



## ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel  
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of  
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

who watch with dismay as the number of people similar to them keeps on declining, while the social periphery – the religious, Jews of Mid-Eastern descent, and Russian immigrants – keeps growing as result of demographic and cultural reasons.

### Events...

**Sunday, April 19, 7:30pm**

Professor Alan Dershowitz's film *The Case for Israel: Democracy's Outpost* will be screened at *Shaarei Shomayim*, followed by a discussion with Robert Friedman.

**Tuesday, April 28, 7:30pm**

Mizrachi's communal Yom HaZikaron Commemoration and Yom HaAtzmaut Celebration, at BAYT.

### Commentary...

**In Praise Of Religious Troops** By Mordechai Kedar

*Nation lacking national awareness, willingness to sacrifice won't survive in Mideast*

In a liberal state with free media, I would expect open and innovative thinking that would show tolerance to different people. However, in a series of reports and articles published recently, it appears that a whole community that is large, moral, and bears a major security burden, is being attacked: Religious soldiers. Meanwhile, the role of the IDF Rabbinate in military life has also become a target for media assaults.

In 1975, when I was a cadet in IDF Training Base 1, we did not have enough soldiers for a minyan during the week. Only on Saturdays would we see about 15 soldiers gathering for the Shabbat prayer, because there were no training sessions that day. The large synagogue stood deserted most of the time, even when the base was filled with cadets, mostly because only few religious soldiers were sent to officer's course. Back then, it was the kibbutzniks who were prominent among the population of future officers, as well as residents of the large cities.

Three years ago, when my son went through officer's course, he said it was impossible to hold orderly prayer sessions at the synagogue (the same building it was back then) because it's too small to fit all the religious cadets. The religious presence was also manifested in the number of female cadets, whose skirts were ubiquitous.

Naturally, religious officers make it to instruction roles these days, at Training Base 1 as well, and, lo and behold, they do not wish to swim in a pool where women swim! They do not wish to see ladies in bikinis! They maintain modesty standards! They're asking for separate swimming times!

The media also tell us about religious soldiers who leave ceremonies as not to hear females sing. As if these media outlets are crying out: "How could it be that soldiers, and religious ones at that, do not think like us, the enlightened, open, and liberal people?" Yet the soldiers did not disrupt the ceremonies, did not yell out in protest of female singing, and did not demonstrate against it. They simply got up and left, quietly, as not to interfere with the enjoyment of those who did stay.

We also heard scathing criticism over the educational role assumed by the IDF Rabbinate under the leadership of Rabbi Ronsky. To me it appears that this criticism stems from the unwillingness to admit that the Educational Corps fail to fulfill their role, because the messages they convey to the soldiers cannot be any better than the general message imparted by the general education system.

The anxiety over the prospect of rabbis replacing education officers stems from the primal fear gnawing at some secular camps in the face of Judaism and its role within Israeli society and the State. There are those

When it comes to meaningful military service, volunteering to combat units and heading to officer's courses, the number of those who tended to do it thus far has declined considerably. Meanwhile, in religious-Zionist families the number of children is significantly larger than in secular families, while national-religious education stresses contribution and sacrifice for the sake of the State – which manifests in the number of religious officers. A religious soldier serving in a non-combat unit feels uncomfortable among his friends.

There is a clear connection between the offensive directed at the IDF Rabbinate, which contributed to boosting the moral of IDF soldiers, and the baseless stories extensively covered by the media regarding IDF actions in Gaza. These reports turned out to be no more than hearsay.

The assault on what is described as religious radicalization among IDF troops is no more than a manifestation of the sense of cultural vacuum imparted to a whole generation of young people by the secular education system. I do not argue that the religious community is faultless, yet for the most part it shuns drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, and the club culture. Yet where is secular culture leading its youth – tomorrow's adult generation – at this time?

