



THE INSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENTIAL JEWISH EDUCATION

Autonomy and Attachment: Creating Foundations for Bridging American and Israeli Jewry

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

At the request of UJA Federation of New York, M²: The Institute of Experiential Jewish Education has recently conducted a consultancy project related to the relationship between American and Israeli Jewish communities; to understand and analyze the current relationship; to stimulate new discourse grounded in concepts from the domain of psychology; and to begin identifying possible directions that would bring these two communities closer together.

Using a methodology of *Conceptual Research* – an approach best suited for researching the validity and salience of conceptual hypotheses, and using focus groups and think tanks, the consultancy addressed a series of questions and issues related to the assumptions, purpose, and conditions involved in the relationship between American and Israeli Jewry, while using concepts from relational psychology.

Relationships Between Israeli and American Jewry: A Psychological Perspective

We suggest that the following concepts drawn from the domain of psychology offer a new way of analyzing, and perhaps intervening in, the relationship between American and Israeli Jewish communities:

- **Autonomy and Attachment** – We perceive the relationship between the two communities as one that is constantly navigating the balance (or imbalance) between the natural human drive towards autonomy and desire for attachment. We see the ways that both sides have aspired to both autonomy and attachment over time and recognize the frustrations and anger that exist today as a result of expectations and needs that are not aligned, or even spoken of.
- **Differentiation** – In the context of relationships, differentiation is the dynamic process through which a person can live in close proximity to a partner and still maintain a separate sense of self. We posit that, in this case, neither community has a “solid sense of self”, resulting in frustration, guilt and “emotional gridlock”.
- **Narrative Psychology** – Narrative psychology refers to a cluster of approaches that focus on the ways that individuals construct their own stories, as a way to build meaning. In this context it suggests that both sides have not had the opportunity, or the will, to tell their own and listen to each other’s narratives, and provides the opening for building meaning and interdependence rather than separation.

Findings for Future Discussion

Based on the differing ways in which the Israeli and American groups responded to the psychological concepts we presented – the Americans finding the ideas much more resonant in general than the Israelis – we deduced the following understandings:

- The Israelis we engaged with felt a stronger sense of autonomy with a lower desire for attachment than the Americans. Therefore, Israel is, perhaps counter-intuitively, controlling the relationship due to its lower level of desire.
- We understand the relationship as being in the state of emotional gridlock, with neither side able to move outside its own needs, desires or positions. Raising differentiation would neutralize the frustration on both sides.
- The tension often expressed between “American Jews” on one side and “Israeli Jews” or the “Israeli government” on the other, frames the relationship in terms of an (albeit undefined) subject-object and does not encourage listening, personal encounter and nuance. Recasting the relationship using narrative psychology, however, allows for dialogue and meaningful encounter.
- Knowledge of each other is helpful but not sufficient to build relationship. We found varying degrees of knowledge on both sides, of the other side, and discovered no correlation between knowledge and commitment to the relationship.
- Participants expressed pain, anger and frustration about the ways their counterparts exert power in the relationship, albeit in different ways. Nevertheless, the preoccupation with power, and particularly with the power wielded by means of American money, is a critical part of the relationship and requires open attention and discussion.
- Israelis, and even more significantly American Jews seemingly do not possess a solid sense of self, and as a result struggle to be independent and close at the same time.
- From a methodological perspective, we found that using play and humor helped significantly in creating a meaningful conversation and reduced the anxiety that having such a conversation appeared to cause.

Conclusions

We are both energized and humbled by our involvement in this process. We believe that there is much to still be learned from the domain of psychology that can shed new light on the critical, but much criticized, relationship between American and Israeli Jewish communities. We submit our suggestions, findings and questions in a spirit of inquiry and hope that the conversation that will be fueled by this report will, indeed, lead to new initiatives and directions for the good of both communities and the whole Jewish People.

[A] BACKGROUND: BALANCING AUTONOMY AND ATTACHMENT

One of the core priorities of UJA Federation of New York has been, and continues to be, the fostering and strengthening of the deep bonds between the American and Israeli Jewish communities. Indeed, many decades of work and investment have gone into this evolving project, and it is within this context, and with modest but hopeful expectations, that M²: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education is now seeking to contribute to this undertaking.

At the request of UJA Federation of New York, M² has recently conducted a consultancy project consisting of focus groups and think tanks in order to understand and analyze the key factors that have contributed to the current situation; to stimulate new discourse in both communities grounded in concepts brought from the domain of psychology; and, through an ideation exercise, to identify possible directions that would bring these two communities closer together.

This report outlines the work that M² has done, the components of the project, and the core findings. It is submitted in the spirit of invitation to further conversation and it is hoped that it will function as a catalyst for new ideas and practical interventions in this field. In Appendix [E] we also include a limited number of recommendations based on our findings, as a prompt for further ideas.

[B] OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES: DIGGING, THEN PLANTING

Through a series of convenings, conversations, and reports that will be described in detail below, our specific goals were to accomplish the following:

1. **Articulation of assumptions:** Bringing to light what each community assumes about how the other side understands the relationship—the needs it serves and the value it adds.
2. **Clarity of purpose:** Identifying the value of a relationship between Israeli and American Jewish communities, to the extent it is in fact deemed valuable.
3. **Articulation of conditions:** Exploring what each community needs to understand about the attributes, characteristics, and value propositions of the other.
4. **Strategies for making these conditions known:** Outlining the strategies for making the above understandings visible within each community.
5. **Digging deeper:** Introducing concepts from the domain of psychology, rather than relying on familiar concepts drawn from sociology or social studies, and applying them to the topic in order to approach the long-running discussion from a fresh perspective.
6. **Planting new seeds:** Exploring what a realistic, achievable, and mature relationship between these two communities looks like, and how close or far away they are from the reality of such a relationship.
7. **Imagining next steps:** Identifying how we might get closer to that notion of a healthy and mature relationship in the short and long term. This last goal, relating to future recommendations, is not included in the main report, but attached in Appendix [E] as an invitation for more substantive further conversation with stakeholders and leaders.

