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Winter Threatening Israeli Society

When the first modern steps toward establishing a Jewish national home in Israel were taken, it was a wholly secular movement, the product of Jewish emancipation from the restrictions of a religiously motivated passivity and of the then-current winds of and cultural political aspirations. The Jewish religious establishment firmly opposed these trends. Nowadays, Israel is being taken over by the most radical religious elements of its society.

In the past, most religious Jews in Israel lived in self-imposed ghettos. They declined to share in the work force, serve in the military or share in the burden of national efforts to increase commercial, industrial, scientific and cultural enterprise. They sponged off society, lived at the expense of the majority and were satisfied with a modicum of influence in areas of special sectorial concern.

Most Israelis held them at a respectful distance, satisfied with a "Judaism by proxy" maintained on behalf of the rest of society by the Orthodox community.

This is now changing, and with it, Israel society is undergoing tectonic cultural and political changes. Driven by Jewish messianism that has been enhanced since the taking and increased settlement of the West Bank, encouraged by political successes in which they imposed their will of successive Israeli Governments and motivated by silent acquiescence of the majority in Israel, Orthodox Judaism in Israel is taking on an increasingly more radical flavor. At the same time, its influence and its ambitious assertions within society are growing. Israel is likely to look very different in 10-15 years from now, as religious extremism grows and its impact on Israeli society increases.

Segregation

Parents of some 400 children in the state religious school system have recently protested: Kindergarten girls are prohibited from singing due to religious restrictions that forbid female voices in the public area.

Parents are brimming with examples of increasing extremism in state religious schools. One father in Tel Aviv's: "On Memorial Day, school girls were forbidden to sing at the Memorial ceremony because it was considered 'immodest' for them to do so. At the end of the school year, fathers will be forbidden to see the girls perform; separate events will be held for boys and girls. The Ministry of Education has taken no stand to change this.

A mother from a religious kindergarten in Kiryat Gat reported that the teacher had notified parents that fathers would not be invited to the oncoming Hanukkah party, because "it

is immodest for girls to dance and sing in the presence of fathers." A project to further classic Israeli literature at the Tomer kindergarten in Ramat HaSharon by subsidizing the purchase of books was scrapped last year, another parent reported, after it was determined that nationally acclaimed Haim Nahman Bialik and national poetess Lea Goldberg were considered "not modest." Children are separated: girls sit at the back of school buses and recess is conducted in separate yards. Mothers have been instructed "to come to the kindergarten in modest dress (skirt or dress, no pants and certainly not without sleeves)."

Buses have been segregated, with women required to enter and sit at the back, apart from men. As one woman put it, "am I asked to sit at the back of the bus, so orthodox men will not be forced to sit near me and be rendered impure by unseemly thoughts. In certain grocery stores in Jerusalem and Beit Shemesh I am asked to wrap a paper skirt over my pants so as to dull my sex appeal. According to our sages, a woman who lives alone must not have a dog for fear that she, incapable of restraining her lust, might force herself on the animal. In other words, women are a threat to the modesty of men, whereas only dogs tempt women."

Cities Changed

In 1996 Benjamin Netanyahu was elected Prime Minister. Netanyahu wooed the Orthodox with a promise that, if they joined his coalition, the Haredi (Orthodox) parties would be given an unprecedented division of power. Hidden from secular view, other forces were at work. A young Haredi generation that had grown up in modern Israel and was unwilling to continue to live in ghettos.

A precedent had been set in the 1993 municipal elections in Jerusalem, when Ehud Olmert defeated the incumbent, Mayor Teddy Kollek. The ultra-Orthodox parties joined the city's administration, gained control of municipal departments, a lion's share of the city budget and widespread planning concessions. The Olmert-Haredi alliance won a second term in 1998. In 2003, Olmert left and the rabbi's man, Uri Lupolianski, became the first Haredi mayor of Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, on the streets of Jerusalem, a fundamental change had taken place. Large affordable neighborhoods were being built for the ultra-Orthodox and religious communities, who were accorded significant subsidies, while secular middle-class families were priced out of the market. Within less than a decade, entire residential areas in the city's north and central sectors became Orthodox, forcing an aging nonreligious population into ever shrinking quarters. City Hall closed school after school for lack of families in the area while funding for Orthodox schooling was quickly found.

