

Religion in Israel

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Introduction

The relationship between [Israel](#) and religion is far from simple. There are several fundamental issues that make this relationship different from most Western countries:

- Israel is home to many and diverse religious groups. While Judaism is the main religion, the Israeli legal system promises support to all religious groups.
- Tension exists between the secular and religious communities.
- The state grants religious law authority in matters of family law.

The role of religion in Israel may be studied from a range of disciplines, including sociology, history and law. In this chapter, we will offer a broad survey of the topic and try to give a little bit of everything to offer a basic introduction to this topic. Since [Judaism](#) is the biggest religious group and [Israel](#) defines it self as a Jewish state, I will focus on Judaism. Beginning with an historical background, I will not mention numbers and percentages since the published reports are conflicting and the definitions used are inordinately vague.

Zionism on Religion

The relationship between [Zionism](#) and religion is at the heart of the historical process that led to the establishment of Israel. Zionism emerged when the Jewish world in Europe was on the brink of modernity. Jews in the early modern period were a religious community that was the ultimate outsider for Christian Europe.^[1] The process of emancipation and the rise of the modern concept of nationalism had a direct effect on Jews.^[2] Jews were faced with choices to join other national movements and maintain Jewish identity as a purely religious one; or they could define themselves as Jewish in a modern national sense and minimize the religious component. The reform movements for example, chose to advocate an identity based solely on religious difference (Germans of mosaic persuasions and later American of mosaic persuasion).^[3] In [Eastern Europe](#) many Jews chose to support a national identity that was based on secular Jewish culture in Eastern Europe and not on an attachment to the old homeland of Zion.^[4]

As for Zionism, in its early stages, the proponents of Zionism, people like Rabbi Yeshiva Shalom Alkalai and [Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Kalischer](#), advocated a political struggle for a Jewish homeland in Zion with religious connotations.^[5] However others, like Moses Hess's *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862), claimed that Jews were a nation independent of religion.^[6] When Theodor Herzl organized the Zionist movement, this issue was at the heart of his work. Herzl made it clear that he viewed Jews as a nation and his future vision of the Jewish state called for a clear separation between church and state: "Faith unites us, knowledge gives us freedom. We shall therefore prevent any theocratic tendencies from coming to

the fore on the part of our priesthood. We shall keep our priests within the confines of their temples in the same way we shall keep our volunteer forces within the confines of their barracks.”^[7]

This, however, did not mean the early Zionists could overlook religion. Their attempt to build the image of the “new Jew” had to be based on something solid, when they turned to Jewish history there was no possibility to deny that the Jewish past had a religious context. In light of this reality, voices calling for a spiritual [Zionism](#) began to emerge from the Zionist movement. This ideology developed from the writing of [Ahad Ha'am](#) (pseudonym for Asher Ginzburg), a Hebrew author who called for a reconstruction of Jewish Eastern-European traditions in order to create a national-cultural identity.^[8]

In the [second Aliyah](#), the major forces within the Zionist movement were not religious. Although there were many supporters of Zionism within the religious camp (as we will see in the second section) the majority of the leadership was secular and, in the 1920s, when Labor Zionists took the leading role in the Zionist movement, and in the [Yishuv](#), secularism became a significant issue on the public agenda.^[9] Here again we find a discourse that wants to present an alternative to religion: Jewish culture with values such as working the land, self-defense, [Hebrew](#) language, etc.

In this respect, secularism was part of a larger attempt to create a new identity; but not something out of nothing. The goal was to take the Jewish past and use it, discarding the parts that were the result of the *Galut* (the exile) and maintain the true spirit of the Jews that was manifested in the pre-exilic Bible. The Jewish secular attempt to create the new Jew saw religion and religious texts as a part of the exile culture that needed to be reshaped; for example the [Talmud](#) that was created in Babylon was to be put aside because of its legal image. The [Bible](#) would be given a place in the center, but not as a religious text, rather as a national epic story. Here the focus would be the stories of war and bravery, the call of the prophets that would enable the new Jewish image: connection to the land, bravery to take up arms, and also revolutionary strivings since Zionists would fight against social injustice just like the prophets of the past.

