

## Jew versus Jew: How Incomplete Visions of the Faith are Dividing the People

Daniel Spiro  
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Virtually all Jews have important things in common. We identify with a certain historical people who trace our origins to the Middle East. We decry polytheism and idol worship. And perhaps above all else, we pride ourselves on a commitment to a Scripturally inspired ethical code. This code has been summarized by one of their teachers, Rabbi Hillel, as “what is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor; that is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary. Now go study.” And when Jews do study, we come to recognize and applaud another teaching by that same rabbi: “If I am not for me, who will be? If I am only for me, what am I? If not now, when?” I can’t imagine any Jew being unwilling to embrace all the above statements.

You might think these commonalities would bring Jews together into a close-knit loving community, even if it is dispersed over space and time. But lately, I’ve noticed that the ties that bind Jews are no match for the passions that split us apart. For a long time, we’ve seen diversity in the people based on differences in ethnicity, ritual observance, theology, socio-economic status and other characteristics. But lately, that diversity has morphed into animosity, and much of the focal point of that animosity is the modern state of Israel and its treatment of Palestinians. Too often, Jews on the political left have come to see the more “mainstream” Zionist Jews as rigid, selfish “obstructions to peace.” By contrast, Jews on the political right have come to see the non-Zionist Jews simply as “self-hating” enemies of the people. These descriptions suggest that each side has come to fundamentally disrespect, if not dislike, the other. One result of this development is that the Jewish community is becoming far less able to join in response to threats, such as the sharp rise in global anti-Semitism.

This essay will explore the basis for such a schism. I conclude that there is symmetry to the tragedy of the situation. On each side of the divide, we find a reductionist interpretation of Judaism that blinds people to an entire domain of Jewish existence. The folks on the left have developed one blind spot; the folks on the right, another. I will focus on these two visions of Judaism and show how each truly is steeped in critical Jewish values. Clearly, Jews as individuals may be moved to choose their paths based on ideologies or other impulses that do not come from Judaism per se, but my attention in this piece is to address the Jewish foundation of the movements we’ll be discussing. In doing so, it is my hope also to reveal what each of these visions of Judaism lacks – namely, the other’s wisdom. If I am successful, this essay will not only serve as a reminder of what all Jews have in common but help to eliminate the animosity, disrespect and name calling that threaten to undermine our solidarity as a people.

### If I Am Only for Me, What Am I?

Let us start by examining those Jews on the political left who have come to see Israel’s staunchest defenders simply as “obstructions to peace” and have little to say about Israel that isn’t critical. Many of my friends fall into this category. We have met through either the Middle East peace movement or the interfaith movement. Some of my friends unabashedly

acknowledge their opposition to Zionism or to any Middle Eastern state that allots special preferences for Jews, even in immigration. They may even support the movement to boycott, divest from, or sanction Israel (BDS). Others who I've met through the above movements are more reluctant to announce their views about such labels as "Zionism," but whenever they venture into a discussion on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict, you can count on them to speak in a manner critical of Israel and not the Palestinians. All these Jews are frequently grouped together in more mainstream circles as "self-hating," even if they don't go so far as to support a boycott of Israel or the elimination of the Jewish State.

If you were to ask these staunch critics of Israel to explain what about their Jewish background supports their ideas, they would surely point to Prophetic Judaism. That term is inspired by the teachings of such Biblical Prophets as Jeremiah, Isaiah, Micah and Amos, and more modern authors such as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel searched for the essence of what defined the prophetic spirit and paints a picture of someone who might be viewed as a raving lunatic in polite society.

"What manner of man is the prophet? A student of philosophy who turns from the discourses of the great metaphysicians to the orations of the prophets may feel as if he were going from the realm of the sublime to an area of trivialities. ... He is thrown into orations about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the marketplace. Instead of showing the way through the elegant mansions of the mind, the prophets take us to the slums. [T]he prophets are scandalized, and rave as if the whole world were a slum. They make much ado about paltry things, lavishing excessive language upon trifling subjects. What if somewhere in ancient Palestine poor people have not been treated properly by the rich? ... Why such intense indignation? ... To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people, to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world. ... To the prophet, no ... subject is as worthy of consideration as the plight of man. Indeed, God Himself is described as reflecting over the plight of man rather than as contemplating eternal ideas."