Get over it. The problem is not the IDF Rabbinate, but rather, those who use it and its success as a means to slam the moral and dedicated national-religious community, which constitutes a mirror for those who are not like it. A nation of fatigued souls lacking national awareness and willingness to sacrifice will not be able to survive in the distressful and radical region we inhabit. (YNet Apr 11)

*The writer is a lecturer at Bar-Ilan University's department of Arabic. A recent Al Jazeera interview of him was widely circulated on the Internet.*

## חג כשר ושמה

**Surviving In A Post-American World** By Caroline Glick

Like it or not, the United States of America is no longer the world's policeman. This was the message of Barack Obama's presidential journey to Britain, France, the Czech Republic, Turkey and Iraq this past week.

Somewhere between apologizing for American history - both distant and recent; genuflecting before the unelected, bigoted king of Saudi Arabia; announcing that he will slash the US's nuclear arsenal, scrap much of America's missile defense programs and emasculate the US Navy; leaving Japan to face North Korea and China alone; telling the Czechs, Poles and their fellow former Soviet colonies, "Don't worry, be happy," as he leaves them to Moscow's tender mercies; humiliating Iraq's leaders while kowtowing to Iran; preparing for an open confrontation with Israel; and thanking Islam for its great contribution to American history, President Obama made clear to the world's aggressors that America will not be confronting them for the foreseeable future.

Whether they are aggressors like Russia, proliferators like North Korea, terror exporters like nuclear-armed Pakistan or would-be genocidal-terror-supporting nuclear states like Iran, today, under the new administration, none of them has any reason to fear Washington.

This news is music to the ears of the American Left and their friends in Europe. Obama's supporters like billionaire George Soros couldn't be more excited at the self-induced demise of the American superpower. CNN's former (anti-)Israel bureau chief Walter Rodgers wrote ecstatically in the Christian Science Monitor on Wednesday, "America's... superpower status, is being downgraded as rapidly as its economy."

The pro-Obama US and European media are so pleased with America's abdication of power that they took the rare step of applauding

Obama at his press conference in London. Indeed, the media's enthusiasm for Obama appeared to grow with each presidential statement of contrition for America's past uses of force, each savage attack he leveled against his predecessor George W. Bush, each swipe he took at Israel, and each statement of gratitude for the blessings of Islam he uttered.

But while the media couldn't get enough of the new US leader, America's most stable allies worldwide began a desperate search for a reset button that would cause the administration to take back its abandonment of America's role as the protector of the free world.

Tokyo was distraught by the administration's reaction to North Korea's three-stage ballistic missile test. Japan recognized the betrayal inherent in Defense Secretary Robert Gates's announcement ahead of Pyongyang's newest provocation that the US would only shoot the missile down if it targeted US territory. In one sentence, uttered not in secret consultations, but declared to the world on CNN, Gates abrogated America's strategic commitment to Japan's defense.

India, for its part, is concerned by Obama's repeated assertions that its refusal to transfer control over the disputed Jammu and Kashmir provinces to Pakistan inspires Pakistani terror against India. It is equally distressed at the Obama administration's refusal to make ending Pakistan's support for jihadist terror groups attacking India a central component of its strategy for contending with Pakistan and Afghanistan. In general, Indian officials have expressed deep concern over the Obama administration's apparent lack of regard for India as an ally and a significant strategic counterweight to China.

Then there is Iraq. During his brief visit to Baghdad on Tuesday afternoon, Obama didn't even pretend that he would ensure that Iraqi democracy and freedom are secured before US forces are withdrawn next year. The most supportive statement he could muster came during his conversation with Turkish students in Istanbul earlier in the day. There he said, "I have a responsibility to make sure that as we bring troops out, that we do so in a careful enough way that we don't see a complete collapse into violence."

Hearing Obama's statements, and watching him and his advisers make daily declarations of friendship to Iran's mullahs, Iraqi leaders are considering their options for surviving the rapidly approaching storm.