A secretive municipal committee censors all public advertising in Jerusalem has two Haredi members and a third secular member who hasn't attended meetings for years. In early November he admitted that he thought the committee had been disbanded. No official poster of City Hall has shown a woman or even a girl for a decade. Recently, a ruling forbade the use of females in any advertising within city limits. The cry that came up as a result has forced the committee to withdraw, at least for the moment.

In the Orthodox quarter, sidewalks were divided by a partition, with women relegated to using one side of the partition and men the other. In Safed, the municipal Rabbi issued a religious edict, requiring residents not to rent or sell properties to non-Jews. Rabbis in various cities echoed his call, and he is now being investigated for racism and promoting discrimination. In Jerusalem, Petach Tivah and other Israeli cities, religious Jews have been busy at creating a list of shops and restaurants that employ Arabs, and have called upon residents to withhold custom from any such commercial enterprises. In Sderot, businesses have been encouraged by Orthodox elements to impose strict dress codes on their female workers.

Cities such as Bet Shemesh and Safed have also undergone transformations. A new, desperately needed, hospital wing is not being built in Ashkelon because ancient skeletons were found on the site. The Orthodox insist that the souls of the dead not be disturbed by construction work. Affordable housing for young couples is being constructed almost exclusively in various religious quarters all around the country because the Minister of Housing is Orthodox and a member of Shas, an Orthodox political party.

The Israel Defense Forces

Elyakim Levanon, a prominent rabbi, many of whose students serve in the military, has recently stated that soldiers should choose death to participating in events that include women singing. His statement was made in response to an appeal by nineteen major generals, who wrote Defense Minister Ehud Barak and IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, imploring them not to restrict women's service in the army as a result of religious soldiers' demands. The appeal was in response to a series of recent events, including the boycotting of military ceremonies by religious cadets due to women singing. The petitioners warned against a threat to "the fundamental values of Israeli society."

Rabbi Levanon criticized an order that would forbid religious soldiers from leaving events over women's singing. He insisted that soldiers should prefer death to complying with such an order.

Such struggles have been teeming beneath the surface of the defense forces for several years. The promotion of religious soldiers in combat units led to a gradual cultural shift. The appeal is the first of its kind. More are expected. A long list of respected and retired generals signed the letter, including two former IAF commanders, three former navy commanders, and the former head of human resources in the General Staff. A third of them are over 80 years of age. Only some from the younger generation of senior military officers responded.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has gradually adopted stricter dietary standards. Addressing students at the religious educational institute he heads, which prepares young religious men for service in the military, Rabbi Eli Sadan academy spoke warmly of the "dedication and courage" of Baruch Goldstein, who massacred Muslim worshippers in Hebron, and of Yigal Amir, who assassinated Prime Minister Isaac Rabin. The two were held up as examples to be admired.

A strongly worded report compiled by the State Comptroller's Office, slated for release in April, will discuss problems related to the power of the IDF rabbinate.

Six weeks ago four cadets were expelled from officer training school for refusing to take part in an evening on battlefield heritage at which a female singer performed. The Chief of Staff has yet to publish directives on how to deal with such a situation in the future. The delay stems from the fear the IDF brass have of facing off against the rabbis, to whose authority soldiers and officers unquestionably submit. The face of the IDF is the face of changing Israeli society. It is unclear why its commanders chose to emulate rabbis who want to turn the IDF into the army of the Lord.

Marriage

The Following is an abbreviation of an article by Anna Mahjar-Barducci, published in Ha'Arets on Nov. 20, 2011:

Hundreds of thousands of Israelis "lacking religious affiliation" cannot wed in Israel, where they were born and raised. My daughter is one of them. My daughter was born in Jerusalem. Her father is an Israeli Jew. But, because I am not Jewish and I don't identify with a particular religion, her birth certificate states she is "without religious affiliation." When she was

born, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior did not even want to recognize our baby as an Israeli citizen. In order for my husband to give our daughter his name, the ministry demanded the ultimate proof: a DNA test (at our expense) to prove his paternity.

While my daughter has now been granted citizen status and carries her father's family name, her birth certificate still takes pains to stress that she is not Jewish, and not part of the Jewish nation. This means that, though Israel is her homeland and though she will most likely serve in its army, she is denied one of the most basic human rights - namely, the right to marry in her own country. Every day, as I take my daughter for a stroll in Jerusalem's Independence Park, I meet other foreign-born mothers married to Israeli Jews, whose children are in the same situation. Their country refuses to accept them as its own and to treat them as equal citizens.

