When Will the Glass Overflow?

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"In a world where everything is seen, nothing is known.
In a world where everything is known, nothing is understood."

— Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Living in Israel in an era that surely lays claim to bringing us closer to redemption than previous generations could have imagined, I see the glass as very much more than half full. Yet the upper part remains to be filled, and there are many issues to be faced—some propitious, some daunting—before we can hope to see it overflow.

Depending on how you count, it is probable that more than half of the world's Jews now live in Israel. This has some implications in halakha, specifically regarding laws relating to the Land of Israel, such as *yovel* and *shemittah*, which revert from their lesser status as rabbinic obligations (*de-rabbanan*), and once again take on the character of biblical obligations (*de-oraita*), "as in days of old."

Looking ahead to the coming years, we will increasingly see Israel as the powerhouse of Jewish life. That is not to say that Jewish life in the diaspora will wither away. But with the dwindling numbers of grassroots adherents of the non-Orthodox movements, national Jewish institutions will more often be led by

members of the Modern Orthodox community. The Haredi world, even as it continues to grow in numbers, is likely to stubbornly persist in isolating itself from Jewish issues outside of its own enclaves and will steadfastly focus its attention and resources only on its own educational systems and communal structures.

The pervasive and unabated anti-Semitism in the diaspora, combined with the relentless attacks on Israel, have already motivated many unaffiliated Jews to search for more spiritual meaning in their Judaism, and this is gradually leading increasing numbers to embrace more observances and to seek more knowledge. As it is, the amount of Torah being learned today far eclipses any other time in history. With online programs already connecting hundreds of thousands to the study of Jewish sources, the opportunities for Torah learning on every level will become even more extensive with the still uncharted capabilities of artificial intelligence.

On the other hand, it is exceedingly worrisome that a recent survey found that as many as 32 percent of Jewish Americans aged 18 to 34 call themselves anti-Zionists or non-Zionists. Given that, it’s unclear how connected they will remain to their Jewish heritage. Sadly, these young people, together with those who intermarry or those who are raised with no Jewish content in their lives—and together with all their descendants—may well be lost to the future of the Jewish people.

In Israel, the schisms that plague society will regrettably grow in intensity. As the Haredi sector defiantly pursues its intransigence and refuses to play its part in the support and defense of the nation, the patience of Israel’s secular citizens will inevitably run out. While it will probably be short of actual civil war, the conflict is likely to become increasingly ugly and confrontational, with the government, as now, unwilling or unable to exert control.

Unfortunately, Yehoram Gaon’s poignant promise in song following the 1973 Yom Kippur War that “this will be the last war” is unlikely ever to become true. Israel’s enemies plot and attack it at every opportunity because of an unwavering religious belief that one day they will be able to destroy it. They can fight and lose a hundred wars, they say, while Israel cannot afford to lose even one.

With all this, Israelis consistently rank in the top five or ten on the UN World Happiness Report. This is often attributed to their strong social cohesion and sense of purpose, and there is no reason to think that this will change. Despite the too-frequent runs to the safe rooms and bomb shelters, despite the huge disruptions in family life and income due to the extended periods spent in the

army, despite the tumultuous way in which the nation is governed, Israelis are proud of their country and will assuredly continue to walk around with their heads high and their spirits even higher.

With all of its existential challenges, or perhaps because of them, Israel's extraordinary success as a world leader in innovative technology will continue undiminished. The abundant income generated by the nation's multitudinous start-ups will go on helping to underwrite the costs of Israel's infrastructure and innumerable other construction projects, and indeed its wars. Transferring ownership of these assets out of Israel by means of "exits" is not ideal and presents a challenge to the country's long-term economic stability, but the Israeli genius will not be suppressed and will continue to attract the attention and investment of other countries and multinational conglomerates.

The disparity among Israel's various subcultures will increasingly blur as marriages between Ashkenazic and Sephardic families proliferate. One might hope that this would lead to the merging of *minhagim* into one universal Israeli set of religious customs and practices, but the religious establishment is extremely unlikely to brook any formalized change. Similarly, a logical consequence of Israel's astounding, God-given rebirth as a nation would be a creative rethinking of parts of the siddur to reflect the enormous theological implications of this new status. Again, the religious authorities will not even contemplate such a notion. Yet there are pockets of creative religious thinkers whose influence may slowly spread.

As we cross the threshold where the majority of our people now live once again in our ancestral land, we continue to see the evolution from a rabbinically-led existence, concerned largely about survival in often hostile foreign countries, to the complex realities of a modern, self-governing state. This will inevitably contribute to the already growing gap between Israeli Jews and those in the diaspora. Yet Israel will never abandon its efforts to bolster Jewish communities and to further Jewish education in other lands as best it can.

The road ahead, both in Israel and in the diaspora, is full of hurdles due to the threats from external enemies on the one hand, and the stubbornness of established institutions and religious extremists on the other. Yet it is precisely within these tensions that the next chapter of Jewish history is being written—not in the margins of other nations, but at the center of our own.

Living in our own land offers us a glimpse of a glass that is *revayah*—full, dynamic and, eventually, running over.