Then there is Europe. Although Obama received enthusiastic applause from his audience in Prague when he announced his intention to destroy the US's nuclear arsenal, drastically scale back its missile defense programs and forge a new alliance with Russia, his words were anything but music to the ears of the leaders of former Soviet satellites threatened by Russia. The Czech, Polish, Georgian and Ukrainian governments were quick to recognize that Obama's strong desire to curry favor with the Kremlin and weaken his own country will imperil their ability to withstand Russian aggression.

It is not a coincidence, for instance, that the day Obama returned to Washington, Georgia's Moscow-sponsored opposition announced its plan to launch massive protests in Tbilisi to force the ouster of pro-Western, anti-Russian Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili.

And as for Russia, like Iran, which responded to Obama's latest ode to the mullahs by opening a nuclear fuel plant and announcing it has 7,000 advanced centrifuges in operation, so Moscow reacted to Obama's fig leaf with a machine gun, announcing its refusal to support sanctions against North Korea and repeating its false claim that Iran's nuclear program is nonaggressive.

Finally there is Israel. If Obama's assertions that Israel must support the immediate establishment of a Palestinian state, his declarations of support for the so-called Saudi "peace plan," which requires Israel to commit national suicide in exchange for "peace" with the Arab world, and his continuous and increasingly frantic appeals for Iran to "engage" his administration weren't enough to show Israel that Obama is sacrificing the US's alliance with the Jewish state in a bid to appease the Arabs and Iran, on Tuesday Vice President Joseph Biden made this policy explicit.

When Biden told CNN that Israel would be "ill-advised" to attack Iran's nuclear installations, he made clear that from the administration's perspective, an Israeli strike that prevents Iran from becoming a nuclear power is less acceptable than a nuclear-armed Iran. That is, the Obama administration prefers to see Iran become a nuclear power than to see Israel secure its very existence.

America's betrayal of its democratic allies makes each of them more vulnerable to aggression at the hands of their enemies - enemies the Obama

administration is now actively attempting to appease. And as the US strengthens their adversaries at their expense, these spurned democracies must consider their options for surviving as free societies in this new, threatening, post-American environment.

For the most part, America's scorned allies lack the ability to defeat their enemies on their own. India cannot easily defeat nuclear-armed Pakistan, which itself is fragmenting into disparate anti-Indian nuclear-wielding Islamist and Islamist-supporting factions.

Japan today cannot face North Korea - which acts as a Chinese proxy - on its own without risking a confrontation with China.

Russia's invasion of Georgia last August showed clearly that its former republics and satellites have no way of escaping Moscow's grip alone.

This week's Arab League conference at Doha demonstrated to Iraq's leaders that their Arab brethren are incapable and unwilling to confront Iran.

And the Obama administration's intense efforts to woo Iran coupled with its plan to slash the US's missile defense programs - including those in which Israel participates - and reportedly pressure Israel to dismantle its own purported nuclear arsenal - make clear that Israel today stands alone against Iran.

The risks that the newly inaugurated post-American world pose for America's threatened friends are clear. But viable opportunities for survival do exist, and Israel can and must play a central role in developing them. Specifically, Israel must move swiftly to develop active strategic alliances with Japan, Iraq, Poland, and the Czech Republic and it must expand its alliance with India.

With Israel's technological capabilities, its intelligence and military expertise, it can play a vital role in shoring up these countries' capacities to contain the rogue states that threaten them. And by containing the likes of Russia, North Korea and Pakistan, they will make it easier for Israel to contain Iran even in the face of US support for the mullahs.

The possibilities for strategic cooperation between and among all of these states and Israel run the gamut from intelligence sharing to military training, to missile defense, naval development, satellite collaboration, to nuclear cooperation. In addition, of course, expanded economic ties between and among these states can aid each of them in the struggle to stay afloat during the current global economic crisis.

Although far from risk free, these opportunities are realistic because they are founded on stable, shared interests. This is the case despite the fact that none of these potential alliances will likely amount to increased support for Israel in international forums. Dependent as they are on Arab oil, these potential allies cannot be expected to vote with Israel in the UN General Assembly. But this should not concern Jerusalem.