Religion on Zionism – Agudah, Mizrachi, Reform

Every coin has two sides, and if [Zionism](#) had a certain view of religion then religion had a certain view of Zionism. But to be more exact, different religious streams had different views of Zionism. Sometimes groups that differed in almost every aspect, such as the *Haredi* world and the American reform movement, could agree on one thing, that Zionism was a very bad idea. Religious groups supported Zionism with varying degrees of enthusiasm when it came to cooperating with secularists. We should begin by saying that Herzl understood the importance of Orthodoxy and he tried to join forces with it in a political alliance, but, after the second Zionist congress, he lost hope of bringing religious Jewry as a whole to his movement.^[10]

What were the major approaches in the religious community in regards to Zionism?

Mizrachi – Founded in 1902 in [Vienna](#), this group was the first religious party to declare itself religious and Zionist. Its primary goal was to take part in the Zionist endeavor to create a Jewish homeland and to give this homeland a religious identity. Even though it was a religious party, it saw itself as squarely political, in other words it was advocating the beliefs and values of its religious constituency but maintaining a mainstream political rhetoric. In fact, *Mizrachi* was part of an attempt to modernize religious life and values.^[11] In the early 20s, a socialist group was formed called [HaPoel HaMizrachi](#) that was made up of young socialists that were advocating a more direct involvement in the building of the new Jewish homeland and with a higher level of connection to the secular Zionists. Between 1920 and 1948, the relationship between these groups experienced ups and downs. This was the result of different ideas concerning the desired level of cooperation with the secular forces and the level of autonomy that they demanded for the religious Zionist community in the *Yishuv* and the future state.

Within this framework, a different group that would become a very dominant force within religious Zionism grew. This group set itself apart from *Mizrachi*, and groups like it, by using messianic rhetoric. Based on the teachings of [Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook](#), this group developed an ideology that emphasized the Jewish nation’s religious destiny over the individual’s.^[12] Rabbi Kook was a born in Lithuania (b. 1865- d. 1935) and was appointed the Rabbi of Jaffa in

1904 where he came to appreciate and support the Zionist enterprise, even though it was led by secularists. After the First World War, he was appointed the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine in 1921, an official position in the government of the Mandate. He and a group of students developed a comprehensive theology that identified the building of the Jewish national home and other political changes of the 20th century, not only as mere political developments but as the fulfillment of the messianic hopes that are found in Jewish traditions. They saw the rise of Zionism in particular, as evidence of the approaching messianic era.

[Agudat Yisrael](#) - Orthodox activists from [Germany](#) who wished to create an organization that would protect the interests of that part of religious Jewry that was not part of the Zionist movement created this party in 1912. While it was a creation of German Orthodoxy it gained momentum in the interwar period in Poland.^[13] The movement had different opinions concerning the question of the extent to which religious Jewry should remain detached from Zionism. ^[14] It situated itself as an alternative to Zionism and approached institutions outside the Jewish community as such. For example, it took an active part in Polish politics in the interwar period,^[15] and made a clear statement to the British Mandate authorities that it should be seen as a separate community apart from organized Zionist institutions.

This self-awareness of being separate from the Zionist secular majority became the focal point of the non-Zionist religious Jewry that described itself as [Haredi](#), which literally means “to fear.” This community sees itself as God-fearing and sociologists describe it as a community that has a sense of heroic religiosity, keeping religious traditions, such as Torah study, despite the challenges of modernity.^[16] It’s no surprise that all these factors can manifest themselves in different degrees, so *Haredi* society has many sub-groups. In light of this, attitudes toward Zionism vary. For example, while there were opinions within the *Haredi* camp that were willing to continue a dialogue, be it critical, with the Zionist movement, like *Agudat Yisrael*, there were others who supported severing all contact with [Zionism](#). With the emergence of ultra-radicals within Orthodoxy, not only Zionism, but also *Agudat Yisrael* was ostracized because it had contact with Zionists. These groups, many of which were centered in parts of Hungary, saw Zionism as a devilish creation, a sign of the tribulations of the messianic era. After the [Second World War](#), one of the leaders of these groups, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar, would declare the Holocaust a divine punishment for the sins of the Jews, primarily Zionism.^[17]

