultural life references the traditions that express those values, Israel is nonetheless the most pragmatic of societies, and out to “get the job done” regardless of its classical anchors.

The reality is that both Israeli and American Jews have evolved during the last half of the twentieth century to the point where we

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have become organic entities of loose definition. Individualism has surely played a role in this development, and modern and post-modern ideologies have played their part. Individual satisfaction has replaced communal identification for most people who belong to the classes that move the society forward. We each have the same precarious attachment to core values that bump up against our quotidian realities; and we each have communal values that are challenged by individual needs. We need to find a language that accounts for the dynamic nature of each entity in the relationship, one that also acknowledges a dynamic relationship between the two that is a corollary of change. There is a way in which language, an always evolving heritage of all civilizations, is the appropriate vehicle not only to express the attachment we seek, but to form it, and even to “sell” it. But it is precisely in this area of language that one of our main problems lies, for while language is an opportunity to express our positive development, it can be used also to deceive us through rhetorics that aren’t supported by reality.

My paper is about language. The challenge I have been given is to suggest the metaphoric language appropriate for Reform attachment to Zionist aspirations in the broad sense, and to Israel, the land, in particular. My assignment in this overall project is to suggest ways in which language shapes discourse and I have been asked further to help shape that discourse until we find compelling metaphors for engaging progressive American Jews in the Zionist project. The search for a language that will capture the Reform imagination suggests that Reform Judaism and Zionism are not automatically compatible, and that the concepts are not coterminous. In any event, the search for language takes place in a dynamic context that is really typical of human group behavior—not unique to the two cultures we are considering here. In the words of Herman Lebovics, tho’ perhaps a little one-sided: “We know cultures are alive because they change; they invent and they cast off—not because they have achieved a certain classical equilibrium” (*New York Review of Books*, October 6, 2005). What language will account for this suggestion of permanent dynamism? And to what extent does the classical equilibrium still claim our attachment? Some of the problems in finding classical equilibrium have been shared most obviously by any thinker who has addressed change: Hoffman, Borowitz, Ellenson, Cohen and Eisen, most apparently—perhaps all of us who struggle with tradition and change: modern halachists,

biblical interpreters, and, yes, even modernists who address less ideological and more cultural phenomena.

My essay is flawed by one handicap that has limited my perspective from time to time: I write from a decidedly western capitalist bias, influenced by the cultural anthropologists from the early twentieth century and their heirs, and then inflected by the Holocaust and other European cultural phenomena such as Existentialist and post-modern rhetorics. Thus I may lack some of the nuance of Oriental heritage or even Sephardic roots.

Language itself is not always disciplined and, as it develops, it carries its own rules, trajectories, and tropisms. Whatever scientific help my essay can offer (that is, theoretical information about how language might work), this essay participates in an effort to enhance the attachment of American Reform Jews to a version or to a phase of the larger Zionist project, which I believe is the second of the two informing Jewish experiences of the twentieth century.

The Shoah, the first informing event, has profoundly more painful associations, and—let us make no mistake about it—has had more to do with the positive emergence of the national entity than many of us like to admit. It is the one “event” that has contributed most to our faulty sense of fixity and permanence. That fixity is expressed in many ways, but few of us who work in Israel or who study Israeli culture can fail to see the Holocaust creeping into many corners of the Israeli cultural map.¹ It is also true that the Holocaust has bequeathed us some language that still serves Zionist purposes, but that saddles us with a narrative that promotes some paradoxes for the Zionist project. So, using these two events as transition points, I will devote a few paragraphs here to a discussion of some of the dilemmas they have bequeathed to us.

Can This Relationship Be Saved?

The primary dilemmas in our relationship have to do with concepts such as redemption, dependence, and accommodation; and with the difference between ideals and reality. Redemption as an expression of a physical reality has been a mixed bag; and dependence themes are as tricky as they are effective. The “real” Israel is rarely reflecting either the need for dependence or the promises of redemption. In each of these concepts, we are stuck with a one-way trajectory. When the Lebanese war damaged countless Israeli lives and enterprises, the American Jewish community was galvanized

once again, and the old dependent relationship re-emerged and was thus re-affirmed. Along with that affirmation, American Jews resurrected the reminders that Israel was a land that redeemed Jews. How long that condition will last is hard to tell.