The only thing that should concern Jerusalem today is how to weaken Iran both directly by attacking its nuclear installations, and indirectly by weakening its international partners in Moscow, Pyongyang, Islamabad and beyond in the absence of US support. If Japan is able to contain North Korea and so limit Pyongyang's freedom to proliferate its nuclear weapons and missiles to Iran and Syria and beyond, Israel is better off. So, too, Israel is better off if Russia is contained by democratic governments in Eastern and Central Europe. These nations in turn are better off if Iran is contained and prevented from threatening them both directly and indirectly through its strategic partners in North Korea, Syria and Russia, and its terror affiliates in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

For the past 16 years, successive Israeli governments have wrongly believed that politics trump strategic interests. The notion that informed Israel's decision-makers - not unlike the notion that now informs the Obama administration - was that Israel's strategic interests would be secured as a consequence of its efforts to appease its enemies by weakening itself. Appreciative of Israel's sacrifices for peace, the nations of the world - and particularly the US, the Arabs and Europe - would come to Israel's defense in its hour of need. Now that the hour of need has arrived, Israel's political strategy for securing itself has been exposed as a complete fiasco.

The good news is that no doubt sooner rather than later, Obama's similarly disastrous bid to denude the US of its military power under the naive assumption that it will be able to use its new stature as a morally pure strategic weakling to win its enemies over to its side will fail spectacularly and America's foreign policy will revert to strategic rationality.

But to survive the current period of American strategic madness, Israel and the US's other unwanted allies must build alliances with one another - covertly if need be - to contain their adversaries in the absence of America. If they do so successfully, then the damage to global security induced by Obama's emasculation of his country will be limited. If on the other hand, they fail, then America's eventual return to its senses will likely come too late for its allies - if not for America itself. (Jerusalem Post Apr 9)

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### **Don't Cry For Us, New York Jewry** By Gil Troy .

The reports of distressed American Jews are stacking up faster than airplanes trying to land at La Guardia at rush hour. On a recent visit, lovely, passionate, pro-Israel friends shared their dismay. Some admitted they avoided talking about Israel because "it is too painful." The epicenter of the worrying - and the disdain - seems to be New York's Upper West Side, still the capital of liberal American Jewry.

The latest trigger, of course, is the anti-Israel backlash following the Gaza war. The IDF has withdrawn, Hamas' rocket fire has resumed, but the condemnations of Israel have intensified. The New York Times, the New York Jew's Bible, has fed this frenzy. The Times gave splashy, repeated, front-page coverage to rehashing the unsubstantiated rumors about Israeli soldiers brutalizing Palestinians, with no independent reporting. Days later, the damage done, an article buried on page 4 treated the IDF's defense as a "he-said, she-said" disagreement rather than a strong repudiation, not only by the top brass but by many soldiers who tried hard to minimize civilian casualties.

Good people should be angry with the Palestinians, not embarrassed by Israel. Inon, a 25-year-old law student turned soldier, saw an elderly Palestinian woman in pain during the war. When Israeli medics approached to help, they noticed her suicide bomb belt. "This is what we are up against," Inon sighed on [www.soldierspeakout.com](http://www.soldierspeakout.com). During my two visits to the Gaza front, most Israeli soldiers I met mentioned "Hadilemot," the Hebrew word for the dilemmas in fighting an enemy cowering behind civilians.

More recently, the lovely story about the Palestinian youth orchestra from Jenin that played for Holocaust survivors in Holon soured when the "moderate" Palestinian Authority shut down the orchestra, banning the conductor from the PA. The Palestinians denounced the conductor and any attempts at "normalization," which is also why Palestinians face death if they sell Jews land, and many "moderate" Fatah leaders still insist they never recognized Israel's right to exist.