The Spousal Covenant for Persons Lacking Religious Affiliation, passed by the Knesset in 2010, was touted as a solution to the problem. The law allows couples to enter into a civil union, only if both lack religious affiliation. Such persons may marry others of their ilk, but must not "mix" with the Jews, a clear breach of Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family." The only way around this is to marry abroad. The law, therefore, reinforces the sectarian character of Israeli society.

Each year, thousands of Israelis travel to Cyprus to exercise their right to wed the person they love. The absence of civil marriage, a clear violation of civil liberties, is a characteristic of countries known for their disrespect for human rights, such as Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iran. Israel should not be on this roster of shame.

Proposed Legislation

With the start of the Knesset session, a series of proposed laws are leading the country into dangerous realms. One bill proposes to eliminate Arabic as an official language. Another seeks to restrict funding for NGO's that criticize the Government. A third seeks to significantly modify the make-up of Israel's Supreme Court. The Speaker of the House and Israel's Attorney general have warned against such legislation, so far to no avail.

Can Israeli Democracy Survive?

The following is an abbreviation of an article by Zeev Sternhell, professor of political science, an Israel Prize laureate and a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, published in Ha'Aretz November 20 2012

It is chilling to comprehend that a people that in the not-too-distant past was the most significant victim of tribal ritual that ran wild in Europe and led to right-wing extremism, is the very same people that in our era is creating a power-driven national movement, negating human rights, and rejecting universal rights, liberalism and democracy. The Right acts through two arms: the violent arm – that of the settlements, which enjoy territorial autonomy, is equipped with arms, and imposes its terror on the army and police – and the respectable arm, which carries out

the work in the Knesset. The crude violence that runs wild on a daily basis in the territories, and has trickled down to the Israeli street, is in many respects less dangerous than the quiet and consistent parliamentary work, which is gradually undermining the values of democracy.

In this context, it ought to be recalled that striving against the intellectual and ethical principles of the liberal and democratic order began in Europe about 40 or 50 years prior to the official passage of German, Italian and French race laws. Several decades passed between the daily

attacks on “traitors” who fought for the attainment of principles such as equality and human rights – including those of Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus – and the passage of legislation that abolished the civil rights of anyone who was not counted among the dominant nationality or an adherent of the Christian faith. Once the Jews’ civil rights were rescinded, the Jews were abandoned and there was no longer anything to prevent their deportation.

Making non-Jews into second-class citizens is the objective aspired to by the right-wing majority in Israel. Acting on behalf of this movement are the ministers of justice and foreign affairs, who have the backing of the entire parliamentary elite of the right, except for the Speaker of the Knesset, Reuven Rivlin.

The Background

Upon joining the government, Menachem Begin and leaders of the Herut movement (the right-wing precursor to Likud) took meticulous care of the liberal and democratic values of the government administration in Israel. Human rights, division of authorities, freedom of expression, independence of the media, and independent status of the Supreme Court as a watchdog of civil freedoms were all, in their eyes, the inalienable assets of Zionism and of the state. With the change in government when Likud assumed power in 1977, for the first time since independence Israel became a Western democracy that proved itself. These achievements are now in a gradual process of elimination.

The core of democracy is the assurance of human rights and individual freedoms. Majority rule is the means to that end, not a goal in itself. Majority rule came into the world as an alternative to rule of the individual or of the few, in order to prevent arbitrariness and to guarantee equality for all. Therefore, majority rule is limited by the purpose for which it was

created: Rule of the majority loses its legitimacy the moment it harms human rights and denies universal norms of equality. Through majority rule, democracy can also terminate itself. If Israel wishes to remain democratic, it can define itself as the nation-state of the Jewish people in only two senses: a state in which the Jews constitute a majority, and a state founded not only for those who live in it but also as a safe haven for Jews liable to need such. Conversely, if the state expresses an ethical partiality for Jews that would necessarily evolve into political, if not social and financial, partiality, it will cease to be a democratic state.

In order to understand the seriousness of the war now being waged in the Knesset, including attempts to eliminate the Supreme Court as a body that restrains the majority, we must ask the elementary question: Who needs democracy? Why not replace it with a “guided democracy,” without division of authorities, without a supreme court to conduct judicial oversight of parliament and government, without an investigative and critical press? Why not opt for a regime that imparts governmental authorities to the executive branch without disruption by other elected institutions or by the courts? Who needs a regime of checks and balances? Why not decide that in a state in which two or more nationalities live, the dominant nationality will have control and, to that end, the national community has ethical priority over the civil?