The narrative of dependence has always worked to some extent in Federations, and it thrills some teenagers and college youth, but it doesn't suit Israelis most of the time. Redemption creates barriers of identification for Americans who have a declining sense of Jewish vulnerability. It suggests that "redemption" is for others who need to be redeemed, not for relatively secure Westerners whose sense of the need for redemption (certainly for themselves) is limited to liturgy, and can be understood best in ambiguous spiritualized terms. Dependence, which may be considered the other half of redemption, is equally unsatisfactory to Israelis making their way in the world, and it will be decreasingly relevant to the generation now in the making—young Israelis in their late teens and early twenties. It is also inherently strange for Israelis to build their organizational infrastructure from the overflow of American funding, since that funding isn't available in such abundance in America, and isn't needed there in the old way to which we have become accustomed. While the war this summer past re-ignited the old passion to jump in to save Israel, that impulse was short-lived and not as thoroughgoing as some would like to believe. And forthright self-affirmation of oneself as a whole Jewish person turns out to be more complex than the old Zionism believed, since accommodation is a constant property of cultures. Individual Jews, as Yosef Haim Brenner lamented, are not necessarily whole even in wonderful periods of national affirmation.²

Accommodation has been a negative metaphor for traditional Jews, but it is difficult for liberal Jews to see it as a negative term. Rav Soleveitchek famously saw in Zionism the solution to accommodationist tendencies and, of course, that was the illusion supported by even less "traditional" adherents. Ironically, however, accommodation is what "progressive" Jewish Americans have excelled at. Indeed, most of the immigrants and exiles who have made it to American shores have learned the value of accommodation, and while most of the communities identified with these exiles have put into play forces that are designed to stem the decline from accommodation to deracination, accommodating is what we do. Language, by its very nature, reflects our accommodations and it will have to express the accommodation of Israelis to their ever-emerg-

ing new circumstances. Of course, language can also reflect classic values if it works right, and if the educational system fosters that reflection and suggestion of the classic. The relationship of the real Israel to the idea “Israel” is always being worked on there by its official educational and cultural agencies, while being ignored in practice once one is outside of Israel. Is the “real” Israel a needy cousin or a successful relative whose similarity to us commends no special attachment? Or are Americans, perhaps, more needy than we realize—in which case the need is in the other direction. We have to find a language in which to ask these questions and to account for the ambiguities that I have discussed in these few paragraphs.

The Ubiquity of Language

Language is everywhere, or at least the need to find language is everywhere. And both the American and Israeli cultures have become adept at creating terms that reflect the living vibrant culture in which each lives, but not in which the other lives. We should concentrate on the areas where the creation of language in each of our cultures intersects out of their respective organic development, and I will urge greater reciprocity in understanding that intersection. But at the beginning we may rightfully assume that we also seek some of the language of “selling” or convincing—of, in short, rhetorical effect.

As soon as I accepted this assignment, I framed two weeks of summer reading (2005) so that I would notice articles that had something to do with language creation. I tracked *The New York Times* at random, along with other less illustrious press organs. The evidence of linguistic manipulation was present throughout all the issues of American life. An article might be about Burger King’s effort to convince the public that the firm is “chicken friendly”; or an article might describe the argument that the morning-after pill is not an aborting agent, so that Catholics may become consumers. A felon may confess to a rhetorically shaped form of indictment as he fashions his plea-bargain, or the Democratic party might hire a consultant to work on finding “framing narratives” for the Democratic story to contest what used to be considered the more compelling Republican framing narrative. Language problems drive a lot of our culture, so the subject of this essay is certainly timely, but the omnipresence of the subject may actually demonstrate that we are seeking frames (narratives, figures of speech, and rhetorical flourishes)

that have a decreasing amount to do with the life we need to describe.

How Shall We Understand Metaphor?

Metaphoric language as a subject has to be understood in some of its complexity before we can determine how we might use that language to convince one party to engage the other party. Varying forms of metaphoric speech are available as both help and hindrance as we try to chart our relationships to Israel. Whenever we talk about language it is good to look at Shakespeare, for whom (according to Stephen Greenblatt) the ways of language trumped every other concern, including the moral values that language expressed.³ Shakespeare, according to this view, was more interested in how language shapes reality than he was concerned with the moral climate created by that reality. But even Shakespeare knew the difference between reality and the appearance of things as expressed in words. In one of the less prominent plays, “*Love’s Labor’s Lost*,” his princess protagonist challenges her flattering courtier with this rebuke: “Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye, not uttered by base sale of salesman’s (chapmen’s) tongues” (II/1). We have a salesperson’s task in this assignment, and as long as we seek a rhetoric to promote Zionism we ought to be honest with ourselves, lest our selling outstrip the reality that our public’s eye beholds. I do not fault us for trying to hold on to formulas and myths that represent the highest aspirations Israel has to offer. But we ought not to try to shape realities that don’t make sense when the reality is experienced, or that don’t account for the dynamism in each of our cultures. Let us, indeed, remind American Reform Jews of Israel’s rich engagement in technology and its massive contributions to alleviating world crises, but we dare not hide from the fact that Israel is drenched in poverty by creating language out of the old Histadrut dreams of social and economic justice. And, if we expect reciprocity, we need to adjust our sense of direction in two ways: We must find language that belongs to Israel as well as to America, and we must seek language that grows out of the living requirements of American language—equally applicable to our lives as well as to Israeli lives.