Israel's staunchest Jewish critics, at their best, are attempting to honor the legacy of the prophets, as characterized by Heschel. After reading his words, it shouldn't be difficult to imagine how a Jeremiah or an Isaiah would react if he were with us today. Just as Heschel described the prophets' horror at seeing the treatment of poor people in ancient Palestine, many contemporary Jews on the left react similarly to images of Palestinian suffering or statelessness. When they read about Palestinians being kicked out of their villages in the Haifa District in 1948, view later images of Palestinian homes being bulldozed to make room for a Jewish settlement near Nablus, or contemplate the results of Israel's blockade of Gaza, these Jews feel they are witnessing "a deathblow to existence, ... a catastrophe, a threat to the world." When they reflect on the creation of a Jewish State in the Biblical Land of Zion – the so-called "land without a people for a people without a land" – they find pure ethnic chauvinism, for indeed the land was filled primarily with non-Jewish residents, many of whom were deeply attached to their ancestral homes. Whether you refer to these natives as "Arabs" or "Palestinians," you can understand why

any Jew steeped in prophetic values would lament their exodus in a trail of tears away from the homes of their parents or grandparents, only to find themselves in refugee camps.

According to the perspective of Prophetic Judaism, the fact that the Palestinian Trail of Tears was paved by the Jewish people, itself a victim of ethnic cleansing, only ratchets up the obligations of Jews to care for and empathize with Palestinians. Strike that. From the perspective of truly Prophetic Judaism (not the kind of tepid, guilt-offering Judaism that pays mere lip service to such a perspective by claiming to care for the Palestinians while never putting pressure on Israel), the Palestinians' plight should make a Jew "scandalized" and "rave" as if the whole of Israel was a moral "slum." Unless and until the Jewish people take concrete steps to confront Palestinian suffering and honor the principle that what is hateful to a Jew should not be done to the Jews' neighbors, Prophetic Judaism will continue to play the same challenging role in our own society that Isaiah and Jeremiah played in the times of our ancestors.

The above explains why many Jews – even dyed in the wool Zionists like me – sometimes feel compelled to criticize Israel publicly on the Palestinians' behalf. It also explains why those who are not Zionists feel especially justified in unleashing their vocal cords. Jeremiah would have demanded nothing less. Notably, the "Prophetic Judaism" we're discussing is hardly a fringe facet of the faith. Thanks largely to our beloved prophets, Jews are invariably champions of the underdog, the downtrodden, the needy, the forgotten. Is there any doubt that the Palestinians who live in Israeli-controlled areas today would fall into at least some of those categories? Say what you will about the responsibility of terrorists or corrupt politicians for the Palestinians' plight. You can't deny the innocence of large swaths of the Palestinian people, including the young Gazan children who suffer in poverty as their parents fail to find jobs in a wretched economy or suffer violence at the hands of the Israeli Defense Force. You should forgive my friends who are so appalled by the situation in Gaza and the West Bank that they feel the need to criticize Israel early and often. You may also want to consider their plea that because Israel has far more power than the Palestinians, Israel is the one who will need to make the initial major concessions for peace, rather than the Palestinians, who are in no position to give up what little bargaining power they currently have.

Finally, though I am about to point out that my friends may themselves be suffering from a blind spot, I hope we can all agree to stop referring to these people as "self-hating Jews" simply because they choose to emphasize, perhaps to a fault, a singular aspect of Judaism that is every bit as authentic and profound as any other. It makes no sense to refer to a Jew as "self-hating" merely because she may have developed an antipathy to nationalism as a geo-political force. That doesn't even do justice to the term "self-hating Jew." That should be reserved for those Jews who truly dislike the Jewish civilization and resent their own Jewish background. There is no shortage of such Jews, just as there is no shortage of non-Zionists who adore being Jewish.

### If I Am Not for Me, Who Will Be?

I began my analysis with a nod to the prophetically inspired background of Israel's staunchest Jewish critics because, on most issues, I reside with those individuals on the political left. However, on the issue of Israeli-Palestinian relations I find myself further to the political right

than many of my friends, and well within the Jewish mainstream. This is because I buy into the conventional Jewish view that when we talk about “the underdog, the downtrodden, the needy, the forgotten,” we should be considering not only the Palestinians, but the Jews as well.