It is not PC to acknowledge that we are dealing with a different culture and a murderous ideology - the resulting "dilemmot" are heartbreaking, horrible. I remain proud that under these circumstances the number of civilian deaths was far smaller than it would have been with any other army in the world - including America's. Yes, one wrongful death is too many. But given both sides' firepower (and Hamas has smuggled in another 70 tons or so since the war ended), that only a few hundred civilians died reflects Israel's moral and operational discipline.

After 60 years, Israel should no longer be on probation, with its legitimacy questioned in the world, or its popularity among Jews so contingent upon good behavior. American liberals did not question America's legitimacy even when they hated president George W. Bush. Yet many Jews and non-Jews repudiate Israel entirely because of one action, or one leader. Nationalism, patriotism, morality, usually runs deeper.

This Upper West Side discomfort suggests that if Israel is not the Disneyland in the Desert it promised to be in the 1960s, it is not worth supporting. Yet Israel is more friendly, pleasant and in many ways progressive than it was in the heyday of the kibbutz and Moshe Dayan. Israel today is remarkably functional. with a higher quality of life than New York Times reportage suggests. The headlines overlook the vibrant community life, the warm Jewish holiday observances, the Western comforts, the openness and diversity, let alone the scientific and hi-tech breakthroughs.

At the same time, yes, there are struggles. Ruth Gavison, the Hebrew University law professor and founding president of Metzila, a center for Zionist, Jewish, humanist and liberal thought, embraces the creative tension resulting from forging a state that is Jewish and democratic, that is moral and fights for survival. As Rabbi Daniel Gordis reminds us in his compelling new book, *Saving Israel: How the Jewish People Can Win a*

War That May Never End, the "very name 'Israel,'" the name Jacob earned after wrestling with the angel, connotes "struggling, grappling, the interaction of the human with what is beyond human." Gordis proclaims: "The real challenge facing Israel is to produce a society worthy of its name."

As Americans - and Upper West Siders in particular - adjust to the startling new economic realities, more and more are recognizing that this prolonged, Reagan-Clinton-Bush "Never, Never Land" that is ending seemed to defy the laws of gravity, unrealistically promising a life without struggle. As a result, our collective moral conscience lost its edge - which the new age of austerity may revive.

Similarly, modern Judaism has been dulled. Many Jews have simply stopped "doing Jewish," because it was too hard, too distracting when there was so much money to be made and so much fun to be had. Many Jewish leaders fed this problem, watering down Judaism, trying to make Jewish life as fluffy as the rest of American life. But this unbearable lightness of being Jewish failed to compel many, who then felt if Jewish values were pale reflections of secular values, why bother? Traditionally, the rabbis taught about "the neshama yetara," the extra soul acquired on Shabbat. This weekly boost gave Jews a taste of redemption while steeling them for the week's upcoming hardships.

Too many of us - and I regret to say, too many of my prosperous, self-righteous, Upper West Side friends - have lost that extra soul. Since Yasser Arafat led his people from negotiations toward terrorism, my family and I have set an extra seat at the Seder in memory of one terror victim who is missed at his or her Seder; this year, I am tempted to set an empty place for New York Jews' deliciously constructive grit, for their neshama yetara.

We need warrior Jews not just worrier Jews. Israelis should justifiably say: "Don't cry for us New York Jewry (and elsewhere). Our state, for all its challenges, is thriving. Our neighbors - and the world - need fixing." (Jerusalem Post Apr 8)

*The writer is professor of history at McGill University and author of Why I Am a Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today and Leading from the Center: Why Moderates Make the Best Presidents. He splits his time between Montreal and Jerusalem.*

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### **Anti-Semitism and the Economic Crisis** By Ira Stoll

*Many People Still Blame Jews for Capitalism's Faults*

Walking down the street in my solidly upper-middle-class New York City neighborhood the other day was a neatly dressed man angrily cursing into his cell phone about "Jew Wall Street bankers."

I was headed in the opposite direction and didn't stop to interview him about his particular grievances, but the brief encounter crystallized for me a foreboding that the financial crisis may trigger a new outbreak of anti-Semitism.