A word about language in general is necessary since my paper calls for an examination of some of the different forms of figurative language—often called “metaphor” in the broadest sense of the

term—but usually meant to include a range of speech and writing strategies. Each form of figurative language serves its own function: some foster comparisons, while some include a family of items connected to a central theme; some have to do with exaggerations or aspects of an idea to be emphasized. So there is not one all-encompassing idea associated with metaphoric language. But we can say at least this much about the technical side of language within this essay: the most enduring and effective metaphors grow out of lived experience, and not out of artificial design. Most new language comes more from popular speech than from writing.⁴ Figures of speech often “happen” without our realizing it, and often have consequences that are surprising. One has only to listen to the way young people speak (in Israel or America) to be reminded of this fact.

It is true that all abstractions require linguistic or visual figures, and such figures can lend specificity or materiality to a general idea. But most specificity is mutable, and most figurative language contributes ambiguity even as it adds richness. That is why advertising is constantly changing, and why governments are always trying to find a better way to communicate their “message.” Clearly some of the framing narratives to which we have become accustomed, and some of the metaphors growing out of those narratives, conflict with the realities of the world as Jews experience it, whether in visits to Israel, or in their imagined relationship to Israel from afar. Israel lives between myth and historical reality, and we create narratives out of myth. It is hard to swallow the original narrative of need in more peaceful interludes, for example, when one sees Israelis as having so much in common with us in the material side of American life, so, too, when we experience the relative economic prosperity of the Jewish state, as it encounters its own poverty. We can cite specific areas of “need” within Israeli society, and I would certainly include our own liberal congregations there, and the tens of thousands living below the poverty line. The Lebanon War temporarily created further pockets of need as the country strives for rehabilitation. But “need” in Israel is no longer a reflection of the redemption of large refugee populations who have escaped genocidal tyranny. It is not a need that people carried with them from lands of oppression in the former post-*Shoah* expression of that experience, or the need fostered by the tyrannies of oriental anti-Semitism. The need in Israel may be more akin to the need of the struggling poor in one of our large American cities. So this leads to the question of

exposing people to reality. Educators at times have argued that we need to teach the “real” Israel to our youngsters.⁵ This sounds like an admirable objective, until one asks whether we can expect any special relationship to Israel if we “normalize” our picture of Israeli life away from the more dramatic spiritual or historical narratives and metaphors that prompted our commitment in the first place. We are juggling our metaphors and narratives between describing Israel as the site of a great tennis and sailing vacation, and depicting Israel as a destination of obligation and quasi-*aliyah*, (a notion that I once heard enunciated by David Polish).⁶ Figurative speech is revealed as a double-edged sword. In order to communicate between us we must be “like”; to be “like” is to lose difference and not be needy in the old, post-*Shoah* sense of that term. Can we usefully cite post-*Shoah* instances of responding to need, like Operation Moses, Yad Sarah, Yad leKashish? It seems to me that settling Ethiopians or Russians is only an echo of the settlement of orphans from Eastern Europe in 1946. None of these salvationary programs in Israel has quite the resonance of the redemption of Jews from the Holocaust terror. And we hope that there won’t be recurring Lebanons. Even if we can create the sense of need, we must craft different language to describe it. One possibility is to believe in the importance of liberal religion for the nation that will soon have the overwhelming majority of Jews in the world. It is a less dramatic need, but it may have greater endurance than we think. If American liberal Jews are to find common linguistic ground with Israeli liberal Jews, we shall probably have to move away from some of our old vocabulary.

Can We Ever Be a “Normal” People?

Normalization is a necessary diminution of “Otherness.” I want to elaborate on the question of otherness and regular-ness with reference to one of Yehuda Amichai’s most popular poems, “Tourists.” The translation is not mine:

They come here to visit mourners.
 They sit in Yad veShem, wear grave faces at the Wailing Wall,
 And laugh behind heavy curtains in hotel rooms.
 They take pictures with the important dead at Rachel’s Tomb
 And at Herzl’s Tomb and Ammunition Hill,
 Weep for the beautiful heroism of our boys,
 Lust for our tough girls,
 And hang their underwear

For fast drying
In a blue, cold bathroom.