Prophetic values may present many crucial strands to the Jewish tapestry. But they don't occupy the entire tapestry. Not even close. One additional value, for example, is that Jews are steeped in history. This includes JEWISH history. And this includes history that occurred prior to 1948, or even the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Mainstream Jews understand that Jewish history is not the story of a people of privilege. For nearly 2000 years, Jews lived exclusively as minorities who never knew what it was like to enjoy a country in which their own culture was dominant. British people can gloriously express themselves in an environment dominated by the English language, British history, and England's traditional religions and holidays. The same could be said for such other nations as the French, Germans, Dutch and Spanish. For all their overseas adventures, some of which epitomized inhumanity at its heights, their citizens have always been blessed with a homeland that oozes national tradition and pride. Few today question their right to dominate that “homeland” (e.g., nobody suggests setting aside massive areas of Germany for the descendants of the Holocaust). In the case of the Anglo-Saxons who moved to North America, few demand that they cede control back to the indigenous people. This is ironic considering that some of the most committed proponents of a boycott of Israel are Americans who come from an Anglo-Saxon background and who are forced to rely on such patently specious arguments as that whatever happened a century or two ago in their own country should be viewed as irreversible fact/ancient history, whereas the U.N.'s decision to create a Jewish state 71 years ago is an act that can and should be effectively overturned.

In contrast to the colonial powers, for nearly 2000 years, the Jews have been primarily confined to the margins of society, often living in ghettos and rarely permitted to attain positions of leadership. When the modern state of Israel was formed in 1948, the Jewish people were fresh off the memory of losing fully one third of their population in a genocide of Biblical proportions (that would be the equivalent of 600 million Muslims today). The U.N. responded by deciding to give the survivors a state of their own. If you consider those facts, it only stands to reason that these survivors would be willing to do virtually anything to keep their state. They were tired of the choice between exile and death, and of continuing to run if they chose exile. Remember – it was the gentiles who turned the Jews into a nomadic people, not the Jews.

Many on the political left point to the Jews' decision to seek and accept a homeland in the Middle East as an egregious act of greed, given that the land was already populated primarily by another people (Palestinian Arabs). But consider the situation after World War I, when the world's most thriving Jewish populations were in Germany and in America. We all know what happened in Germany, but many forget the situation in America. Jews in the U.S.A. were subjected to quotas when applying to colleges, prevented from staying in many hotels, and denied access when they arrived to flee the Nazis. In light of these experiences, it's hardly surprising that the need for a state that would take Jews in when others may not was etched into the Jewish psyche. So is the notion of justice. According to the Jewish narrative, Jews have

contributed so much to human civilization over the past three millennia. They had also staked a legitimate claim to their own state in the Biblical land of Israel, which was repeatedly seized from them. Why, Jews ask ourselves, are we not entitled as a matter of justice and fairness to the same autonomy as the British, French, and Germans, not to mention numerous nations of Arabs?

In many religions, the faithful keep their optimism by promises of a glorious existence in the hereafter. That was the norm in Islam and Christianity, the two faiths Jews have encountered the most over the past two millennia. By contrast, relatively little is said in Judaism about what happens to the soul after death. Instead, when my Jewish ancestors pined for the future, they longed not for heaven, but for heaven on earth – a time when Jews would return to the home of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs, the Land of Zion. Finally, in 1948, our people were given the opportunity to return, and when that opportunity knocked, those steeped in Jewish history felt that their prayers were answered ... and this would have only seemed fair. In fact, they must have felt like the Biblical figure of Hannah, who had been taunted mercilessly for not being able to bear a child, until one day her prayers to God were answered with a child of her own (the prophet Samuel).

Believe me when I say that Zionists support a Jewish state largely as a matter of fairness and justice. That is why Israel will last.

This is not to say, however, that because of the injustices Jews have faced throughout history, they are ethically entitled to engage in conduct that would be viewed as abusive if perpetrated by anyone else. For this reason, even some of the staunchest Zionists have fiercely criticized Israeli policies, including the decision to allow Jews to build West Bank settlements. But let's keep in mind that throughout the history of the modern state of Israel, most Israelis have supported a two-state solution featuring a primarily Jewish and a primarily Palestinian state. They have simply been worried about finding a partner who would allow the primarily Jewish state to live in peace and make its own laws – including immigration laws that may seem discriminatory from a universalist perspective but may also be essential if Israel is to retain its Jewish majority despite the small number of Jews in the region compared to Arabs.