[Reform Judaism](#) – Since the Reform movement was established in the 19th century, it witnessed much discourse over whether or not nationality should be included as a major part of the definition of Judaism. The Reform movement however clearly defined Judaism as a religion and not a nationality. Jews identified with the nationality of their homeland, be it German, British or American, therefore they opposed Zionism. Since the basic tenet of Zionism was that a Jewish homeland must be established to resolve the global issues of anti-Semitism, this stood in direct contrast to the Reform movement’s desire to acculturate in general society. The movement’s objection to Zionism ceased after the [Holocaust](#) and the establishment of the State of Israel, mainly because of the work of one of its influential leaders, [Abba Hillel Silver](#), who steered the movement away from anti-Zionism.^[18]

The Status Quo Agreement and the Secular Religious Tension

The complicated relationship between religion and Zionism was not at the center of attention during pre-state Israel. The struggle of the [Yishuv](#) to gain independence simply pushed the problem aside. In some sense throughout Israeli history, the tension between secularists and the religious was never resolved because there was always something more urgent that took precedence.

One of the defining moments of the relationship of religion and state in Israel took place on the eve of the declaration of independence. [David Ben-Gurion](#) sent a letter dated June 19, 1947, to the political leaders of the religious parties ([Mizrachi](#) and [Agudat Yisrael](#)) making certain assurances concerning life in the future state.^[19] Ben-Gurion promised that:

- The future government will do all it can to make sure that the religious demands be answered concerning personal status issues, such as marriage, divorce, and conversions. The result of this promise was that the Chief Rabbinate has authority over personal status issues and religious law governs marriage and divorce. This agreement continued the policy established during the Turkish and British era.
- All government-operated kitchens (army, police, hospitals, etc.) will have [kosher](#) food.

- The Sabbath will be the official day of rest for Jews.
- There will be autonomy in education and the state will not intervene in religious education but will demand and regulate a minimum curriculum in secular subjects such as science, grammar and history.

The status quo agreement was accepted with the understanding that the assurances given by [Ben-Gurion](#) could be altered with the adoption of a constitution, but that constitution never came into being, as described in another chapter in this anthology.^[20] With no constitution, the “church”-state divide remained vague and the different political powers, secular and religious, constantly attempted to change the equilibrium.

There are many examples of these tensions, a major one being the “who-is-a-Jew” debate. This issue arose several times in relation to the [Law of Return](#) (1950). The law gives every Jew in the world the right to become an Israeli citizen; however it does not define a Jew. While the religious parties wanted to use the traditional legal definition, the secular parties supported a civil definition that included spouses and children of Jews or people who were converted under the auspices of denominations other than Orthodox.^[21] Other debates that occasionally resurface relate to the public transportation operating on the Sabbath or the political battles over the funding of religious institutions by the state,^[22] but it seems that the topic at the core of the religious-secular struggle has to do with army service.

The army is an integral part of Jewish Israeli society; it is an army that enjoys the support of the entire population and is seen as the force that stands between the Jewish state and its destruction by the hands of its enemies. Most importantly, nearly everyone serves-- Israel has a model of (near) universal conscription -- and the many soldiers that were killed in Israel's wars represent all segments of the Israeli population, with the exception of the [Arab](#) and *Haredi* communities.

Since [Israel](#) is engaged in conflict with [Arab countries](#), the fact that most Arabs are exempt from army service is not surprising and accepted by the public. That is not the case with the *Haredi* population; there we find a tension since this issue comes up on a regular basis. The history of the *Haredi* exemption from the army began with David Ben-Gurion's decision to allow 400 yeshiva students to continue their studies rather than serve in the army in the hopes of revitalizing the Yeshiva world that was destroyed after the Holocaust. The number grew through the years until [Menachem Begin](#) abolished the quota and every person that had the status of a full-time Yeshiva student was exempt from army service.^[23] By 2010, the number of exemptions had reached 60,000. While in the decade prior the army developed programs that catered specifically to the *Haredi* population, it did not change the overall picture. The *Haredi* units offer food with rabbinic supervision acceptable to the *Haredi* community, all religious services and needs are part of the units' official schedule, and no women take part in the units for reasons of modesty. Secularists talk of equality and a fair distribution of obligations while the *Haredim* claim that the learning of Torah is a spiritual defense to the nation and helps to maintain its Jewish identity. Other considerations in the *Haredi* camp are that army service will probably cause a culture shock to the young men who have lived in a protected environment, a shock that might lead them to abandon their way of life.

