

Liberal American Jewish youth's estrangement from Israel

The Jewish Agency is right to sound the alarm regarding the rejection of Israel by liberal Jewish youth. However, such trends don't occur in a vacuum. They are the political consequences of spiritual decline.

by Matthew M. Hausman



Map of Ancient Jerusalem with Soloman's Temple

The Jewish Agency recently warned that young Jews are becoming estranged from Israel because of perceived conflict with their liberal values, and commentary on the subject suggests that instead of acknowledging its own responsibility, the mainstream establishment is questioning what Israel and her supporters must do to stem the tide.

But the phenomenon is not a consequence of misdirected youthful exuberance or Israeli policies and is not a problem

among the observant or politically conservative. Rather, it affects the progressive and culturally assimilated segments of American Jewish society and echoes the social priorities of an institutional leadership that has traded spirituality for secular political values.

Many of those who claim to speak for American Jews – including communal lay leaders and nontraditional clergy – seem to express greater affinity for liberal politics than traditional Judaism. In attempting to avoid the appearance of Jewish insularity which rankles so many on the left, they frequently rationalize unbalanced criticism of Israel, ignore the pervasiveness of left-wing anti-Semitism, and disregard classical Jewish tradition. Though viewed as community role models, they are inculcating youth with a slanted message that glorifies secular partisan activism.

Often taking cues from the liberal pulpit, young adults from the nontraditional movements are drawn to J Street, the New Israel Fund, and other organizations that espouse progressive policies at odds with Israel's sovereign integrity and continuity as a Jewish state. They are also encouraged to pursue dialogue with Muslim advocacy groups, some of which reportedly have extremist ties or sympathies. Scions of liberal Judaism seem to believe that progressivism which undercuts Israel is somehow consistent with Jewish values, although Jewish tradition does not mandate the abdication of religious and national self-interest, the contextualization of Islamist radicalism, or the validation of revisionist propaganda that denies Jewish history.

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