Moreover, to understand the mind of mainstream Zionists, Israel's opponents on the left may want to consider Jewish values over and above the recognition of Jewish history. For example, they might remember that tribalism is not a dirty word in Judaism. As is reflected in the Jewish liturgy, Judaism is not a religion of "I and Thou," it's a religion of "We and Thou." Jews think of themselves as part of a community – or better yet, a family -- who were all spiritual descendants of those who were at Sinai. When they pray to God, they do so as family members looking to honor their part of a covenant given to the family, not merely as an isolated individual looking for personal favors. Judaism, in fact, requires balancing competing needs – the needs of the individual versus the needs of the community, and the needs of the community versus the needs of the world. Presumably, Jews put a thumb on the scale on behalf of the universal, but they don't do that by altogether neglecting the interests of the tribe. To paraphrase Hillel – "if I am not for my people, who will be," especially when the population of world Jewry has been artificially depressed by a combination of discrimination, forced conversion and genocide.

In short, Jews have a special obligation to look out for their fellow Jews. And they have a special obligation to remember Jewish history in all its vivid color, which prevents them from whitewashing everything but the recent past. Together, these values explain why mainstream Jews support the modern state of Israel both as a matter of justice and of national security.

### How Choosing Among Jewish Values Can Easily Enough Turn to Jew-on-Jew Hatred

The previous two sections have attempted to demonstrate why fundamental Jewish values underly both the movement to staunchly criticize Israel and the movement to staunchly defend her right to exist as a Jewish state. It is not difficult to see why Jews might want to celebrate one of those sets of values above the other. We are not talking about equilateral triangles here where each side is mathematically equal. In the real world, we must choose among different sets of frequently conflicting values, and one set will often seem more compelling than the other. But that still doesn't explain the level of animosity and disrespect that each group holds for their fellow Jews. It doesn't explain, for example, why Jews who primarily adopt one set of values commonly view those with whom they disagree as enemies and perceive them to be fundamental threats to the Jewish people. How have things so gone off the rails?

The answer begins, in part, with the fact that the above sets of values are both central to Judaism, and they are presented to us in a concrete political context where so much is at stake. We're talking about the first Jewish-controlled society in nearly two millennia; quite obviously, the future reputation of the Jewish people may largely turn on how this society is perceived. This is an inherently combustible formula. Organizations arise that honor one of the above sets of values and not the other. We're encouraged by these organizations to choose between these values, and since few of us can emotionally handle much cognitive dissonance, we tend to make a clear choice. (The Zionist/anti-Zionist choice is reminiscent of Pete Seeger's "Which Side are You On?" where we're told, "They say in Harlan County, there are no neutrals there. You'll either be a union man or a thug for J.H. Blair.") So rather than being paralyzed by the fact that both sides are making powerful arguments reflecting central Jewish values, more and more Jews are repressing one set of values and hyper-emphasizing the other in order to justify choosing sides. Is it any wonder that so many Jews have become dogmatists on this topic and no longer interested in dialoguing with those who sit on the other side of the fence? Or that nuanced thinkers who see both sides of the equation tend to feel increasingly alienated from the institutional outlets available for them to express their ideas?

Moreover, this clash of values has been incubated in an especially radioactive mixing bowl. I'm referring to the experience of anti-Semitism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including its crescendo into the pits of Holocaust Hell. Israel's staunchest critics and supporters were all deeply shaped by this experience, and the result, predictably, has not been pretty.

On the political left, the notion of Divine Providence (a central theme in traditional Judaism) has been tossed aside, and in many cases the entire notion of God has departed as well. The ultimate concern of Judaism for these thinkers is no longer God, let alone Jewish ceremonial rituals, but rather social justice. For a while, there was even great pride in the perspective that Jews were a justice-seeking community who typically voted based on their conscience and not their wallets

and who never, ever oppressed another people despite the fact that they were themselves victims of oppression. Now enter the modern state of Israel and, more recently, the rise of the political right in that country. For many Jews on the left, Israeli mistreatment of Palestinians is perhaps the most despicable act imaginable because it shatters their entire self-identity as Jews. For them, oppression is something that happens TO Jews, not perpetrated BY Jews. They expect Jews instead to become a “light onto the nations” by modeling the values of peace, generosity, justice, service – i.e., values that history has shown to be difficult enough to model by a people in exile, but virtually impossible to model by a group in power of an ethnically divided society.

Increasingly, Jews on the left compare Israel’s behavior to that of the Nazis and treat the Palestinians as if they are the new Jews. That explains why many Jews virtually never publicly criticize the Palestinians and when they do, they confine the criticism purely to acts of terror, as if short of murder (and Holocaust denial, which is a sin to all Jews), there is nothing a Palestinian can do, say, or teach that is worthy of rebuke.