Once I sat on the stairs at the gate of David's Tower and put two heavy baskets next to me. A group of tourists stood there around their guide and I served as their orientation point. "You see that man with the baskets? A bit to the right of his head, there's an arch from the Roman period. A bit to the right of his head." But he moves, he moves! I said to myself: Redemption will come only when they are told: "You see over there the arch from the Roman period? Never mind: but next to it, a bit to the left and lower, sits a man who bought fruit and vegetables for his home."⁷

In this poem, the ironic contrast between the day-to-day life of the Israeli and the icons of its metaphorically laden past, connects the most elevated notions of relating to Israel with the most mundane behavior of Israel's citizens. This typical Amichai-esque gesture demythologizes life in Israel and offers the daily buzz of living as the salient feature of life in the state.

That has been the dream of many leaders of the Zionist project, and one that the Diaspora has had trouble assimilating. Bialik is alleged to have said that the Jewish nation will have succeeded when we have crooks and cops and scoundrels like all the peoples of the world. This "normalization" is somewhat more metaphor-free than the narrative upon which we have built loyalty to the nation and to the Zionist project. It is certainly free of the dramatic mythic layers attached to the language of redemption, and our having resisted it as a way of thinking may be another of the barriers between the "us" in America and the "them" in *Medinat Yisrael*. (Yael Zerubabel has discussed this tendency to demythologize throughout Israeli culture in her study *Recovered Roots*.)⁸

But let us keep our gaze on the Amichai poem. Even his program to take away the metaphoric-iconic past is metaphoric. When will the cultural code no longer make his image (of shopping baskets and pedestrian shoppers) sensible? As the culture progresses, and as fewer people walk to the market with their personal shopping baskets, that romantic image of the simple fellow will soon be lost. It may not even be understood. Thus Amichai's anti-metaphoric effort of the late 1970s contains some of the metaphoric and the mythic, a narrative even if it is the narrative of the anti-hero. If we write that message into a contemporary poem, when shopping bags no longer serve as metonymic representations of daily-ness, we will

have new images. Perhaps we will say that “redemption will have come” when the tour guide makes the object of his lesson: a young computer consultant driving up the coast from his Tel Aviv apartment, or an entrepreneur trying to close a deal at a sidewalk café. (And we hope that the sidewalk cafes will not be replaced by Starbucks.) The Diaspora must move very fast, indeed, to keep up with the linguistic imagery of modern Israel. The classic associations may remain, but the dynamic life will outstrip our dreams. My solution is not so simple, but it is necessary: we must become more a part of each others’ lives.

Language Is a Home

Language is a home —a Potential Dialogue, but between unequals.

The Polish poet and intellectual Czeslaw Milosz once declaimed that “language is our only home.” It is a romantic notion that permits us to transcend political boundaries and, therefore, it ought to be suitable for our relationship to Israel. But Americans don’t learn languages easily and, besides, we live in an age when language is less valued than experience or visual representation. While Milosz’s statement may not be entirely adequate as empirical fact, it will serve this paper as a touchstone for a new look at our sense of language, and language on some level is critical to cultural survival.

I will use Milosz’s statement to consider the relationship of English to Hebrew, and as a statement about what we liberal Jews give up by not being able to call our first home “home.” But in addition, I will suggest (at least midrashically) that a second home can enrich our lives when our first home does not provide all we need. It is this “second way” that my assignment directs me to pursue.

According to Milosz’s (overstated, perhaps) pronouncement, the Jews of America are homeless, and have lost a tool that is naturally absent from the very thing the Diaspora has offered Jews: safe physical homes. It is quite clear that the Zionist canard that Jews aren’t safe outside of Israel is not useful. It is also clear that English language speakers of the Diaspora now possess the most powerful language in the world. So, Diaspora Jews are safe *and* they have a successful language. Socio-linguists sometimes claim that certain languages confer status, and possessing English as one’s native language confers special status.⁹ There are few incentives to learn a language in addition to English. Language of one kind or another is available to everyone, but languages in social ascendancy are a

special possession and we Americans possess the language that the nations of the world covet. It is not easy to argue that something is missing for Americans, but if an argument is to be made, we need to find a need within Americans that is not immediately obvious from the perspective of American shores. Something must be missing in us in order for Americans to sense any linguistic need. Does 9/11 change our concept of what “American shores” means? We need more time to find that out, but certainly until now, those “shores” are a protection for our English language—if not always for our American bodies.

