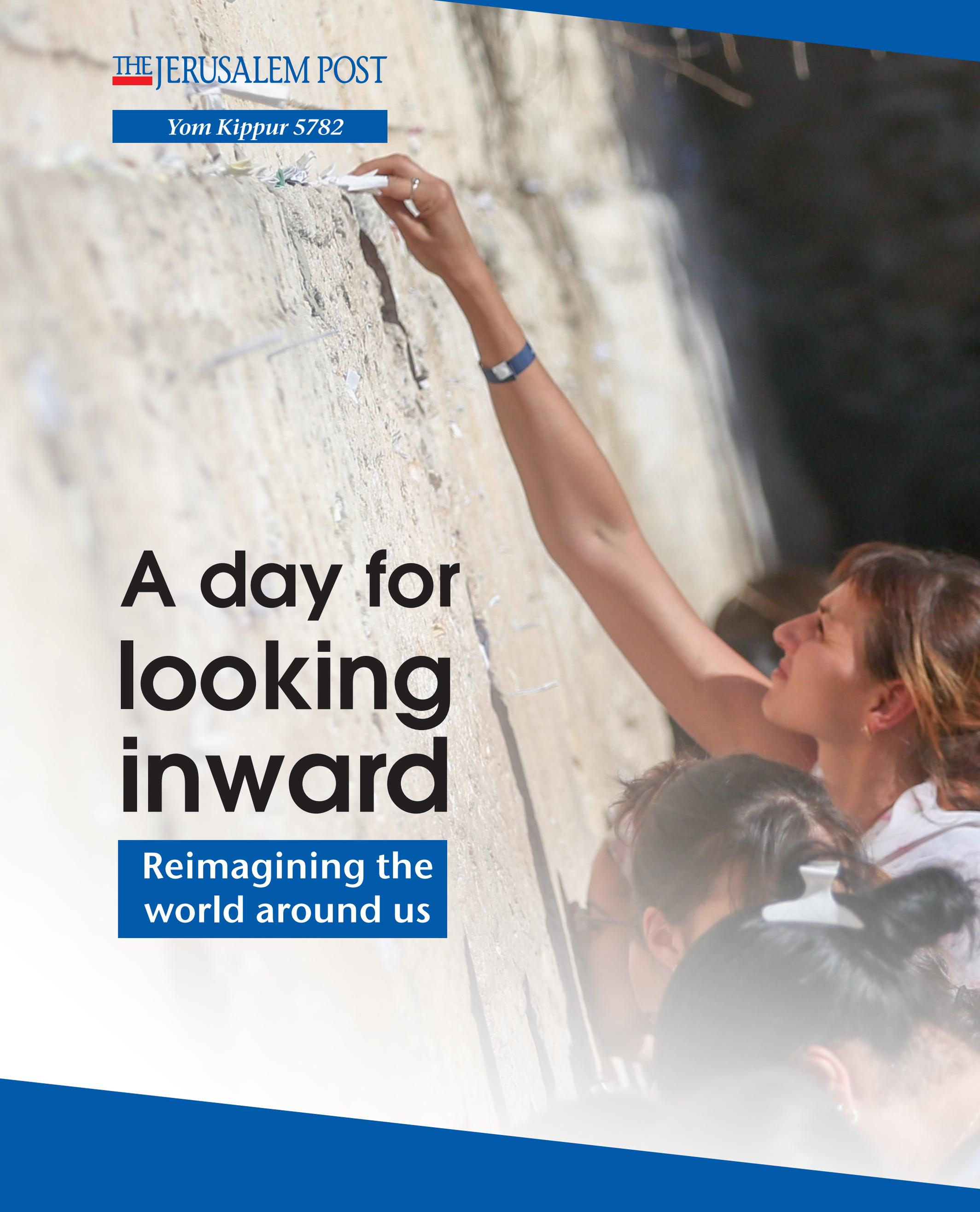


Yom Kippur 5782

A day for looking inward

Reimagining the
world around us



Regardless of one's level of support for Israel, Jews around the world are defined by their connection to the Jewish state. (Reuters)



Holding up a mirror to the Jewish people

A greater Jewish self-awareness could open doors for a more pure relationship with the world's nations, for reconciliation, and for enhanced Jewish contribution to humanity

• By GOL KALEV

From their inception and through the 19th century, Jews were a nation-religion. That is how they viewed themselves and how the world viewed the Jews. There was no separation between the Jewish religion and Jewish nation. They were one and the same.