Another point of contention is the issue of welfare. After the [Holocaust](#), *Haredi* leadership, mainly [Rabbi Avraham Yashayahu Karelitz](#) (known after his book as *Hazon Ish*), opted to create a model dubbed by sociologist Menachem Friedman as “the learners' society.”^[24] This term refers to a reality where at the center of life is Torah study above all else, including material aspirations. The ideal man in this society devotes his life to Torah study, he learns in a *kollel* (a learning institution for married men) while his wife works to support the family. A substantial part of the family budget is dependent on welfare payments; some of which were created for the *Haredi* population of *kollel* students as part of political negotiations with the *Haredi* parties.^[25] This became another major point of friction in Israeli society that labeled the *Haredi* population as exploitive and parasitic. Secular politicians regard the economic hardships of living in such conditions as a reality that needs to be changed with little appreciation for the *Haredi* ideal of economic sacrifice for the study of Torah. Even though there is evidence of change in the *Haredi* economic structure, this is still a hot topic in the Israeli political scene.

Religious Courts, Family Law and the Supreme Court

One of the major points of contention between the opposing sides is Family Law. Under Turkish rule, the religious courts had the authority to determine issues concerning personal status. The [British Mandate](#) adopted this system and, after 1948,

the Israeli government decided to continue with this system.[26] Why did the secular parties agree to this arrangement? As [Ben-Gurion](#) states in his letter concerning the status quo, he and others were worried that the Jewish people would split. Since a civil divorce is not valid according to Jewish law, women might remarry and the children from the second marriage would be considered *mamzerim* (bastards) who, according to Jewish law, are only allowed to marry other *mamzerim* or converts.

Since 1948, Israeli law has given religious tribunals the sole authority in matters of marriage and divorce. However, the fact that religious law is not compatible with liberal notions of gender equality leads to a constant struggle. Since Israel has not come closer to a constitution, the parliamentary arena was not the right place for those seeking change. The battle is therefore waged in the courts; the secular court system uses its power to enforce secular law on the religious system and to diminish the scope of the authority of religious law by reinterpreting the law. In a slow process, the religious system has lost more and more power.

This process has led many in Israel, especially in the religious community, to identify the court system, primarily the [Supreme Court](#), as an agent of secularization. [27]

Since the 1980s, the Supreme Court has been promoting a line that supports human rights as they are understood in a liberal context and in a wide array of issues: gender equality, LGBT rights, limits on military activity in the [West Bank](#) and the [Gaza Strip](#), etc. In many decisions the court took a stand against the wishes of the religious camp and even nullified laws as unconstitutional after they were passed in the Israeli parliament. All this leads to a reality where the courts are highly criticized by the Israeli right and reduces the legitimacy the Supreme Court has in the Israeli public opinion.[28]

The *Tshuva* Movement and *Shas*

One of the significant points in the religious-secular tension in Israel is the rise of [Shas](#). This is a political party that was founded on an ethnic basis and changed the delicate equilibrium of religion and state in Israel. The mass immigration of Jews from the Muslim world to Israel in the beginning of the 1950s created social tension between Jews that came from European countries and the immigrants from the Levant and North Africa. Differences of language, culture, values and economic resources immediately affected the relationship between the communities and at times these social tensions even resulted in violence.[29] This tension was found in the general population and also among the *Haredi* community and, in the early 1980s, *Shas* was created. It identifies as a *Haredi* party but it represents a wider constituency that is not *Haredi* yet identifies with the message of discrimination against the [Sephardi](#) community. The party allowed the growth of an independent community that differs from other [Ashkenazi](#) groups because of a more complicated attitude toward Zionism. While the other Ashkenazi *Haredi* parties continued with the line of separation from the Israeli secular establishment, *Shas*' members were willing to assume a larger role in Israeli public life while demanding more resources from the state.

