

**Rabbi Michael M. Cohen**

Writing in 1942 Martin Buber wrote in his essay "On Hebrew Humanism": "Israel is not a nation like other nations, no matter how much its representatives have wished it during certain eras. Israel is a people like no other, for it is the only people in the world which, from its earliest beginnings, has been both a nation and a religious community."

That double component of our identity compliments who we are, as well as being the cause of tension, and for some confusion. What Kaplan offers, in this case of marriage, is being Jewish in the Jewish state is a condition where the national aspect of that identity takes greater precedence over the religious composition of that

identity. In his eyes, in a nation there are no restrictions on who you can marry based on your religious or national differences - for Kaplan that included the Jewish State, as Jewish is also a political identity for him. Such an orientation opens many possibilities for the institutions and laws of the Jewish State.

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**Rabbi Gail Shuster-Bouskila**

Beyond the resistance to changes in the balance of power between the Israeli Supreme Court, the Knesset and the government, many "middle of the road" Israelis wonder about the possibility of Israeli non-orthodox life under increasingly centralized fundamentalist religious rule. I am very sympathetic to their concerns. Recently I have turned to the writings of Mordecai Kaplan for additional

encouragement to join with them in protest.

While Kaplan was at times ambivalent about classical Zionism, he was at all times fully devoted to the ethical ideals that he believed were incumbent upon every Jew in every place—and that includes the State of Israel. It was in these ethical ideals, the sum and substance of Jewish peoplehood, that Jewish unity lay and on which Jewish survival depended. (Mel Scult interpreting Kaplan). There is an ethical core to the concerns of "the middle of the road" that I believe Kaplan would applaud.

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**Rabbi Barbara Penzner**

As allies of Israel, we might offer perspective to help heal the historic fissures in Israeli society. These rifts are rooted in the experiences and attitudes of both waves of immigrants and refugees, and those who have lived on the land for generations. Young secular Israelis today argue that Jewish and Israeli identity need to be uncoupled from religious identity and practice. A new New Zionism must ask questions to help imagine a shared civil society for the future, drawing on the past. What would distinguish Israel as a country if it were not a Jewish state?

Drawing on Kaplan's ideas, a new New Zionism demands a reckoning with the meaning of peoplehood

and Judaism as a civilization. Can the Jews of Israel come together in the name of peoplehood? ...Is peoplehood large enough to encompass Israeli citizens who are not Jews? ...Can the State of Israel understand itself as part of a civilization that encompasses all Jews secular as well as religious?..

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**Dr. Nadav S. Berman**

The ongoing democracy crisis in Israel, which started in winter 2023, concerns the question of Israel's constitutional structure, as well as several foundational problems with which Israeli society has already grappled for a long period: the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict, religion and state (or Judaism and democracy), environmental issues, over-population, and more. Most of

these problems were known to Mordecai M. Kaplan, one of the main Jewish thinkers of the 20th century.

Though Kaplan did not focus on the question of Israel's constitutional structure, his writing may shed some light about the present democracy crisis. For Kaplan, similar to John Dewey, democracy is more than a mechanism: it is a civilization, a civilizing and educational process, and a moral ethos predicated on religious beliefs, and on prophetic hope.

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*When our work is done,  
I believe that a Jewish  
citizen, namely, a citizen  
of the Jewish State will not  
be forbidden to marry a  
foreigner. She will be  
politically Jewish,  
irrespective of her  
religion...Incidentally, you  
could advance some  
striking precedents: if I am  
not mistaken, Moses was  
married to a Midianite.*

*—Kaplan quoting  
Theodor Herzl*