[C] METHODOLOGY AND INTERVENTIONS

To accomplish these objectives, M² developed a process of conceptual research that included focus groups and think tanks, as described below. Unlike empirical research, which focuses on data-gathering and experimentation, conceptual research is the development of new concepts and hypotheses through conceptualization, observation and the analysis of ideas¹. Adopting the conceptual research methodology, we proposed a hypothesis regarding the relationship between Israeli and American Jewish communities and examined its validity and salience in discussion with a various groups of interested informants.

Our process consisted of the following steps:

1. Developing a baseline: M² conducted a survey of recent literature, including mapping and data about American-Israeli Jewish relationships, with the goal of providing a baseline for all subsequent components of this project. Recent UJA-NY research was a useful resource. The literature review that resulted from this stage is included below, in Section [D].

2. Focus groups: As preparation for the think tanks (see stage 3), M² convened conversations with a range of Israeli activists, educators, and psychologists. A list of those consulted is included as Appendix [A]. The conversations were held as follows:

A. Focused consultations with psychologists specializing in relationships (both individual and group) to gain feedback on using psychological language and to extract the most relevant concepts that could be used with the think tanks.

B. Focus group of Israelis, which included interested and thoughtful laypeople, whose perspectives as “outsiders” were highly instructive. During the focus groups, we asked participants to reflect on their own relationship to the American Jewish community and the relevance of that community to their lives, and to generate questions they would want to ask the other side.

Despite our original intention to convene a parallel focus group of Americans, we found that this stage was not necessary, as the American think tank provided significant data that we used for the Israeli think tank.

3. Think tanks: Following the focus groups, M² convened two think tanks — one in New York for American thought leaders and one in Herzliya for their Israeli counterparts. Each group comprised approximately 20 individuals representing a broad range of expertise and involvement in this area, including academics, educators, public officials, community activists, and young people. A list of participants is included in Appendix [C].

Each think tank spent a full day discussing these issues through the lens of psychological concepts, using a variety of experiential techniques designed to stimulate conversation and new insights. The schedules for the think tanks are included here in Appendix [D].

¹ For more information about Conceptual Research and how it differs from empirical research, see <https://www.reseapro.com/blog/2012/05/conceptual-vs-empirical-research/>

[D] LITERATURE REVIEW

A robust body of literature on contemporary Israel-US Jewry relations has been published over the past decade, including research studies initiated by UJA Federation of New York. As a starting point for this consultancy, we conducted a review of this literature, combing the key points from the relevant empirical research with our own experience and knowledge about the topic at hand. Thus, we were able to build from previous research and contribute new insights into Israel-US Jewry relations rather than duplicate work that had already been done.

In reviewing current literature² on Israel-US Jewry relations, we found a clear emphasis on demographics and quantitative surveys. This methodological approach is helpful in identifying large trends within and between two large social groups, as well as in obtaining objective data in a subject that easily veers into the personal and subjective.

It seems that this latter advantage is related to a main objective of many of the researchers on this topic; that is, answering the question: what do people think, feel, believe, and do with regard to Israel-US Jewry relations? The plural “people” here is key: the concern is less on individual motives, the human “why” of a particular belief, and more on larger sociological trends.

In our review, we were able to identify several trends and ideas, which served as starting points for our own initiative. The topics below summarize our findings.

a. Differences in Classification of One’s Jewishness

Jews in each country have different perspectives on “authentic” Judaism. In Israel, authenticity is connected to traditional modes of expression, leading to a bifurcated sense of Jewish life; an “orthodox or nothing” attitude. In America, authenticity is tied to one of a number of formal, institutional movements/denominations that may not prioritize traditional expressions of Jewishness. Due to these differences, language around categorization of one’s Jewish identity may differ between countries: an Israeli Jew and an American Jew might not be talking about the same thing when they use the word “religious,” for example.

b. Differences in How Judaism Is Worked into Mainstream Life

For Israeli Jews living in a majority Jewish county, Judaism is integrated holistically into the mainstream culture of society. Judaism is engaged in more organic, community-minded, and informal ways than it is by American Jews, for whom it is something separate from the mainstream culture of their country. In some ways, this makes religious expression “simpler” for Israeli Jews than for their American counterparts. Israeli Jews may perform religious acts, such as having a *Seder* or building a *sukkah*, for reasons that are socially mainstreamed, whereas in North America, those same acts might be more laden with particularistic religious contexts.

² Appendix [B] references the literature that informed this review.

This also makes religious expression more complicated for Israelis since religious acts are tied to the nation's complicated socio-political discourse and potentially seen as a statement that goes beyond an individual's religious beliefs.

c. Differences in Opinions on the Palestinian Conflict

Israeli Jews in general are less optimistic about a two-state solution than American Jews are. The former are more supportive of settlements and are more likely to advocate for stronger support of Israel from the US. This is a trend that holds across lines of religious observance. Orthodox Jews in Israel hold these opinions more than Orthodox Jews in America, and non-Orthodox Jews in Israel hold these opinions more than non-Orthodox Jews in America. Surprisingly, Israeli Jews are more conservative when it comes to the Palestinian conflict; fewer Israeli Jews note security issues as the main problem facing Israel than do American Jews.

d. Shared Feelings of Connection Between Countries

Despite the differences described above, research indicates that a majority of Jews in both Israel and America feel an attachment to Jews in the opposite country. Though the extent of these feelings of attachment differs based on political ideology, religious beliefs, age, and other demographic factors, a significant population of Jews in each country recognizes the importance of a thriving Jewish community in both Israel and the diaspora.

[E] RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ISRAELI AND AMERICAN JEWRY: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In light of the demographically focused work that has been done, we consciously moved in a different direction, focusing on psychological discourse and how it can inform us. In contrast to the most influential studies that have come out recently about the relationship between Israel and American Jewry, we have focused on the human level — listening to personal narratives from members of both groups. In addition, even though the use of the term “relationship” to describe the connection between American and Israeli Jewish communities is not new, to the best of our knowledge, the notion of a relationship from a psychological perspective has never been applied directly to this topic.

Thus, we put the notion of relationship at the center of our work, considering the needs, desires, and roles of each side in the relationship as a way to analyze the current reality and prescribe directions for the future. Through our research and consultations with psychologists whose expertise is in both group and individual psychology, we extracted several core concepts relating to relationships that we found relevant and useful to apply in this context.