[Shas](#)' growing power in the political arena, well beyond that of any other minority group in [Israeli society](#), and its fierce criticism of the Israeli establishment led to great interest in the movement.[30] All of a sudden there was a minority group that was able to challenge the traditional hegemonic powers of Israeli society. Many perceived the movement to be a threat to the Zionist establishment as it seemed to be shifting the loyalty of the *Mizrachi* population to the anti-Zionist Ashkenazi Orthodox society.[31] Another tangible threat *Shas* presented to the fragile equilibrium was the *Tshuva* movement. The latter is not a political movement but a term that refers to Jews that conducted a secular life style and decided to adopt a religious life, generally speaking a *Haredi* one. It's a topic that has not been properly researched yet and there are conflicting reports about the scope of the phenomenon. It can be found both in the Ashkenazi and *Mizrachi Haredi* communities, but it seems to be extremely strong among *Mizrachi* Jews. It has the potential to change the balance in Israeli society, but it also introduces *Haredi* society to changes brought by those that came from the non-religious world.[32]

***Gush Emunim* and the Emergence of a New Religious Zionism**

Another development that changed the relationship between religious and secular was centered in religious [Zionism](#). As time passed, the teachings of [Rabbi Kook](#) and his students became more popular and began to dominate religious

Zionism. Rabbi Kook's teachings, which emphasized the Jewish nation's destiny, finally found a proper vessel through which to express themselves. After the [Six-Day War](#) the Israeli victory was seen as a major step in the fulfillment of the messianic vision presented by Rabbi Kook. The victory was not seen only as a military one, but as a new phase in the process that would end in redemption after the settlement of the Jewish people in the land of Israel.

Religious Zionists were not content with building new Jewish towns and villages; they sought to transform the Zionist secular hegemony.^[33] Such a revolution required cadres and thus came the need for an educational system. The religious settlement movement created the *Hesder* yeshivas that combined [Torah](#) study and [army](#) service^[34] and called its adherents to reach positions of leadership in all walks of life. The desire to lead Israeli society and to expand Israeli control over the territories gained in the [Six-Day War](#) led to a growing conflict between the Israeli secular left wing and religious Zionism over the future of the territories. The greater the pressure felt by Palestinian population growth in the territories, the greater the support across large swaths of the Israeli political spectrum became for a peace agreement that would entail giving up those parts of biblical Israel. This caused a growing rift between religious Zionism and secular Zionism. This conflict was exacerbated by the [2005 disengagement](#) from Gaza as it became clear the Israeli government was prepared to forcibly remove Jews from their homes to advance its interests and conveyed the message that Jews in the West Bank could not count on the government to support them remaining in their homes.

Islam in Israel : Legal and Political Aspects

In 2009, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics published that there were 1,286,500 [Muslim](#) citizens of Israel.^[35] Like the Jews, Muslims are entitled to state support of religious needs, and Islamic law governs the personal status issues of Muslim citizens. Almost all Muslims in [Israel](#) are Sunni, and their legal traditions and customs are established in the *Sharia* courts that are state sanctioned. These state courts, as part of the Israeli government, are fully funded and the judges are chosen by a committee of ministers, parliament members, Kadis (Muslim Judges) and lawyers and their salaries are paid by the state.^[36] The *Sharia* court system in Israel was the first source of leadership to Muslims after 1948, not only from a religious point of view, but also politically. ^[37] The courts serve as a center of Islamic identity in Israel and since they conduct their affairs and publish their decisions in Arabic, their actions are generally unknown to the Israeli public.

The state-funded schools that teach in Arabic include [Islam](#) in their curriculum; however, there are hardly any options to study Islam in depth in Israel. This has been a problem since 1948, when only one parochial school was left. ^[38] That problem was so serious that in the mid-1960s there were hardly any qualified clergy to supply religious services and the government wanted to invite non-Israeli clergy to provide religious needs.^[39] Religious officials supported by the state were mainly skilled politically rather than educated in the finer points of *Sharia*. This vacuum was filled after 1967 when interested students were able to attend Palestinian Islamic colleges.^[40] The thriving religious campuses in the [West Bank](#) and [Gaza](#), and the politically involved teachers, played a significant role in stimulating the rise of the Islamist movement. Although it began as a terrorist organization (Usrat al-Jihad), after its members were arrested and sent to prison, they decided to create a different model and upon the release of the leadership from jail in 1983, they created a movement that focused on education and social action. In 1989 it decided to begin political involvement at the municipal level, winning several municipalities.^[41] As for Knesset elections, the movement was divided and when Shaykh Abdallah Nimer Darwish decided to take part in the election of 1996, the leader of the more radical group within the movement and the mayor of *Um el Phahim* decided to part ways; he became the leader of the northern branch of the Islamist movement. ^[42] In the 1990s, for the first time since 1948, Islamic seminaries were opened by the movement, which prompted the state to fund another seminary as a countermeasure.^[43] While the Israeli government is less willing to intervene in Muslim religious life, the growing radicalization among [Arabs in Israel](#) and the role the northern branch of the Islamist movement might, if not resolved, be the source of future clashes. ^[44]