Those who believe that Hebrew can save the Jewish people, or simply Hebrew advocates like me, love the idea that language is home. For Jewish survival it can seem to trump every other concern. Theoretically it could embrace secular and religious people. Of course, not all important Jewish thinkers would have endorsed Milosz’s notion as an argument for using Hebrew. Rosenzweig, for one, rejected that idea, convinced that the sacral nature of Hebrew and its universal import would be lost in the transfer from holy language to quotidian use.¹⁰ And most of our adherents behave with the unconscious conviction that English is the preferable language of Jewish tradition. Those of us who believe in one version or another of “home land” or “home language” are left to draw on strategies and powers of persuasion to try to create some Hebrew linguistic realities: some songs, prayers, or phrases. This is a limited and sometimes melancholy effort to build a linguistic bridge between Jewish past and present, between myth and actual history, but it has had even less effectiveness when it comes to building a bridge between Israel and America. Contemporary Hebrew in Israel has reflected a genuine dialogue between classical associations and daily usage. How many Americans can participate in that dialogue? And, even if not, can Americans be made to feel the need to carry on that dialogue? I have some hope that it will be possible.

Among those who say “no,” however, are some of Israel’s strongest metaphor builders, its writers. One of them, Amos Oz, used to argue that Jews ought to see their experience as “theater,” and in that metaphor, Israelis were on the stage and the rest of the Jewish world was in the audience—empathizing, identifying, but not actually participating in the drama. He seems to have relinquished that metaphor, but when one listens carefully, one might see the regularity of life as the ground of his later stories, as in *That Very Sea* (*Oto haYam*). Thus Israel is so much at the center of Jewish life that the

themes need no longer be exceptional. Oz has built up a lot of Israel's metaphors and struggled to describe the breakdown of those metaphors as well. In those of his novels that describe the conflict of generations, one sees the lost dreams diluted by contemporary vulgarity of common-ness. The dilutions inevitably lead to regularity.

In a powerful description out of his narrative-biography, *A Story of Love and Darkness* (*Sippur shel Ahavah veHoshech*) he gives another color to Amichai's rejection of mythic rhetoric: He is, in the 1940s, an eleven-year-old boy, attending with his grandfather a Saturday morning gathering of the Revisionist Herut Party. The great Menachem Begin, at that time Israel's archetypal loyal "back bencher," delivers a homily to his followers, a somehow traditionalist but highly secular nationalist gathering. The Klausner family (Oz's patrilineal descent) is in loyal attendance. Some in the family are well-connected figures among that community. Begin's presentation at the old Edison Theater is full of as much bombast as the little nation can muster: totalitarian in style, and perhaps a little ridiculous. Begin is excoriating the Labor Party and its allies in the West. Drawing on a soon to be outdated word for "arming," Begin decries lack of support from America, from Britain, and from everyone else, and accuses the labor leadership of collaborating with these demons of the Occident. He is shouting to the cheers of the older people in the audience that "if Britain won't arm us, we will arm ourselves," but the problem is that the word for "arming" has emerged in the new generation as the slang for sexual intercourse. Thus: "If the British won't screw us, then let us screw ourselves," he shouts, and the young folk, Amos Klausner among them, roll on the floor.

This is a part of Oz's self-described deflowering, the spiritual side of what is to happen physically only a few years later as a consequence of these critical moments in his life. Who among us has not experienced some version of this language joke in our own lives, however much less may have been at stake? (And for those of us who speak Hebrew now, who among us doesn't perform one of these unintentional jokes when we are at work in Israel?) For most Americans, Oz's stage metaphor is as outdated as Begin's "zayin," and we, like Oz, just move on when the dialogue gets to that point. No less risky, of course, are A. B. Yehoshua's metaphors of Diaspora neurosis, (described in another session of the ARZA forum that inaugurated this discussion) or the inability of Jews outside of Israel to return to find a "normal" position. What unites Amichai, Yehoshua, and Oz, and other Jewishly self-conscious writers in Israel is

the Hebrew language and the fact that Hebrew is their home. Their imageries merge with their rich engagement with dreams of the Hebrew past, even when they are putting those dreams to rest. The tension between the classic and the contemporary is everywhere present in their words. The myth and the reality of Israel's life are as present in their work as is the play of ancient and contemporary within the language they use. Myth and history have a natural dialogue in Hebrew even when they contend with each other, and sometimes even when the user is not aware. The citizen who, through natural speech, draws on ancient metaphor will be reminded by either the educational or religious establishment that they are drawing strength from the classic sources.