It is important to note that M² does not focus primarily on psychology, nor are any of its staff professionally trained in this domain. As noted above, our goal was to identify ideas that could be useful and encourage new ways of thinking rather than to become experts in the field itself. In line with the approach of Conceptual Research, we suggest these ideas as a working hypothesis that prompts further discussion and can energize the field into new directions in the future.

What follows are three concepts from the domain of psychology whose application we found most beneficial for the purpose of our work:

a. Autonomy and Attachment

Core idea: Psychologists consider the development of autonomy to be a core task of human development. Children, of course, start life as completely dependent and develop the capacity to be autonomous throughout their maturation. Individuals continue to navigate the balance between autonomy and attachment throughout their adult life. Complexity is added when two individuals in a relationship lack alignment in their respective desires for attachment and autonomy.

One of the most important things in life is becoming a solid individual. And another important thing is to have meaningful relationships. Two of the most powerful human drives are our urge to control our own lives (autonomy), and our urge for relationship with others (attachment). One of the biggest tasks of adulthood is being able to balance these two urges, and one of the most common problems is having too much of one, and not enough of the other. People often feel claustrophobic or

*controlled in committed relationships, or feel like they can't be their true self in their relationships, or feel like their sense of self is starting to disappear and they don't know who they are any more. Others are constantly worried about "abandonment," or "safety and security," and constantly press their partner for "commitment" and "unconditional love."*³

Application: Applying this concept to American and Israeli relations, we perceive the relationship between the two communities as one that is constantly navigating the balance (or imbalance) between the desire for autonomy and the desire for attachment. At times these desires have been aligned, and at times they have not. Some might argue that the creation of the State of Israel itself was an expression of autonomy as it broke away to create its own identity, separate from the communities of the diaspora.

We can look at the ways that both sides have aspired to both autonomy and attachment over time and see the frustrations and anger that exist today as a result of expectations and needs that are not aligned, or even spoken of.

Today, if the American Jewish community seeks a greater attachment to Israel, but Israel is actually aspiring to be more autonomous — free of dependence on, or with less responsibility for, Jewish communities abroad — it is likely to lead to frustration, anger, and a host of other negative emotions, even as the relationship evolves. Conversely, if the American Jewish community desires more autonomy, expressed through self-definitions around issues of Jewish identity and community, while Israel is seeking greater attachment, specifically around issues of security and loyalty to sovereign ruling, it is likely to lead to anxiety and disappointment.

What is important to note, however, is that the often-asynchronous desires for attachment or autonomy are normal and common developments within a relationship; accepting each other — rather than trying to change each other — might prove to be a better strategy, even when it gets really hard.

In order to explore and test this concept, we developed a series of experiential tasks for think tank participants, encouraging them to explore the relevance of these frames as well as the advantages and disadvantages of autonomy and attachment. Further, we ran exercises designed to encourage participants to develop empathy toward the needs of each community, with the intention of examining the extent to which this frame might defuse the tensions that exist within the relationship.

³ David Schnarch, PhD, "Passionate Marriage: Keeping Love and Intimacy Alive in Committed Relationships," 2009; and "Intimacy and Desire," 2011.

b. Differentiation

Core idea: Differentiation is another highly suggestive concept drawn from the domain of couples therapy and written about extensively by Dr. David Schnarch. In the context of relationships, as defined by Schnarch, differentiation is the dynamic process through which a person can live in close proximity to a partner and still maintain a separate sense of self.

The ability to balance our needs for autonomy and attachment is called differentiation. Differentiation is a scientific process that occurs in all species. For humans, it is about becoming more of a unique individual and a solid person through relationships with others.⁴

Differentiation is the key to mutuality; as a perspective and a mindset, it offers a solution to the central struggle of any long-term relationship: going forward with one's own self-development while being concerned with the other's happiness and well-being. Differentiation allows each person to function independently *and* interdependently.

Well-differentiated people can stay connected with those who disagree with them and still "know who they are." They don't have to leave the situation to hold on to their sense of self. When we are poorly differentiated, our identity is constructed out of what's called *a reflected sense of self*. We need continual contact, validation, consensus (or disagreement) from others.

In order for an individual in a relationship to develop and maintain a high level of differentiation from his or her partner, that individual must cultivate what Schnarch calls the "Four Points of Balance":

- Solid Flexible Self — the ability to hold on to one's own sense of self while making room for others.
- Quiet Mind and Calm Heart — the ability to handle one's own emotional inner world, including self-control and the ability to self-soothe.
- Grounded Responding — the ability to modulate responses to people and situations.
- Meaningful Endurance — the capacity to tolerate pain for growth, to be resilient and stick with it.

⁴ Dr. David Schnarch. See also www.crucibletherapy.com.

Schnarch also demonstrates that in all relationships, when the two parties are in conflict, it is the “low desire partner” (i.e., the partner who is least in favor of a particular action) who defines the response of the couple as a whole. The “high desire partner” may have a passionate commitment to a particular action but is blocked by the level of desire of his or her partner. Further, when the couple is caught in a cycle of misalignment of their needs (one party wants more dependence, the other more autonomy), and they are unwilling or unable to break out of this cycle, they are caught in emotional gridlock. This situation can only be solved if one side raises his or her own level of differentiation or gives up something he or she holds dear.

Application: The notion of differentiation can be observed in the context of the relationship between Israel and North America in a number of ways: We might posit that while both sides are committed to a relationship, they are unable to maintain closeness when one side attempts to exercise self-determination. We also might suggest that if American Jews are more interested in a strong relationship with Israel, but that desire is not reciprocated, it is ultimately the level of interest of Israel (the low desire partner) that defines the nature of the relationship. And because there is no alignment in desire, the result is expressed through frustration, guilt, and anger on both sides. We are then in the situation that Schnarch calls emotional gridlock.

Another possible application suggests that each community has not succeeded in cultivating a solid sense of self, which is key to a healthy relationship. Rather, each community possess characteristics of a “reflected sense of self” — defining themselves based on how they perceive that the other sees them, or based on how they want to be seen by the other. When we encounter discourse in which one or both sides express anger or frustration, it seems that we are unable to respond with calm understanding of the other side (grounded responding) or that we are unable to tolerate pain in service of the relationship (meaningful endurance). In this case, each side can raise its level of differentiation in order to maintain closeness while maintaining a solid sense of self that is not molded by how the other views them or wants them to be.