On the political right, we find a very symmetrical flip side to the equation. The Holocaust and its anti-Semitic antecedents have similarly cultivated plenty of hatred toward the left generally and the Jewish-left in particular. Anti-Semitism is perceived to be grounded in a basic double-standard in which Jews are held to a higher standard and excoriated (or worse) whenever they behave like gentiles are expected to behave -- self-interested and self-protecting. There is no reason to believe that Jews in Weimar Germany or the Russian Pale of Settlement behaved fundamentally worse (or better) than their gentile neighbors. Yet to the Jew hater, this same behavior was viewed either as wretched or as acceptable depending on whether a Semite was responsible. Fast forward to contemporary times, when many regimes violate international norms far more than Israel, but Israel has become the number one whipping boy of the political left. Whereas divesting from the apartheid of South Africa was once all the rage on college campuses, now the talk revolves around the BDS movement, which aims to treat Israel as a pariah state. Even centrist Jews find this double standard intolerable, as they watch countries like China mistreat their Muslim population far worse than Israel mistreats the Palestinians but garner relatively muted criticism on campus or in social media.

In light of the profound role that double standards have played in modern Jewish history, it shouldn’t be surprising that those who single out Israel for criticism are accused of anti-Semitism. Jewish critics of Israel aren’t spared these charges; in fact, they become even greater targets of animosity and resentment. This powder keg is at its worst when the same people who obsessively and constantly blast Israel on social media go out of their way to express that it isn’t Jews as such they have a problem with, only Zionists. (They forget that most Jews are Zionists, so by spewing enough venom against Zionists, they end up insulting Jews generally). In this climate, there is only so much criticism of Zionism or Israel that a Jew can voice without being called out by many Jewish supporters of Israel as “self-hating” or viewed as an enemy.

By the same token, when Israel’s supporters point out the double standards that are at the heart of so much of their animosity, they are accused by anti-Zionists of “what aboutism” -- the attitude that allows us to deflect attention from the sins of ourselves or our allies by asking “what about” the sins of someone else. We’ve all seen “what aboutism” in action in various contexts; it can

be infuriating. For me, though, what is even more infuriating is that whenever the topic of the Conflict is raised these days, each side increasingly has a programmed response to the other (“What-aboutism!” “Double standard!”), neither really listens to the other, and both increasingly hate the other. It makes a mockery of the term “Jewish community” at a time of rising anti-Semitism when we can least afford to be divided. For example, it increases the likelihood that when certain groups of Jews (like the Hasidim) are targeted in violent attacks, other Jews will shrug and say “those aren’t our kind of Jews” and ignore the threat as if it’s not happening to their own community. What used to be a strength of the Jewish people – standing loudly in unison in response to threats – is becoming a weakness.

### We Need Intra-Faith Peace, and If Not Now, When?

Immanuel Kant once wrote that

“[T]he greatest evil that can oppress civilized peoples derives from *wars*, not indeed, so much from actual present or past wars, as from the never-ending and constantly increasing *arming* for future war. To this, all of the nation’s powers are devoted, as are all those fruits of its culture that could be used to build a still greater culture; freedom will in many areas be largely destroyed, and the nation’s motherly care for individual members will be changed into pitilessly hard demands that will be justified by concern over external dangers.”

This passage illustrates what should already have been obvious – that the modern state of Israel has never been at peace. The Palestinians who resided in the Land at the time of Israel’s inception have never bought into the notion of a “Jewish State” and have used the full panoply of options available to resist such a state. Even the movement of Palestinian non-violence frequently goes by the name of “the resistance.” Somehow the state of Israel has survived, seemingly miraculously at times, but not without suffering a tremendous toll on its national spirit. As Kant points out, its citizens cannot be free in such an environment. They are far too fearful to experience the tranquility needed for full self-expression, for fear can enslave us like nothing else. Perpetual war creates a siege mentality antithetical to the spirit of compromise and love. It’s a formula for circling the wagons and, indeed, my Israeli brothers and sisters are doing just that by embracing one right-wing government after another over the past two decades.