How can we mediate between these two senses of the idea that language is home, between the absolute and the unforgiving fact that the Hebrew language trumps our other identity guarantors, and yet can belong to Americans in only a limited and restricted way? In our search for linguistic figures to sell commitment to Reform Zionism, we would do well to develop language that binds us and not language that separates us. Redemption language does not qualify as bonding. It is a difficult task, because language is as clamorous and undisciplined as the materiality of the Zionist project, and it grows out of the lived life more than out of the designed life. In other words, language is almost too dynamic for us to use to build a sense of Zionist value without suffering the inevitable backfire of language. And, of course, history in one sense or another won't let go of us.

Ever hopeful, however, I suggest that just as we will not have a nation without contradictions, without heroic behavior and gigantic misbehavior, we cannot have shared language without compromises or dangers. And since we are speaking here about a "second home," we cannot produce our metaphors out of a lived Hebrew environment, but must remain alert to the metaphors that emerge abroad out of that lived Israeli environment that we must visit from time to time, both physically and intellectually.

I suggest that some of our difficulty comes from the fact that liberal Jews in America have lost something by not being able to call this language "home." Hebrew has historically been the source of Jewish metaphors. In order to utilize them organically, or even to discover them, a certain basis for Jewish discourse must first be taught to the Diaspora Jew. That does not mean that such metaphors cannot be created. The Reform Movement in America has certainly

created at least one with the notion of *tikkun olam*. The strategies for creating these figures of speech and for keeping them alive remain the responsibility of other essays and thinkers involved in our current project. My concern is to point out some of the linguistic pitfalls and opportunities.

At the same time I am convinced that the predictable decline in religious affiliation in the United States calls forth a need for attachment to the old-new language.

Can There Be Reciprocity?

Full linguistic reciprocity and shared language are ideals to which our project should aspire; but I am willing to compromise. The development of a figurative Zionist language for American Jews may lose some of the reciprocity that would follow from a shared Hebrew language, and may have to accept the more limited function of the “second home.” Second home is part-time and temporary and must sacrifice some of the “daily-ness” of a first home. Yet second homes are often less trouble and less difficult to manage than the home in which we live most of our lives. A measure of translation is surely called for when the dwellers in the full language meet those who dwell only in a few phrases or ideas. But I remain hopeful that there are other aspects of language that are shared—the common language of the professions, of business and of friendship connections in which micro-“language”—not only Hebrew—becomes part of organic relationships that enrich connection between people and place.

An implication of my thinking here is that we should try to enhance physical connection and let some version of common language emerge between the people who are to do the connecting, instead of trying to create an imagery or a language that, in any event, will always be changing and even precarious. (Somewhere in this discussion lies a distinction like that between “langue” and “parole” in the semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure.) That is, a distinction between the language system and the way it is carried out in its individual settings and amongst intimates of particular circles: students with students; business people with business people; Jewish professionals with colleagues. Can our Reform movement foster more of these personal associations and build upon the larger institutional missions for second, third, or even fourth trips—permanent relationships in business, culture, and

profession? If we are to remain proud of the modern representations of ancient roots, but pay more attention to the daily demands of language, we will have to become more a part of the “daily” routine of the other.

We have to re-visit the notion of living language that, within a sociologically vital community, emerges from the lives of the people. That language would draw on the daily experience and emerge without plan and only moderately controlled by the canons of the language. There are official and formal rules, of course, but more often we experience a breaking out into new words, phrases, syntactic forms, and even expletives. Rosenzweig, as I have noted, was not entirely wrong in his concern that the daily-ness of a spoken tongue would force that language to lose its universal value and would de-sacralize it. The great language thinkers of the Zionist revival, Berdyczewski, Brenner, Bialik, and even Ahad Ha’am, understood what Rosenzweig was talking about, but they saw in the revival of daily use of the language another kind of redemption. The great Gershom Scholem was both intrigued by this tension and frightened of it, as he expressed in a letter to Rosenzweig as early as 1926.¹¹ And now, an anthology of poetry, gathered and illuminated by Malkah Shaked, places that tension within two volumes of over six hundred biblically-inflected contemporary poems.¹²

What worried Rosenzweig is precisely what appealed to the others. To one degree or another, the promotion of lively spoken discourse was their goal. They may not have known the price they would pay, but they were willing to foster linguistic “organicism.” Herzl, on the other hand, never understood it, believing that Hebrew would only be ceremonial in Eretz Israel.¹³ But for opponents or proponents, the implications of an organic daily language were not clear, and the possible connection between the development of a language and the development of the Jewish people in their own commonwealth did not, in any event, get in the way of their hopes. And it is the “organic” nature of lived speech that creates a potential barrier between American Zionists and Israelis, at least on the linguistic front. To repeat the view I am proposing: language is chaotic; it unfolds from its users; it is created in the tension between what the people are doing in the day-to-day and the formal authorities who set the boundaries of usage, and the classic phrase of its literary-linguistic development. It is a classic phase one still hears echoed in Israel, but the slang, hurried, and practical speech is the carriage in which that ancient tongue travels.