It is a fear that is being articulated ever more widely. President Bill Clinton's secretary of labor, Robert Reich, frets on his blog, "History shows how effective demagogic ravings can be when a public is stressed economically." He warns that Jews, along with gays and blacks, could become victims of populist rage.

In the New York Jewish Week newspaper, a column by Rabbi Ronald Price of the Union for Traditional Judaism begins, "In the 1930s, as Germany's economy collapsed, the finger was pointed at the Jews and the Nazis ascended to power. The famous Dreyfus Affair, in which a Jew was falsely accused of treason in France, followed on the heels of economic turmoil."

At this juncture, the trepidation may yet seem like paranoia, or special pleading akin to the old joke about the newspaper headline, "World Ends in Nuclear Attack: Poor, Minorities Hardest Hit." Everyone is feeling the brunt of the recession; why worry about the Jews in particular? After all, Jews today have two refuges: Israel and America, a land where Jews have attained remarkable power and prosperity and have a constitutionally protected right to exercise their religion freely. In that case, why worry about potential danger to the Jews at all?

One answer is that the historical precedents are exceedingly grim. The causes of the First Crusade, in which thousands of Jews were murdered, are still being debated, but some historians link it to famine and a poor harvest in 1095. As for the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the

foremost historian of its causes, Benzion Netanyahu (the father of Israel's new prime minister), writes of the desire of the persecutors "to get rid of their debts by getting rid of their creditors." More generally, he writes, "it is an iron-clad rule in the history of group relations: the majority's toleration of every minority lessens with the worsening of the majority's condition."

Lest this seem overly crude economic determinism, consider that the Jews have been victims not only of unrest prompted by economic distress but of attempts to remedy such economic distress with socialism. Take it from Friedrich Hayek, the late Nobel Prize winning Austrian economist. In "The Road to Serfdom," Hayek wrote, "In Germany and Austria the Jew had come to be regarded as the representative of Capitalism." Thus, the response in those countries, National Socialism, was an attack on both capitalism and the Jews.

There are ample indicators of current anti-Semitic attitudes. A poll conducted recently in Europe by the Anti-Defamation League found 74% of Spaniards believe Jews "have too much power in international financial markets," while 67% of Hungarians believe Jews "have too much power in the business world." Here in America, the Web site of National Journal is hosting an "expert blog" by former CIA official Michael Scheuer, now a professor at Georgetown, complaining of a "fifth column of pro-Israel U.S. citizens" who are "unquestionably enemies of America's republican experiment." And over at Yahoo! Finance, the message board discussing Goldman Sachs is rife with comments about "Jew pigs" and the "Zionist Federal Reserve."

So will the Jews come under attack? The existence of the Jewish state guarantees refuge for Jews around the world, but it carries with it its own risks. Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has said that if the Jews "all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them world-wide." It's a comment all the more chilling as Nasrallah's Iranian sponsors are on the brink of making a nuclear bomb.

As for the idea that Jewish professional, political, and economic success in America is a guarantee of security, that, too, has its risks. As Yuri Sleskine recounted in his book "The Jewish Century," in 1900 Vienna more than half of the lawyers, doctors and professional journalists were Jewish, as were 70% of the members of the stock exchange. In Germany, after World War I but before the Nazis came to power, Jews served as finance minister and as foreign minister. Such achievements have a way of being fleeting.

It may yet be that the Jews escape the current economic crisis having only lost fortunes. But if not, there will have been no lack of warning about the threat. When Jews gather Wednesday night for the Passover Seder, we will recite the words from the Hagadah, the book that relays the Israelite exodus from slavery in Egypt: "In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us." This year, they will resonate all the more ominously.

(Wall Street Journal Apr 7)

*The writer is the author of "Samuel Adams: A Life" (Free Press, 2008).*

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### **Self-Loathing on J Street** By James Kirchick

There is something perverse and masochistic about a self-described "pro-Israel" group going out of its way to lend support to the airing of luridly anti-Semitic propaganda. But that's what happened last month when J Street - the "pro-Israel, pro-peace" lobby - endorsed the performance of Seven Jewish Children, an outrageous, 10-minute screed written by British playwright Caryl Churchill, originally performed in London and now being produced in cities across the US.