Christianity and Druze

According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, there were 151,700 [Christians](#) in Israel in 2009.^[45] It is the community with the lowest birth rate and it is divided by more than 20 different denominations. Most Christians in Israel are Arabs, but some are people that immigrated to Israel as descendents of Jews but are now practicing Christians.

The largest denomination is the Greek Catholic Church, but Orthodox churches, the Catholic church (and eastern factions that returned to the Catholic Church in the 18th century while retaining their Byzantine liturgy), Monophysitist churches (churches that broke away from the orthodox church in the early days of Christianity) and protestant groups are also represented. Concerning the Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches, even though the majority of its members are Arabs, the clergy is Greek and there is tension between lay leaders and clergy especially in light of the scope of property held by the churches. According to the Turkish system that was accepted by the British and Israeli legal system, the different Christian groups that are acknowledged by the state have legal jurisdiction over personal status issues and the ecclesiastical courts, while not appointed by the government or funded by it, they have the power to make decisions about marriage and divorce.

The [Druze](#) religion is a somewhat more complicated issue since it keeps its tenets secret from most of its followers; only a minority of men and women are allowed access to the Druze religious texts. For those that are not initiated fully in the religion, the community developed strong social mechanisms that safeguard their identity. [\[46\]](#) The Druze religious institutions are funded by the state and their courts are part of the Israeli legal system. Judges are appointed by a committee of ministers, parliament members and lawyers and are paid by the government. [\[47\]](#) Since Druze clerics have connections with Druze leaders in [Syria](#) and [Lebanon](#), some of them do not support the Druze community's strong sense of identification with Israeli society.

Summary

The process described in this chapter is ongoing. It is a fight on legacy but also the future of [Israeli society](#). The secular claims are that the Zionist enterprise was primarily a secularist endeavor in the spirit of modern nationalism. The religious side claims that the victorious wrote the history and omitted the part the religious parties played. The [Haredi](#) camp is also contemplating larger involvement in Israeli society and continues to diminish the hegemony of the traditional secularist leadership.

This conflict is articulated with pathos, the two sides express the wish to fashion future generations of Israelis, and it is characterized as an all or nothing battle. It is impossible to say what the future holds for the gap between the two factions in Israeli society, but the growing numbers of supporters of religion in Israel (even though the reports about the actual numbers are conflicting) suggest that the intensity of this conflict will grow. However it's important to mention that this conflict never resulted in violence, the roles of the game are clear to the players and until the present it has been contained to the legal and political fields.

Notes:

[\[1\]](#) Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: the Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, (Cambridge 1992) 89-100, 158-199.

[\[2\]](#) Michael Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish identity and European culture in Germany, 1749-1824*, (Detroit, 1979) 8-56, 62-99.

[\[3\]](#) Joseph Blau, *Modern Varieties of Judaism*, (New York 1966) 28-74.

[\[4\]](#) Howard Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History*, (New York 1990) 332-358.

[\[5\]](#) Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, "DerishatZion", in *The Zionist Idea* Arthur Hertzberg (ed.) (New York 1969), 114. Originally published in 1862 see also Judah Solomon Hai Alkalai, "Minhat Yehud" a ibid p. 106.

[\[6\]](#) Ken Koltun-Fromm, *Moses Hess and modern Jewish identity*, (Bloomington 2001).

[\[7\]](#) Theodor Herzl, *A Jewish state: an attempt at a modern solution of the Jewish question* (New York 1917) 38.