In order to explore the relevance and salience of this concept, we introduced think tank participants to the notion of differentiation and the Four Points of Balance. We challenged them to consider various elements of the current relationship between Israel and American Jewry through these prisms, and the extent to which these viewpoints help both explain and move the needle on some of the current struggles within the relationship.

4. Core idea: Narrative psychology refers to a cluster of approaches in the domain of psychology that focus on the ways that individuals construct their own (and others’) stories, as a way to build meaning and understand their own experiences. Narrative psychologists use in-depth interviews to help their clients tell their own stories, provide detailed accounts of their lives and experiences, and then consider, interpret, and analyze those narratives. As the narrative approach has developed, it has focused on relationships and sees relationships as core components of the stories that all individuals tell.

Along with the “narrative turn” in the social sciences has come a “relational turn” in the understanding of human lives. The late 20th-century critique of the social science depiction of human beings as (desirably) autonomous, individuated and self-reliant has given way to a view of people as interrelated, interdependent, and mutually constructive of one another.⁵

Thus, through stories about ourselves and our relationships with others, we construct our lives, our sense of self, and ultimately the way we engage in the world. A core component of narrative psychology is the ability to listen to the story of the narrator with an open mind, empathy, and no judgment; to hold a space in which a person can retell his or her story and gain new understandings as a result.

One of the greatest contributions of narrative psychology is that it defuses tensions that often stifle the growth of relationships. By affording the other person the space to share his or her own narrative, one can develop and cultivate a deep empathy toward it. Sharing narratives, and listening deeply to them, defuses the tensions often caused when either side in the relationship is focused on claiming her or his independence.

Application: Applying the processes of narrative psychology to the relationship between Israel and American Jewry provides a new lens through which to view each community’s desire for autonomy and self-definition. Instead of viewing this desire as a rebellious act of independence, when placed in context of narrator and listener, it can be viewed as a process of interdependence and mutual construction.

This approach also suggests that both sides have not had the opportunity, and perhaps also the will, to listen to each other’s narratives. Perhaps they need new vehicles to tell and share their own stories and to develop the capacities to listen more deeply.

Recognizing the potential impact that narrative psychology can have, and quite possibly already has, on the relationship between Israel and American Jewry, we exercised some of these ideas in the think tanks and used them to analyze our findings.

* * *

Having identified and articulated these psychological concepts and recognizing their potential utility, we used the think tanks to test them out. What follows are our findings, specifically as they relate to our initial objectives outlined in [B].

⁵ From Josselson, R., Lieblich, A., and McAdams, D., “The Meaning of Others: Narrative Studies of Relationships,” American Psychological Association, 2007.

[F] APPLYING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LENSES TO THE ASSUMPTIONS, PURPOSE, AND CONDITIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Our goals for the consultancy were to address a series of questions and issues related to the assumptions, purpose, and conditions involved in the relationship between American and Israeli Jewry, while using the concepts from relational psychology. What follows are our findings:

[1] Assumptions

a. Autonomy and Anxiety

In the think tanks, we found that both sides carry strong assumptions about the other community and the connection that exists between them. For example, we heard beliefs and convictions from each side that said in effect that if the other side doesn't change, it will be in existential danger. On the Israeli side, we heard assumptions that the Americans are close to wiping themselves out by assimilating. On the American side, we heard that the democratic State of Israel is under imminent threat by anti-democratic forces, specifically around issues of religious pluralism and the occupation. In context of the psychological terms we have introduced, it is like both sides are asserting, "if you don't become more like me, you will cease to exist." This is a very strong and visceral response to the autonomy each side is exercising, coupled with an anxiety that stems from the lack of desire for attachment that each side is experiencing from the other.

In terms of the actual existence of a relationship between the two communities, we heard that for Americans a significant relationship with Israeli Jews exists and is important. This assumption was unstated but clearly present, notably because it was not challenged. On the Israeli side, while there was an assumption that such a relationship is present and to an extent desirable, the significance of the relationship was explicitly challenged — both in terms of its value and in terms of its necessity.

The differences in these assumptions became clear as we introduced the psychological concepts. Overall, participants found them to be useful and generative, but with limitations. The American participants found these concepts to be stimulating and even cathartic. They provided a frame for a conversation that held less judgment and more empathy and understanding. Participants were able to explore challenging aspects of the relationship without feeling threatened or defensive. Moreover, the psychological lens afforded them the opportunity to place their experiences, perspectives, and ideas in a framework that felt familiar, helpful, and even comforting. Viewing their approach to the relationship as a normal human desire for both attachment and autonomy seemed to offer a "normalizing" effect. In the words of an American think tank participant:

The lens of high and low desire partners and attachment and autonomy offers a challenging yet refreshing opportunity to reflect on each of our unique individual, familial, professional, and communal relationships to the State of Israel and Jews in the State of Israel — with or without a connection to the national entity.

The Israelis, however, were not as receptive to these ideas. They challenged the significance of the relationship, with most participants claiming that it does not hold great value for them. Additionally, they repeatedly compared this relationship with other relationships that hold far greater significance, such as relationships with Arabs or with other groups within Israeli society. Evidently, the relationship with American Jewry occupies Israelis very little. Even the Israelis with the strongest roots in and knowledge of North America were clear that the relationship between American and Israeli Jews is not their first priority, when considered against the other weighty issues they are involved in.

Applying the psychological language with the Israeli group proved to be of tremendous value in a way that was completely opposite to its relevance for the American group: The Israelis simply could not connect to the majority of it! It felt foreign, unfamiliar, and even strange for many of them to utilize psychological language in describing their relationship with American Jewry.

b. Low Desire and Emotional Gridlock

We can now deduce two core understandings: In context of their relationship with their American counterparts, Israelis feel a far stronger sense of autonomy with very little desire for attachment. Israel is, overall, the “low desire” partner in this relationship, which means that it is the party that is controlling the relationship. Thus, the psychological frames we adopted posit that Israel is not controlling the relationship because it has more power than American Jewry; it is controlling the relationship because it desires it less.

Further, we find that Israeli and American Jews are in a state of emotional gridlock, with neither side able to move outside its own desires, needs, or positions, nor ready to pay the price of giving up ideas or commitments that are dear to them, or to admit to a level of emotional vulnerability that might break the gridlock.