The truth is there is nothing sacred about democracy. Our rights and freedoms as autonomous creatures are anchored in a fiction that says that at any time and at any place, by virtue of his essence, the individual is a rational and therefore a free creature, equal to all other human beings. As such, he can and should manage his own life. All of the free regimes of the West are built upon this simple concept. They guarantee equality to all their citizens and

do not distinguish between members of various nationalities, races or religions. All are viewed as citizens possessing equal rights.

Both the secular and religious wings of the Israeli Right are now challenging this perspective. [According to the Right], the tribe is the objective of social and political action, not the individual.

The state is not perceived to be a device to ensure the well being of all its citizens, but a framework to facilitate the enforcement of supremacy of Jews over non-Jews. One should not misunderstand the intentions of the right. The seriousness of the current antidemocratic legislation derives from the fact that it is anchored in an inclusive outlook, that it serves a clear objective, and is nothing but the first stage in the major effort to change the character of the State and society in Israel.

There was a host of defects and flaws in the Ben-Gurionesque concept of democracy, but they stemmed from his adherence to the idea of precedence of the state, as opposed to the tribal ritual. Ben-Gurion was far from being a liberal, and more than once sought to expand the authorities of the State maximally. He viewed the State as taking precedence over both the individual and civil society. But he did not think it was permissible to mortgage the Supreme Court to the will of the parliamentary majority, or to manipulate the makeup of the Judicial Selection Committee. Israel's first Prime Minister established and maintained the military administration of Israel's Arab citizens for reasons of administrative ease, but he knew that it was a time-limited transition period, and therefore he did not legislate Basic Laws that would ensure Jewish supremacy.

Ben Gurion realized that establishment of the State constituted a colossal revolution in the lives of the Jewish people. For the first time, Jews were citizens in their own state. He knew there was great significance to the normalization

of Jewish existence. Citizenship required equality between all those who lived within the boundaries of the new state. He would have preferred that there would be no Arabs in Israel, but as they were here it was forbidden to legislate discriminatory laws, as these would constitute a lethal blow to Israel's existence as a modern state. The Law of Return was meant to protect Jews around the world, and was not an excuse for establishing a permanent legislative norm that would have resulted in two classes of citizens.

The present revolutionary Right views the institutions of state – the government, Knesset, Supreme Court, army and police – as tools by which to ensure Jewish tribal supremacy. This is the perspective that guides lawmaking, obligates the army and police to cooperate with the hilltop bullies in the territories, and now calls for a dramatic shift in the makeup of the Supreme Court.

Legal But Unethical

At this point, it seems proper to take stock. What if legislation such as is now making its way through the Knesset were to be passed a European country? What if documents were published there, akin to the statements and rulings of Israeli rabbis, demanding that apartments not be rented out to non-Christians, or forbidding girls to date non-Christians? One proposal, Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People substantially modifies Israel's character as a State seeking to maintain the delicate, difficult balance between universal norms of equality and the particularistic norms of Jewish nationhood. The proposed law essentially states that citizenship is artificial, a mere convention that may at any time be abolished or supplanted by another consensus.

Citizenship is inferior to membership in the national tribe. Anyone can receive a passport, but none can choose the tribe to which they belong. To be Israeli

in the fuller sense of the word, citizenship is insufficient: nationalism trumps citizenship as it did in Germany, Vichy France and in Italy following the passage of the Manifesto of Race in 1938. The European racism was the logical outcome of a differentiation between national identity and citizenship.

Emphasizing the differences creates a hierarchy, which in turn creates fear and hostility: a protective wall must be erected around the Jewish people. Israeli Arabs must come to terms with a subordinate status, and Arabs in the territories must recognize the Jewish people's ownership of the whole Land of Israel.

These are symptoms of the disease spreading throughout Israeli society. They are foundations of a historic and cultural determinism that could evolve into an ethnic determinism, as if World War II never happened, as if none of the persecutions and catastrophes that struck the Jewish people ever occurred. Ethnic nationalism has led all too easily to various forms of racism. There is a real danger that events in Israel will develop in the same direction. Evidence of such a direction are all about us.

Other legislative initiatives are intended to prevent the public from receiving information about suspects under police investigation. The Knesset

Committee on Constitution, Law and Justice approved an amendment to an already existing law that would create a *de facto* censorship with regards to criminal investigations. Under such legislation it would be easier for high-ranking officials and other connected individuals to disrupt investigations in their early stages. "Sunlight," the Jewish-American Justice Louis Brandeis reminded us, "is the best of disinfectants." Israeli lawmakers prefer to ward off the disinfecting sun and let the rot set in.