That is not to say that language cannot be manipulated, or that we cannot artificially try to create some metaphors of connection. We need only look to the advertising world to see that one can find effective figures of speech. (“Diamonds are forever” is almost a metaphor forever, surely.) But this is only sloganeering that happens to work. We should be aware that this form of metaphor building is likely not to create reciprocity within the communities we hope to bring together. It may also distance us from the lived life, the unfolding life, Israel’s reality at a distance, which continues to haunt our programming and our efforts to teach Israel in our schools and synagogues. The clamor of language best proceeds from the clamor of life. And since both parties in the system I am describing have rich lives, the need for metaphor exists on both sides of the relationship.

The Lost Eden

At a time when we in North America may be trying to construct a language that will attach our constituents to Israel and to its ideals, Israel is giving up some of the idealism to which we want to attach. This is felt in a variety of contexts, from the post-Zionism of some of the young thinkers, to the de-mythologizing quality of some of Israel’s great writing, and including the world pressure that makes some Jews feel that we now have too much power as occupiers or that we have become brutes. And, of course, the nature of language itself undergirds all of this development. Change, of course, occurs within every society, and resistance to change inevitably hearkens to some purer time. As Samuel Brittan, writing in the *Financial Times*, suggested: Hume noted that “To declaim against present times and magnify the virtue of remote ancestors, is a propensity almost inherent in human nature.” Most of the Israelis in my generation seem to feel that too many of their “old values” have disappeared; but the truth is that they would not give up most change just to hold on to the affirmations of a nascent and poor country. When it comes to Israel, we ought to be aware that not only does language contain its own daily-ness, but the eternal values attached to language are often subdued by the social and economic realities of what one can only call “progress.” The word “value” is actually one of the most dynamic and fluid terms in the English language, not the indicator of permanence hawked by Jewish educators.

Three Israeli cultural figures may exemplify the tensions proposed by my point of view. I will call them “preservationist right/

center/left." Hillel Halkin, on the right, composed an unusual quasi-historical novel about Zichron Yaakov in which the history of that picturesque town is embedded in a charming mystery about the Aronson family of the NiLi spy group. For Halkin, the village in which he and his wife settled, love at first sight for the dusty 1970s' town has disappeared like the charm of many old villages that are colonized by resort-minded developers. His Zichron Yaakov no longer bears its charm nor reflects its history. Halkin's disillusionment about the progress of his village is a story as old as Hume's comment about the past. Halkin's hankering for a former time is muted by the hankering we all have for some former time. Would Halkin really trade Israel's modernizing for its former third-world status?

In the middle of my proposed spectrum is Amos Oz, who both laments the loss of the old and participated in its loss even as he identified with classic Zionist "values." The man who might wish for higher ideals within his country is both the product and producer of a well-established world literature that could not have happened to an Israel that remained tiny and Levantine. Oz has actually lamented the strength of some of the old Zionist myths, while offering a way to hold on to them. Figures on the "left" think he may be holding an untenable position.

On that left are figures, such as post-Zionist Hanan Hever, who feel that history has moved us beyond anything that could be proposed by the Zionist narrative. In Hever's view, a bi-national state may be inevitable and a diminution of the Jewish majority will be a consequence, along with an even more radical change in the development of the Hebrew language. But in any case, what kind of language can we ever expect to reflect the dynamic realities of modern Israel, with multiple nationality, and a Hebrew distorted beyond anything we would recognize from our classrooms? I will leave the response to this to historians and to our religious leadership—some of whose essentialist hopes may soon be meaningless in this dialogue. It won't hurt us to imagine the old ideals nor to resurrect some of the classic imagery. But all this will be re-framed as the People of Israel moves on.