Typically, when in a state of emotional gridlock, the parties in the relationship perceive that they have two options: to walk away and give up the relationship, or to give in and lose their sense of self. Differentiation argues for a third option: to stay close and hold on to oneself. This requires cultivation of the Four Points of Balance elucidated above. In our recommendations, we suggest some strategies for how this might be accomplished.

[2] Purpose

a. Subject and Object

Exploring the question of purpose and value in the relationship between American Jewry and Israel through the psychological lens provided great insights. In our literature review (section [D]), we concluded that many studies on this subject took a sociological standpoint, investigating the relationship through a subject-object viewpoint. For example, an American Jew (a subject) might be asked about his attitudes toward a certain action of the Israeli government (an object).

When introducing the psychological frame, the first and most immediate question raised was whom, actually, is this relationship between? Who are the subjects in the title “Building Bridges Between Israel and American Jews”? This question was asked multiple times in every setting we encountered and was present as the subtext of every conversation. On both sides of the ocean, participants struggled to identify the subjects in the relationship.

One of the contributions of narrative psychology is the concept that any relationship requires the presence of two subjects: the narrator and the listener. By virtue of being listened to, the narrator is able to articulate and share a compelling narrative about the whys and hows of the identity she inhabits.

As think tank participants grappled with the question of “whom am I in a relationship with?” we began to notice the problematic impact the subject-object lens has on both communities. Some individuals are experiencing enormous anger, aggression, and resentment over what is happening on the other side. These feelings can be aired in full force and with little consequence simply because there is no subject on the other side. There is no one on the other side to accept, reject, or respond to this anger. However, when inhabiting the psychological lens — that of subject-subject — the tension inherent to the confrontation is often defused because of the encounter between the subjects.

When we interviewed one of the founders of narrative psychology for this study, she spoke of the fraught conversations she has with her American cousin about Israel (she is Israeli). When asked how the field she pioneered — narrative psychology — might help defuse this tension, she contemplated for a while and finally responded: “I guess that all I want is to know that he, my cousin, understands me. I don’t need him to agree with me. I need him to understand.”

We can deduce from this that it’s impossible to explore the value and purpose within a relationship before articulating who the subjects in the relationship are.

b. Desires and Needs

There is a clear distinction between desires and needs within both communities. The *desires* that each community expressed were, by and large, what we would call “classic and romantic.” There is a desire to feel connected to the other: the notions of “one people” and “one family” are present in both communities, and it seems that both possess a vision of peoplehood.

The *needs* that each community expressed were, however, different. American participants seemed to need Israel to be for them an ideological haven, one which provides them with a sense of meaning and societal aspiration. Israeli participants seemed to need from North America support and resources to be able to actualize the projects they deem appropriate (social, religious, or otherwise). While one could argue that the needs are a particularistic expression of the overall desires, the concepts of desires and needs should not be conflated. It is true that the value and purpose of the relationship are shared, but the needs expressed by the two sides are vastly different and probably contribute to friction in the relationship.

Adopting the attachment and autonomy frame, we might suggest dealing with this friction with a great deal of patience. When a child begins developing an autonomous self, the needs of the child and the parent become different and at times conflictual. What will ultimately hold the relationship together is the cultivating and recalling of the initial desire to be connected. If that desire is there, it serves as the foundation for the relationship — even through challenges and conflicts. As Israeli and American Jewries each develop an autonomous and more highly differentiated self, it is natural that their attachments might become more transactional or even nonexistent. And while this is difficult to experience and witness, it might be a necessary step in “growing up,” so long as every so often each side is reminded of the foundational baseline.

It is worth noting that, overall, American Jewry does cultivate these desires, be it through Birthright or other similar initiatives. In Israel, this desire is not as present, and further action can be taken to cultivate the desires for connection among Israelis.

c. It’s Not “All or Nothing”!

Given the range of commitment to the relationship that we uncovered through the focus groups and think tanks, it is impossible to expect that everyone involved, on both sides, will share the same sense of purpose for the relationship.

Indeed, humans do not bring all of themselves into every relationship all the time. We have a broad range of relationships. To each, we bring different sides of ourselves, and we measure how much of ourselves we bring. There are very few significant relationships to which we bring most of ourselves most of the time. The relationship between Israeli and American Jews is not an all-or-nothing proposal. We can have a relationship filled with value and propose without bringing all aspects of ourselves into it.

[3] Conditions

a. Knowledge and Experiences

When considering the conditions necessary for a meaningful relationship between Israeli and American Jews, we hypothesized that knowledge of each other is a significant and necessary condition for strengthening the relationship.

In the focus group and think tanks, we asked the Americans and Israelis to share with us questions they would like to ask their counterparts. We discovered there were significant disparities in knowledge about the other side in both communities and uncovered lingering questions, usually unspoken, that reflect lack of understanding, particularly the Israelis' unfamiliarity with Jewish life in North America.

At the same time, we realized that knowledge is less important than we had expected and is not a prerequisite for commitment to the relationship, particularly on the Israeli side. We engaged with several people who, despite prolonged exposure to the other side, were not necessarily committed to the future of the relationship in the way we had expected. While knowledge about the other side might be important for a variety of reasons, there is no apparent correlation between knowledge and commitment to the relationship.

We would suggest, however, replacing knowledge with experience. The depth of relationships is not necessarily defined by how much we know about our partner. It is defined by the experiences shared. In the think tanks, we ran exercises that asked participants to imagine that Israeli and American Jews are going on a date. Dating does not only facilitate the gathering of information about one another, it is also the co-creation of joint experiences that form a sense of togetherness.

We conclude, therefore, that conditions for a meaningful relationship must include shared experiences. These experiences must shift from exclusively focusing on knowledge acquisition. They must engage additional domains as well: spiritual, emotional, physical, etc. This finding can influence the way *mifgash* programs are designed, or how a curriculum is written.

b. Power

Relationships are deeply influenced by the power either side possesses and how it exerts this power over the other. Negative exertion of this power, or negative perceptions of its exertion, can become a source of conflict and tension.

In both think tanks, participants expressed pain, anger, and frustration about the ways their counterparts exert power in the relationship. While the type of power exerted by each side is significantly different, the preoccupation with the impact of this power was equally present and heated. It is important to note that in various moments in each think tank, participants acknowledged the power their community possesses. However, neither community seemed to be aware of how deeply that power impacts their counterpart's perception of the relationship.