Israeli democracy is not guided by a constitution. The independence of the judicial system, with the High Court of Justice at its head and the free functioning of the investigative press, are sole guarantees of equality before the law. But the Government has recently lent its support to a bill that would restrict the freedom of the Supreme Court, subjecting it to the Knesset and therefore, in an Israeli-style democracy, to the wishes and whims of the Government.

Disturbing winds are blowing through Israeli society, threatening the fabric of life in the country and steadily creating in Israel a religiously motivated, nationalistic, xenophobia that will reduce civil liberties and impose on the country a new kind of Government.

Ministry and Family News

Brig Jones, who was called by **Grace and Truth Christian Congregation** to serve as Pastor, and who commenced his ministry in early 2009, has resigned. Please pray for him, for his wife Michelle and for their young child. The three years during which Brig and Michelle served Grace and Truth have been extremely challenging for them. Pray too for Grace and Truth as it undergoes the turmoil of repeatedly significant changes, for the Eldership of the church and the congregation. May the Lord grant them oneness of heart and mind, much of his presence and renewed vision for the future.

Most of Baruch's time is presently given to writing his **thesis** – the project grew as did the list of books and articles to be studied. Finally, Baruch had to put his foot down and say, "no more!" No further books (except in special cases...), and only a limited number of additional articles. Ten to 14 hours a day are spent almost every day on this undertaking. Good progress is being made, but there is a good deal of work yet to do.

Meanwhile, other projects continue, including the last stages of the OT in the **Modern Hebrew Bible for Youth**. It is good to be able to report that a decision has been made to carry

this project onto the New Testament. We are presently editing the text of genealogies in I Chron. 1-9 and are facing many difficulties. The Hebrew text sometimes does not distinguish place names and names of individuals, sometimes skips entire generations and deviates in other ways from the same genealogies as given in earlier portions of God's word.

Our children and their families are all well. **Eran and Avital** hosted Keith, Shlomit and Yonatan, Marcus, Tamar Yotam and Avishai in early December. The little house (three bedrooms) was gloriously crowded. The three Erez children attend the same charter school, where Avital teaches art and the history of art as a volunteer. Noam is becoming a precocious young teenager – with all that this implies. Maya has taken up goalkeeping in her soccer team, enjoys her karate classes as well as singing. Both girls love the cooking programs on TV and are making bold to try out some recipes. Nadav is settling in better at school

Keith and Shlomit have dug in for the winter. Shlomit is expected to give birth to their second child in March. Jonathan is learning to communicate and is into everything his little hands can reach. A few days back his mother found him “unstopping” the toilet with the plunger – something he had seen his parents do once or twice before. **Marcus and Tamar** are enjoying their two, Yotam and Avishai. Yotam has discovered that Avishai is not a toy to be played with but something of a competition for Mom and Dad's attention. This is a new experience for him, and he needs to learn to adjust.

Felix and Katya have moved into the flat they purchased, after tastefully renovating it. Their little Maya now attends play-school, and (as is often the case) brings home every nose and throat infection the other children contract, sharing it with her parents. Katya is especially prone to such infections.

Rose developed a tendon inflammation on her left hand (an occupational hazard, we are told, for dental assistants) and was restricted in activity for a month. Most of her days are now spent in utter boredom – she is not given much to do, but is not at liberty to use the time, for example, to study or for reading. She has evidenced a growing maturity and growing sense of responsibility.

We've been so short of rain these last few years that the clay under **Baruch's office** **shrunk**, resulting in the office tipping at one point by almost 2 inches (!). We've had to engage in buttressing the structure by sinking 6-10 yard deep holes near the walls, casting six pillars into these and then connecting the pillars with a concrete “belt” under the office walls about one yard wide and another yard deep. Now we'll need to look into redoing the aluminum and glass that covers three of the four sides of the walls. Our yard is a mess! At the same time, our 15 year-old garage door has gone the way of all doors. We had to have it replaced. As you can imagine, it's hard to concentrate on one's thesis, editing or writing with drills, workers, banging, shoveling and talking are constantly going on.

TAX-deductible **support for our ministry** should be written to the order of **Berean Baptist church, P.O. Box 1233, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48480-3233**. Direct bank transfers may be made to **Franklin Bank, 24725 West Twelve Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48034 USA, Routing Number 241271957 Berean Baptist Special Account No. 567495976**.

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