Focusing on Kant’s insight could go a long way to mending the breach within the Jewish community. Kant points to the trauma inherent in living in any nation (like Israel) that is consumed by the constant threat of armed conflict. Leftists who neglect to heed his wisdom continue to make the mistake of seeing Israeli Jews simply as “people of privilege” who can be expected to behave as if they lived an affluent, low-stress life in Boston, Bethesda or Beverly Hills. Given the way the U.S.A. reacted to 9/11, Americans are in no position to look down their noses at Israelis when it comes to the way people respond to traumatic military threats.

Similarly, right-wingers who ignore Kant’s point may be continuing to peddle the shibboleth that Israel is doing everything in its power to make peace with and nurture the Palestinians, whose violent nature renders them incorrigible as potential partners for peace. The truth is that Israel, reflecting the trauma of its perpetual-war status, has hardly been behaving like a people of peace.



Its government and its soldiers are often ruthless to the Palestinians, and many Israelis have reached the point where they've given up on a two-state solution and would be content to allow the Palestinians to remain stateless in perpetuity. It is tragic enough to fight over a homeland with another people by kicking them out of their homes and turning them into refugees, but once we wash our hands of responsibility for their indefinite statelessness, we compound the tragedy and open ourselves up to the charge of callousness or even imperialism. And yet, as was suggested above, for comfortable Americans and Brits to expect Israelis to let down their shields and sing kumbaya at every possible opportunity is to ignore how traumatic it is to live in any country that has been at war from its inception to the present. Peace breeds peacefulness, war breeds combativeness, and war is all Israel knows. It is time, then, to think of the Israelis realistically, rather than either romantically or condescendingly. It is time, in fact, that we show compassion to the Israelis and Palestinians alike, for they all live in a war zone, and you don't have to be a Kant to realize the toll that this takes on the human spirit.

One of my favorite descriptions of Judaism is that it is "three parts idealism and two parts pragmatism, or is it the other way around?" We balance those two characteristics constantly, and it is perhaps the striving to achieve that balance that frames our essence as a people. As people of pragmatism, we are necessarily people of action. And this is where the "if not now, when?" comes into the equation. The Jewish community has reached the point where it needs to make a fateful choice about whether we still want to stand together as a family or are willing to splinter off into factions that fundamentally oppose one another. Before we can talk about making peace with the Palestinians, perhaps we should concentrate on trying to make peace with each other. That begins with an exercise to appreciate where our fellow Jews are coming from and, where possible, to embrace their values as our own, even if we recognize that we may vary in the extent to which we emphasize different values.

It is no coincidence that one of the most dynamic movements in the Jewish world today is the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. The founder of that movement, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, distinguished himself among ultra-Orthodox Jewish leaders in beseeching his adherents to warmly welcome non-Orthodox Jews as part of the Jewish family. Rabbi Schneerson and his followers hold plenty of views that progressive Jews like me view to be antiquated, and he ran a movement devoted largely to persuading non-Orthodox Jews to become Chabadniks, so his movement is hardly a role model when it comes to inter-group dialogue. Yet we should not soon forget that Rabbi Schneerson is a shining light in the way he preached love and connection. If only the rest of us could do the same right now, that would heal a thousand wounds.

Speaking personally, I received a great gift in 1981 when, as a recent college graduate, I went to Jerusalem and was taken in by an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva. I entered as an atheist-turned-agnostic. I left as a devout religious Jew for life, albeit not an Orthodox one. With the passage of time, I've remained on the political left on most issues and continue to oppose the West Bank settlements with every fiber of my being, positions I can't imagine would be popular at my former yeshiva. But I'll never forget the service the yeshiva rabbis did in helping me appreciate religious Judaism in general and the Holy Name in particular. They completely changed my life. So I have no trouble embracing the ultra-Orthodox Jews and others who cleave to the Jewish

narrative as my own brothers and sisters, even though we strike a different balance on various important issues.

My hope is that wherever you fall on the debates discussed in this essay, you recognize that for millennia, the Jewish people survived under the harshest of circumstances by clinging to what it is we share. While we still have much in common, we are now becoming so obsessed with our differences that they are blinding us to everything else. So what do you say we let go of that obsession? What do you say we embrace our co-religionists and try to understand their perspectives as compassionately as if we were encountering someone from a different faith or culture? We owe this to our ancestors who fought so valiantly over the millennia to keep the Jewish civilization together. And we owe it to our children who depend on us to unify against scourges like anti-Semitism.

Take it from an experienced member of the interfaith movement – sometimes *intrafaith* dialogue is every bit as vital as *interfaith* dialogue. At least in the Jewish community, today is one of those times.