On the Israeli side, the role of financial power was a heated topic of conversation. This topic did not arise at all in the New York think tank, aside from a passing comment while role playing. It was clear to all the Israelis that their relationship with American Jews is deeply influenced by the fact that their work — be it the Zionist project in its totality or, more specifically, the critical work of NGOs in Israel — is often at the mercy of American Jews. The financial power wielded by American Jewry leads to enormous inequality and dependence, resulting in frustration, denial, and defensiveness. More significantly, having an honest relationship becomes very difficult, if not impossible, because of the shadow of financial dependency.

On the American side, the power that Israel wields in deciding who, within its boundaries, is accepted as a Jew causes tremendous grief and anger. Many participants in the American think tank expressed that it is very difficult for them, if not impossible, to have a relationship with an entity that does not accept them as a fellow Jew. This topic came up briefly at the Israeli think tank, and it was clear that the Israelis do not recognize the extent to which this impacts American Jews.

Viewing the role of power through the prism of psychology can be helpful. It is clear that the power that each side holds threatens the capacity of the other side to become more autonomous. Moreover, power creates a false sense of attachment. The attachment is not one of choice; it is one of dependence. Using narrative psychology might be useful here. Some of the power dynamics described here reflect a subject-object relationship (the Israeli Jew versus American philanthropy; the American Jew versus the system that is Israel). Shifting to a subject-subject relationship might defuse this tension. In such a scenario, what Americans are likely to discover is that the issue of Jewish identification is burning for many Israelis as much as it is for Americans, albeit in a different way. Conversely, what Israelis might discover is that Americans are as concerned as they are with the use and abuse of economic power and privilege, again in a different way.

c. Solid and Reflected Sense of Self

Another finding impacting the conditions of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry became apparent when exploring perceptions of self. David Schnarch argues that to become better differentiated, one must develop a solid sense of self. The more solid one's sense of self is, the freer one is to get close to and intimate with others. Conversely, a sense of self that is dependent and influenced by feedback from others (be it good or bad) is called a reflected sense of self. That feedback can make us feel better or worse about ourselves. When this sense of self is dominant, intimacy becomes dangerous, and we avoid it in different ways.

Many participants in the American think tank recognized that in the context of their relationship with Israel, they possess characteristics of individuals with a reflected sense of self. Concern over how Israel or Israelis might perceive them influences their Jewish self-conception. In fact, when summarizing the day, many think tank participants mentioned this as one of their most significant takeaways. One participant summarized it as follows:

The key to any healthy relationship, between individuals, families, and communities, is the development of a strong sense of self. This includes healthy self-respect and self-knowledge, and being grounded in your history, values, and relationships within and without your community. For a long time, there has been an imbalance in the Israel-diaspora relationship, and each side has its own extensional anxiety that it feels the other community does not acknowledge. It is important for each community to not impose its own value structure and desires on the other. However, the other side must also demand that its existence is acknowledged and seen. This is a condition of any healthy relationship.

d. Conversation, Levity, and Play

Over the course of working on this project, we found that two elements are helpful, if not necessary, to manage such a fraught and value-laden conversation. The first is the diversity of participants in the conversation. After both think tanks, participants reported that the most powerful part of the day was that 20 very diverse people, with very different communal roles and political opinions, were able to have a very productive, friendly, and even fun encounter with each other and this topic. At both think tanks, participants were also eager and curious to have a discussion with their counterparts in the other community. As one participant reported:

I was struck by the diversity of opinions within the room today, let alone the differences with our Israeli peers which certainly exist. The murkiness of American Jewish identity surely influences our larger problems with our Israeli brethren.

The ability to “play” in this topic was also significant. Several exercises involved role playing, movement, and elements of play: participants experimented with expressing opinions that they do not necessarily hold, were prompted to empathize with opposing positions, and were sent on “dates” with people very different from themselves. All of these components contributed to defusing the hardened positions typical of these conversations. Particularly in America, having a conversation about Israel, even in an ostensibly safe setting, is highly fraught and potentially risky for all involved. The level of anxiety about this is so high that offering a model for a conversation that values diversity and encourages play and humor is extremely valuable and potentially a powerful corrective to what has existed for so long.

[G] CONCLUSION

Through our conceptual research we discovered that there is still room for new thinking and energy in the field of American-Israeli relationships. We believe that our findings, as described here, can be a catalyst for further discussion and innovations in possible programmatic interventions. We are grateful for the opportunity to present and test our ideas and look forward to seeing them be debated, tested further and taken in new directions.

Appendix [a]

Participants in Focus Groups

Psychologists

Dr Sharon Almougy, Psychotherapist and Coach

Dr Assael Romanelli, CEO, Potential State Institute

Dr Shani Danielle and Dr Aharon Levi, IDC Hertzliya

Dr Amia Lieblich, Psychologist, Researcher and Author

Focus Groups of Israelis

February 21st, and February 22nd, 2018

Noga Brenner Samia - Vice President, Bina

Bezalel Cohen – Haredi activist, Educator

Avigail Cohen – Principal of Elementary School of the Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem

Dr Hagit Hacoheh Wolf – Researcher, Hebrew University

Yahel Halevi – High School student, Graduate of the Bronfman Fellowship

Yoav Heller - CEO, Maoz

Shiri Klayman – High School student, graduate of the Bronfman Fellowship

Appendix [b]

Literature Review – List of Reviewed Materials

Books:

- Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism*. NYU Press. 2013.
- Jonathan Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture*. Cambridge University Press. February 2015.

Primary Research/Policy Papers:

- The Pew Research Center, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews*. October 2013.
- Leonard Saxe, Michelle Shain, Graham Wright, Shahar Hecht, and Theodore Sasson, *Beyond 10 days: Parents, Gender, Marriage, and the Long-Term Impact of Birthright Israel*. Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University. December 2017.
- Shmuel Rosner and Inbal Hakman, *The Challenge of Peoplehood: Strengthening the Attachment of American Jews to Israel in the Time of the Distancing Discourse*. Jewish People Policy Institute. April 2012.
- The Reut Institute, *The Future of the Nation State of the Jewish People: Consolidation or Rupture?* March 2017.
- Alon Pinkas, *Israel: A Unifying or a Divisive Issue among American Jews?* The Ruderman Program for American Jewish Studies. 2017.
- Elan Ezrachi, *Israelis, American Jewry, and American Judaism: Analysis of Israeli Attitudes, Mapping of Interventions, and Reflections*. UJA-Federation of New York. February 2018.
- Steven M. Cohen, Mijal Bitton, Lisa Grant, Ezra Kopelowitz, Jack Ukeles, *Together and Apart: Israel Jews' Views on their Relationship to American Jews, Religious Pluralism and the Conflict with Palestinians*. UJA-Federation of New York. 2017.