Since the turn of the 19th century, however, there have been attempts to denationalize Judaism and reduce it to a religion – first on a small-scale in parts of western Europe, and then through a large-scale denationalization that occurred in the United States. Both attempts have failed.

First attempt at Jewish denationalization: Europe

At the outset of the French Revolution, some French Jews began to claim that they were French, and were the “members of the religion of Moses.” But very soon it became evident that this is not the way the French viewed the Jews – neither as friends nor foes.

When Napoleon conquered Palestine, he was ready to give it to the Jews, calling them “the rightful heirs.” He declared: “Israelites, a unique nation, who, in thousands of years, lust of conquest and tyranny, have been able to be deprived of their ancestral lands, but not of name and national existence.”

In French official documents through the 20th Century, the term for Jew was “Israelite.” This disconnect between French Jews’ self-perception as a religion and the way they are viewed by the outside as a nation came to the fore in the Dreyfus Affair. Captain Alfred Dreyfus did not consider himself to be part of the Jewish nation. For him he was a proud French patriot, but the French viewed him otherwise, and through a broad conspiracy spanning multiple branches of the French

government, military and press, he was falsely convicted of treason.

Denationalization attempts spread to other parts of Western Europe, but only affected a small percentage of world Jewry. The majority of Jews at this time lived in insular communities, mostly in Eastern Europe.

However, during the early 20th century, after Jews migrated to America, Jewish denationalization became widespread.

Second attempt of Jewish denationalization: America

The core of American Jewry quickly developed a self-perception that Judaism is a religion, akin to Christianity or Islam, and not a nationality. The Jewish nation-religion that was in-place for thousands of years was abruptly reduced to “The Jewish Church.” Moreover, it disassociated itself from its ancestral land. A new “invented” form of Judaism emerged: Judaism without Judea.

This was understandable. For 2,000 years in Europe, Jews were persecuted and hated. The American Revolution rebelled against deeply rooted European dogmas. This included Europe’s chronic opposition to Judaism, what Theodor Herzl viewed as incurable, adjusting based on evolving European and Jewish circumstances. But in America, Jews were not only free, but accepted. They became part of a new nation: America, which they loved and were grateful for. With the dominating homogeneous “Mayflower narrative” in America at the time, Jews who wanted to fit in and resemble their patriotic American neighbors felt they had to suppress their Jewish ethnological national affiliation. There was simply no room for another national identity.

But circumstances in America have since changed.

By the 2020s, there has been a shift from a homogeneous American ethos toward an America with multiple branches, anchored in a strong core American trunk (in sharp contrast to European Cultural Plural-

A photo of the author's upcoming book, Judaism 3.0

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ism, a loose combination of societies in competition and conflict with one another).

The patriotic American neighbors of the Jews today celebrate their own ethnological national affiliation, be it Mexican, Irish or Korean. This is manifested in Vice President Kamala Harris, who is proud of her Jamaican and Indian affiliations, and senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, who in the 2016 Republican primary argued who was the more Cuban (not more Christian).

There is also a broad recognition that an American has multiple identities: his profession, sexual orientation, race, state and indeed his ethnological national affiliation. At the same time, it is clear today that one's political nationality (for whom you vote) is different from ethnological national affiliation. One can be a proud German-speaking Tyrolian and hold an Italian passport, and one can be a proud Irish-American and have no political connections to Ireland. Unlike in the 1960s, nobody accuses President Biden of dual-loyalty.

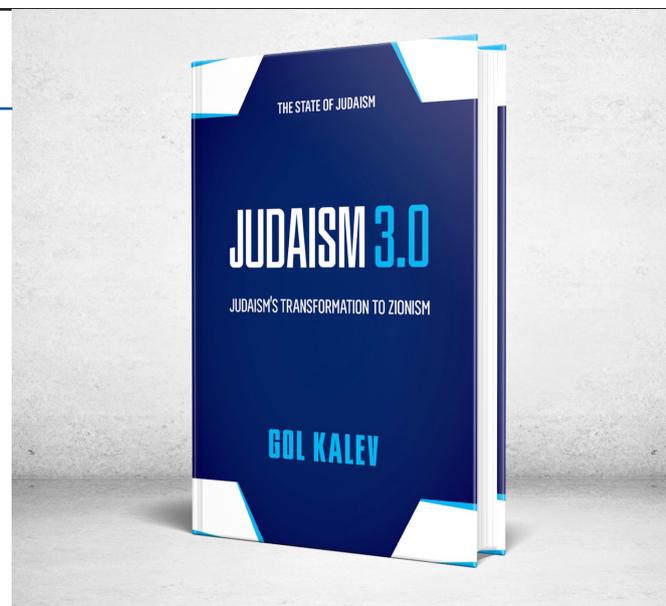
So unlike in the past, a Jew who wants to be in tune with prevailing American realities would celebrate his ethnological national affiliation, which is Zionism.