A lovely figure of speech has it that Israel remains a haven and an opportunity. Another is about Israeli physical prowess and determination, which in an ironic way continues the Israeli male resistance to being a "sucker" (such able people are not "Freiers," after all!). Such figures of speech have been fostered by the remarkable

realities of Israeli scientific, economic, and cultural life. In spite of Lebanon, Israel remains strong, and in spite of its own needs, Israel is still a haven of sorts, for some Jews. But what about for others? It is an opportunity for others in the world for sure, given Israel's advances on many health and technological fronts, but is it still an opportunity for Jews? And can Americans be joined linguistically to that opportunity? These are still lively linguistic figures: haven and opportunity, power. Create them, design them artificially, but then think about to whom they belong. Liberal American Judaism now steps into the organic reality of Israel and offers a push for some changes—within Israeli religious life and among the Israelis who will live that reality. It is another unique opportunity for exchange. But the Israeli liberal will still have the language that bears the tradition, and thus has something to offer her American counterpart. If only the American could feel the need! Perhaps before the need to feel connected to Israel there is a more primary problem: Has the idea of Peoplehood waned among American Reform Jews, as Steven Cohen and Jack Wertheimer recently suggested?¹⁴

Fostering exchange to account for dynamism calls out for change among us Americans. Our efforts at formalization must be balanced by efforts at organicism and by efforts to communicate with Israelis living their lives. Enduring metaphoric language can best be created if the ground fosters organic growth. Otherwise, we are subject to sloganeering. We must not just transport our children; we must work for mutual engagement so that shared language will emerge from shared experience. And, when we meet up again in a time when Israeli reality interrupts our relationships (hostilities, terrorism, chaos), we must be better prepared for strategies that sustain our relationships than we were during the most recent Intifada. Somehow the Lebanese War did not keep Jews from visiting in the same way that the Intifada did. We seem braver as Americans in time of war than we are when a battle is being fought within the daily lives of people? We must, in fact, suggest that our American Jewish destinies are as much at stake as the destiny of the Jewish political nation itself. But first we must feel the need for that shift in our sense of destiny. If we are not linked in a lively active sense, then no amount of language will overcome the sense that we are two different peoples. Our mutual language should emerge from a joyful and willing reciprocity.

Notes

1. Marc Lee Raphael, "Representations of the Holocaust in Literature and Film," vol. II (Williamsburg: William and Mary, 2006). The point of omnipresence is highlighted especially in my article in that volume: Cutter, "Traces of the Holocaust in Israeli and American Fiction."
2. See the Introduction to Y. H. Brenner's *Shekhol veKhishalon* [Breakdown and Bereavement] (Tel Aviv: Devir Publishing House, 1960). The translation is by Hillel Halkin and published by Schocken Press.
3. Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World* (New York: Norton Books, 2005).
4. Any number of scholars, philosophers, and just plain literary people have written about the spontaneous and unplanned way in which language often develops. For the Hebrew literary community, perhaps the most compelling articles are by Hayim Nachman Bialik, whose "*Gilui veKhisui beLashon*" (The Hidden and the Revealed in Language) has been translated in Robert Alter, *Modern Hebrew Literature* (New York: Behrman House Books, 1960). Bialik's essay, along with some of his untranslated essays and those of Micah Yosef Berdyczewski reflect an understanding of the emerging linguistic science at the turn of the twentieth century.
5. See articles by William Cutter and Barry Chazan under the title "Educating about Israel" in Alon Gal and Alfred Gotschalk, *Beyond Survival and Philanthropy* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000).
6. David Polish's best-known work on this subject is *The Eternal Dissent* (The Hague: Mouton, 1960), but my own relationship with Rabbi Polish during the final years of his life is the best source for the ideas that he proposed.
7. Binyamin and Barbara Harshav, *A Life of Poetry* (New York: Harper Publishing, 1994).
8. Yael Zerubabel, *Recovered Roots* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
9. See the works of Joshua Fishman on the development of language communities, and the way in which they emerge out of the organic life and speech of citizens in those communities.
10. Kleine Schriften—the "little writings." See Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* [containing many of Rosenzweig's 'minor' essays] (New York: Schocken Books, 1953). See especially Rosenzweig's essays "On the Scriptures and Their Language." I have written on Rosenzweig's relationship with Gershom Scholem that considers their contradictory hopes for the future of the Hebrew language in "Ghastly Hebrew Ghostly Speech," *Prooftexts* (Winter, 1994).
11. Ibid.
12. Malka Shaked, *Lanetzach Anagnech* [I Will Play on You Forever] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot Press, 2005).

13. See the Herzl diaries. Rafael Patai, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), esp. Part I, Book One.
14. Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer, "Whatever Happened to the Jewish People," *Commentary* (June 2006), pp. 33–37.