Articles:

- The Pew Research Center, American and Israeli Jews: Twin portraits from Pew Research Center surveys. January 2017.
- Jared Sichel, At Federation's General Assembly, grappling with less authority and more division. The Jewish Journal. November 2015.
- Martin Kramer, Unspoken reasons for the American Jewish distancing from Israel. Mosaic Magazine. April 2016.
- Amanda Borschel-Dan, What happens when two Jews means two different peoplehoods? The Times of Israel. March 2016.
- Yair Sheleg, We Already Do Not Depend on You: Israel is on the rise and the diaspora is shrinking. NRG. June 2013.
- Michael Lipka, A closer look at Jewish identity in Israel and the U.S. The Pew Research Center. March 2016.
- Steven M. Cohen, The Shrinking Jewish middle- and what to do about it. Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, University of Michigan. 2017.

Appendix [c]

Participants in Think Tanks

New York – March 22, 2018

Netaly Ophir Flint	Partner, KONU: Growing and Provoking Leadership
Shira Koch Epstein	Executive Director, 14 th Street Y
Elana Stein Hain	Director of Faculty, Hartman Institute of North America
Arya Marvazy	Assistant Director, JQ International
Yehudit Feinstein-Mentesh	Regional Director, Israeli American Council
Amy Skopp Cooper	Associate Director National Ramah Commission
Yona Shem-Tov	Executive Director, Encounter
Lauren Cohen Fisher	Director of Israel Engagement, Harvard Hillel
Joey Eisman	Senior Program Manager for Global Engagement, BBYO
Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt	Life Editor, the Forward
Tamara Tweel	Director of Strategic Development, Hillel Office of Innovation
Mark Gottlieb	Senior Director, the Tikvah Fund
Aaron Dorfman	President, Lippman Kanfer Foundation
Angela Buchdahl	Senior Rabbi, Central Synagogue
Daniel Septimus	CEO, Sefaria
Shaul Magid	Professor of Jewish Studies, Indiana University
Doria Kahn	Student, NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study
Michael Novack	CEO, Kiosite; Board Member, M ²

Israel – April 10, 2018

Sharon Almougy	Psychotherapist and Coach
Shivi Greenfield	Director of Strategy, Jewish Agency for Israel
Dafna Yisrael	Director, Bronfman Fellowship Israel
No'a Gorlin	Associate Executive Director, ROI Community
Eldad Weil	CEO, Jerusalem Youth Center
David Mittelberg	Professor, Oranim College, Research Fellow, Monash University
Alex Rif	Founder, Dor veHetzi
Racheli Ivenboim	President, Movilot, CEO, Telem
Yotam Tulub	CEO, Bizchut; Author
Nir Levenberg	Student, Shalem College
Gary Levy	Dror Yisrael (Habonim)
Oshra Friedman	TV presenter
Uri Leventer Roberts	UJA Federation of New York
Assaf Orion	Senior Researcher, Institute for National Security Studies
Shimon Vaknin	Director of Secular Yeshiva in Beer Sheva
Anton Goodman	Director of Resource Development, The Abraham Fund
Ruthie Saragosti	UJA Federation of New York
Dana Talmi	Founder and CEO, Yahel
Naama Ore	Founder and Director, Collective Impact
Nevo Vaknin	Director, Bina Be'er Sheva
Ahraon Ariel Lavi	Director, Hakhel for Intentional Communities

Appendix [d]

Program Outlines for Think Tanks

"Autonomy and Attachment: Foundations for Bridging Israeli and American Jewry"

Thursday, March 22nd 2018 | UJA Federation of New York

The Think Tank will open an exploratory and interactive space for a group of 20 diverse Jewish professionals to engage in discussion about the dynamics of the relationship between Israeli and American Jewish communities. Our goal is to bring concepts drawn from psychology and apply them to the relationship that exists between Israeli and North America, test their utility and develop new directions for the future.

8:30-9:00	Breakfast and Arrivals
9:00-10:30	Act I: Prologue Setting the scene, introducing ourselves and framing the conversation
10:30-11:00	Break
11:00-1:00	Act II: Attachment and Autonomy Understanding and experiencing the tensions between attachment and autonomy, through embodied exercises and interventions
13:00-13:45	Lunch
13:45-15:00	Act III: Going on a Date (Re)-Discovering the magic in the relationship between Israel and the US
15:00-15:20	Break
15:20-16:45	Act IV: Differentiation Exploring the possible ways that our "Four Points of Balance" can help each party to heal themselves and the relationship
16:45-17:45	Act V: Epilogue Conceptualizing our learnings and directions for the future
17:45	Thank You and Lehitraot!

פורום ישראל

התקשרות ואוטונומיה: יסודות לגישור בין יהודי ישראל ליהודי ארה"ב

דן אכדיה, הרצליה | 10 באפריל 2018 – כ"ה ניסן תשע"ח

צוות החשיבה יפתח מרחב חקר אינטראקטיבי לקבוצה רבגונית של 20 פעילות ופעילים חברתיים, מנהיגי קהילה ומובילי דעת קהל, לדין בדינמיקה של היחסים בין ישראל לבין הקהילות היהודיות בארה"ב. מטרת הפורום הוא להציף מושגים ותפיסות אודות מערכות יחסים משדה הפסיכולוגיה, ולבחון האם וכיצד הם יכולים לשפוך אור על הבנת מערכת היחסים שבין יהודי ישראל וצפון אמריקה, וכן לבחון את התכליתיות היישומית שלהם.