However, an attempt to suppress one's Zionist affiliation creates an inevitable disconnect – a less honest relationship between the American Jew and his surroundings. Imagine Biden claiming he was not Irish, or Kamala Harris denying her Indian or Jamaican ethnological national affiliations.

Zionism as a conduit to one's Judaism is not just in-line with prevailing American realities, but also needed, as legacy connectors to Judaism has faded: religious observance has declined, and memory of the Holocaust and nostalgia for the Eastern European past eroded as the generations pass.

Such nostalgia was peculiar to begin with. The ghetto life that was considered miserable in real time became glorified in America: Yiddish, bagels and lox, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. There was a retroactive connection to a pretend “old country” (Jews were never Polish – in Poland, they were Jews), since there was no tangible connection to the real old country – to Zion. It was too far in the past. That, however, changed once the Jewish State was reestablished. The real old country became real again.

In the same century that religiosity dramatically receded, the national aspect of Judaism was dramatically augmented. Hence, after a few decades of brewing, the organizing principle of the Jewish nation-religion is now shifting from its religious element – Rabbinic Judaism (Judaism 2.0) – to its national element: Zionism



(Judaism 3.0). This is similar to the organizing principle of Judaism shifted at the onset of the exile after the destruction of the Temple from Biblical Judaism (Judaism 1.0) to Rabbinic Judaism.

The attempted metamorphosis of Judaism in America from an ethnological group to a self-proclaimed religious minority has failed. It is time for all Jews to own-up to that – to stop defining themselves as a “religious minority” that does not practice religion (Judaism 2.0), and instead define themselves more naturally through their ethnological national affiliation, Zionism (Judaism 3.0).

Once they do so, they will not only be in greater unison with the predominant American ethos, but will also fuel energy to all other aspects of Judaism: its religious, cultural, communal, and to the cherished Jewish value of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

The tikkun olam nation

The vast majority of American Jews engaging in tikkun olam do not do so wearing a “Jewish hat” – they do so as individuals or part of community-wide charity organizations. Notwithstanding the important work of Jewish charity organizations that help thousands of individuals, there is no large-scale high-impact collective Jewish tikkun olam in America.

But by the mere recognition that Judaism transformed, and Zionism is now its organizing principle, the American Jew will partake in a successful collective massive endeavor of tikkun olam that has enormous global impact.

Israel's immense contribution to humanity is globally recognized by the Jewish state's friends and foes alike. Innovations produced in Israel improve the lives of billions of people around the world, and save millions of lives each year. Whether by addressing famine and drought by turning air into water, increasing longevity through biotech innovations and cutting edge medical research, or through daring social and cultural innovations, the Jewish state has turned into the tikkun olam state.

Centering one's Jewish identity around Israel certainly does not mean one needs to agree with its policies. After all, Rubio and Cruz do not agree with the Cuban government. Moreover, criticism of Israel – which many American Jews partake in – is itself a form of connection to one's Judaism through Israel. Indeed, for some American Jews, criticism of Israel is the main Jewish-related activity. Zionism is where an American Jew meets his Judaism.

Quite simply, in an under-engaged environment, it is easier to connect to Judaism through the country you do not visit than through the synagogue you do not visit. This is especially true when this country is the most relevant aspect of one's Judaism, through positive and negative connections alike.

Synchronizing one's self-perception of Judaism with the way the world looks at the Jews can lead to both reconciliation with the world's nations, and to greater collective Jewish contribution to humanity. As Herzl predicted: “The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness.” ❖

The writer is author of an upcoming book *Judaism 3.0: Judaism's Transformation to Zionism* (November 2021). For details and information on book launch events visit: Judaism-Zionism.com