Seven Jewish Children draws a direct line from Nazi Germany's mass-murder of European Jewry to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, an old trope in the quiver of rabid Israel-haters. Rushing through 60 years of history, it depicts a group of adults speaking in hushed tones about how they ought to address a Jewish girl who remains offstage.

"Don't tell her they'll kill her," one of the characters says, presumably sometime in the 1940s. Minutes later, transported to modern-day Israel, the adults discuss what they should teach the child about Palestinians: "Tell her they're filth," "tell her they're animals living in rubble now" and so on.

In Churchill's abbreviated history of the Jewish experience, the girl who begins as Anne Frank ends up as Baruch Goldstein-in-training.

"The decision to feature Seven Jewish Children at Theater J," read a statement issued by J Street in the defense of its production by a Washington, DC, Jewish theater project, "should be judged not on the basis

of the play's content but, rather, on its value in sparking a difficult but necessary conversation within our community. To preclude even the possibility of such a discussion does a disservice not only to public discourse, but also to the very values of rigorous intellectual engagement and civil debate on which our community prides itself."

It is Seven Jewish Children, with its spreading the anti-Semitic blood libel, that "does a disservice to public discourse," not complaints over the propriety of its production (which, by the way, should not be confused with a call to ban it). Would J Street similarly support the production of a play depicting Palestinians as bloodthirsty murderers?

Contrast J Street's support for the production of Seven Jewish Children with its stance on controversial Pastor John Hagee. Last year, the group launched a campaign criticizing Hagee and his affiliation with pro-Israel organizations. Hagee is indeed an incendiary man, and J Street spoke for many Jews (this one included) when it called his coziness with some Israel advocacy groups into question. But it says something about J Street's motives when it trips over itself to attack a politically conservative ally of Israel but rushes to defend a play comparing the Jewish state to Nazi Germany.

J Street attempts to cover itself with a fig leaf of moral deniability by saying that it "takes no position on the content" of Seven Jewish Children but insists that its performance is a good thing nonetheless because it will encourage "a difficult but necessary conversation." If you don't understand this distinction between the play's anti-Semitic message and the desirability of putting it on, it's because there is no distinction. Just the opposite: To J Street, the inflammatory message of Seven Jewish Children is precisely what makes it worthy of production.

Instead of admitting this, J Street engages in a feeble and transparent attempt at having it both ways, distancing itself from the disgusting content of the play while encouraging the spectacle of pain that will follow in its wake. J Street says that Seven Jewish Children will contribute to debate about Israel. Which part of it contributes to what part of the debate? The part where the Jews celebrate the killing of Arab children? Or is it the part where they use the memory of the Holocaust to justify the wanton slaughter of Palestinians?

Self-criticism is a much-cherished Jewish value. We pride ourselves on our collective introspection, our ability to ask honest questions about communal faults in a way that we presume other ethnic and religious groups don't. The Jewish state embodies this trait more than any other polity, certainly more than any of its neighbors. Every day, the pages of Israeli newspapers are filled with heated arguments about the morality of this or that military tactic, and Israelis criticize their leaders and the country's national psyche in the most unstinting terms.

The creation last year of J Street was, at first glance, a laudable embodiment of this penchant. Unlike established pro-Israel organizations that see their role as supporting Israel in a hostile world, J Street has been forthright about its intention to criticize the Israeli government from a dovish perspective. That's fair and welcome. But in such perilous times for the Jewish state and world Jewry in general, it's appalling that an ostensibly "pro-Israel" organization like J Street would transmogrify the worthy Jewish tradition of self-criticism into a farce of self-loathing. (Jerusalem Post Apr 12)

*The writer is an assistant editor of The New Republic and a contributing writer to The Advocate.*

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