הגעה וארוחת בוקר	8:00–8:30
מערכה ראשונה: פתיחה	8:30–10:30
הכנת הרקע, הכרות וקביעת המסגרת לדין	
הפסקה	10:30–11:00
מערכה שנייה: התקשרות ואוטונומיה	11:00–13:00
הבנת המתחים בין התקשרות לאוטונומיה והתנסות בהם באמצעות התערבויות ותרגילים להמחשה	
ארוחת צהריים	13:00–13:45
מערכה שלישית: יוצאים לדייט	13:45–14:45
הזדמנות לגלות (מחדש) את הקסם ביחסים שבין ישראל לארה"ב	
מערכה רביעית: מובחנות	14:45–16:00
ארבע נקודות האיזון ויכולתן לסייע לכל צד להשתפר ולשפר את היחסים	
מערכה חמישית: סיום	16:00–17:00
המשגה של מה שלמדנו וכיוונים לעתיד	
סיום משוער	17:00

Appendix [e]

STRATEGIES FOR DIGGING DEEPER AND PLANTING NEW SEEDS

The following strategies are suggested as programmatic directions, drawn from the findings of the focus groups and think tanks described in the main section of the report. They are broad and initial, and we hope they will serve as a springboard for more robust discussion and innovative programmatic interventions.

The first three recommendations are broadly strategic, suggesting how to recast the field in terms of new language, mindsets, and approaches. The last two recommendations are more programmatic in nature.

a. Shift Language and Focus on Subject-Subject

It is time to shift the language we use in relating to this topic. The language of “relationship between Israel and American Jewry” is not helpful, nor is the question “how do we build bridges between Israel and American Jewry?” Both of these articulations create a perception of a relationship between a subject and an object, and thereby promote tension and hostility, leaving little room for empathy and reconciliation. We recommend adopting the language of “global Jewry” in which there are a broad range of indicators for self-identification of individuals and groups, some of which might be geographic based. Shifting to this language significantly clarifies whom the relationships are actually between; for example, a Jewish social activist from Israel or observant Jews from Western countries.

b. Address and Change the Dynamics of Funding

We believe it is critical to address the dependence that comes with the current financial structure and the power dynamic it creates — specifically because we believe that it impacts the nature of the relationship. We suggest opening new discussions about how to neutralize some of the dependence that results from Israelis always being the recipients of funding. This might include sharing reasons for why UJA has agreed to fund certain projects; namely, what it is about these projects that UJA finds compelling; why UJA is investing in this sort of change; how this change might help UJA itself grow.

Another way to address this issue is to recognize that when Israelis take for granted the support they receive from American Jews, it significantly contributes to emotional gridlock. Having American Jews stop funding Israeli organizations all together for a time might yield positive results, as a deliberate attempt for both communities to increase their own differentiation.

c. Defuse the Tensions

In order to develop what Schnarch calls “meaningful endurance”: exercising patience, tolerance, and resilience when things get tough, we recommend normalizing, as much as possible, the tensions that exist and defusing them by focusing on other (less painful) issues. Working on projects of mutual interest, bringing together groups of Israelis and Americans around issues they have a shared passion for (professional or based on identity), and finding ways to modulate the discourse can all help. Talking about the relationship exacerbates the anger and frustration; working on other issues can perhaps be a more productive path that in the long run can cultivate patience and empathy.

d. Increase Differentiation, Alone and Together

Our work on this consultancy has led us to believe that, fundamentally, each side needs to raise its level of differentiation, meaning that it needs to develop a more solid and flexible sense of self, greater self-understanding, and independence. The basic principle for parties in a relationship that want to increase their differentiation is to “stay close and hold on to oneself”; in other words, remain committed to the relationship, not walk away, but also develop ways to be independent and less reliant on the emotional needs of the other. Achieving this would lead to a greater capacity to weather the difficulties in the relationship, as well as to greater self-confidence and self-reliance, which would open up new avenues for the relationship to develop, even in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

Following our suggestion to identify different types of subgroups within the totality of “global Jewry,” we recommend that UJA Federation of New York take a significant role in developing strategies that cultivate relationships among communities from both sides of the ocean who self-identify in *similar* ways (for example LGBTQ communities, communities from the former Soviet Union, communities with a passion for Jewish renewal, communities invested in environmentalism, communities bound by similar Jewish practices, etc.), and cultivating relationships among communities from both sides of the ocean who self-identify in *different* ways (for example, secular Jews together with religious ones, academics together with activists, etc.). The common denominator here is that the relationships are not built around groups who share geographic indicators of identity but around other components of Jewish identity. Two existing examples of this strategy are Limmud FSU and the ROI community. In both instances, there is something that binds members of these communities — and when they gather, they become more highly differentiated.

e. Develop Narratives, Then Invest in Having Them Shared

We recommend providing resources that encourage Jews from all subcommunities to articulate and share their unique narratives, enabling them to develop a proud and solid sense of self, which is, in Schnarch's language, a prerequisite for increasing differentiation. In addition, developing empathy by listening to each other's story is a critical way to defuse tensions and rebuild the relationship between two subjects.

These narratives can be collected and shared through a variety of media (the "Humans of" initiative is a great example) and may result in curricula that can be used in camps, schools, and other settings across the globe. The way that Mizrahi *Piyutim* have become part of the mainstream cultural discourse in Israel in recent years, exposing and celebrating the narratives of Jews of North African origin, is perhaps a model here.

The "reverse Birthright" model has been suggested by many as a programmatic step for allowing Israelis to hear and experience the American Jewish narrative and was echoed by American think tank participants. Given our findings, we also believe that it is an appropriate (albeit extremely expensive) programmatic direction.

Another recommendation is that UJA commission a range of perspectives that would articulate what the narrative and educational arc of a reverse Birthright would look like. What is the story that American Jews even want to tell about themselves? While this is, of course, a prerequisite for any model that would bring significant numbers of Israelis to experience American Jewish life, we believe that the exploration of the topic itself could have significant positive effects in helping American Jews understand themselves and develop a less reflective and more solid sense of self, even if a full-scale mass travel program does not result from it.

f. Invest in Cultivating Productive Discourse

We recommend expanding and multiplying gatherings similar to the think tanks used in this process and including a wide diversity of participants and incorporating elements of play, movement, simulation, and experimentation with different roles, in a judgment-free environment. These gatherings would ideally take place in neutral spaces, span more than one day and lead to programmatic action. We suggest that some gatherings take place for Israelis alone, some for Americans alone, and some together.



The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education

www.iej.org

info@iej.org