- [8] Steven J. Zipperstein, "Symbolic Politics, Religion and Ahad Haam", in Shmuel Almog et al (eds.) *Zionism and Religion* (Boston 1998) 55-66.
- [9] Shmuel Almog, "The Role of Religious Values in the Second Aliyah", *ibid*, 237-250; Anita Shapira, "The Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement", *ibid*, 251-255.
- [10] Yosef Salmon, *Religion and Zionism : First encounters* (Jerusalem 2002).
- [11] Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology*, (Boston, 2009) 19-26.
- [12] Yehudah Mirsky, "An Intellectual and Spiritual Biography of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhaq Ha-Cohen Kook from 1865-1904" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2007).
- [13] Gershon Bacon, *The politics of tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916-1939*, (Jerusalem 1996).
- [14] Menachem Friedman, *Society and Religion: The Non-Zionist Orthodoxy in Eretz-Israel, 1918-1936*. (Jerusalem 1982), 2nd edition (Hebrew).
- [15] Ezra Mendelsohn, *Jews of Central Europe Between the Wars*, (Bloomington 1983) 46-47.
- [16] Menachem Friedman, *The Haredi Ultra-Orthodox Society: Sources Trends and Processes*, *The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies*, (Jerusalem 1991) (Hebrew).
- [17] Aviezer Ravitzky, "Munkacs and Jerusalem: Ultra Orthodox Opposition to Zionism and Agudism" in Shmuel Almog et al (eds.) *Zionism and Religion* Boston 1998, 67-89.
- [18] Mark A. Raider, Jonathan D. Sarna, Ronald W. Zweig (eds.) *Abba Hillel Silver and American Zionism* (London, 1997); Ofer Shiff, *The Defeated Zionist: Abba Hillel Silver and his Attempt to Transcend Jewish Nationalism*" (Tel-Aviv 2010) (Hebrew); idem, *Survival through Integration: American Reform Jewish Universalism and the Holocaust*, (Leiden 2005).
- [19] Itamar Rabinovich, Jehuda Reinharz, *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations Pre 1948 to the Present*, (Boston 2008) 58-59.
- [20] Amnon Rubinstein, "Israel's Partial Constitution: The Basic Laws", in Mitchell Bard et-al (eds.) *Israel Studies: An Anthology* (Washington 2009).
- [21] Oscar Kraines, *The Impossible Dilemma: Who Is a Jew in the State of Israel?* (New York 1976).
- [22] JCPA.org, <http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles2/israel-jud.html>, retrieved Sept. 1, 2010.
- [23] Gideon Sapir, "Yeshiva Students Conscriptio: an Outline for the Relevant Normative considerations" *Plilim* 9 (2001) 217 (Hebrew).
- [24] Friedman, *supra* note 16, ch. 1.
- [25] Eli Berman, "Sect, Subsidy, and Sacrifice: An Economist's View of Ultra-Orthodox Jews," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* Vol. 115, No. 3, Pages 905-953.
- [26] Daphne Barak Erez, *Outlawed Pigs: Law, Religion and Culture in Israel* (Madison 2007) 3-43.

[27] Gideon Sapir, "Religion and State in Israel - The Case for Reevaluation and Constitutional Entrenchment.," 22 *Hastings Int'l & Comp. L. Rev.* (1999) 617.

[28] Suzie Navot, *The Constitutional Law of Israel* (Netherlands, 2007) 30- 318; Gideon Sapir, "Law or Politics: Israeli Constitutional Adjudication as a Case Study" *UCLA J. of Int'l L. & Foreign Aff.* 6 (2001) 169.

[29] Gershon Shafir, Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge 2002) 37-95; Yehuda Shenhav, "Jews from Arab Lands in Israel: An 'Ethnic' Community in the Realms of 'National' Memory" in Hanan Hever, Yehuda Shenhav and Pnina Motzafi-Haller (eds.), *Mizrahim In Israel: A Critical Investigation of Israel's Ethnicity* (Jerusalem, 2002), 105-151 (Hebrew).

[30] Yoav Peled, *Shas: The Challenge of Israeliness* (Tel-Aviv, 2001) (Hebrew).

[31] Yedidya Kalfon Stillman (eds.), *From Iberia to Diaspora: Studies in Sephardic History and Culture* (Brill, 1999), 223-234.

[32] Lilly Weissbrod, "Shas: an ethnic religious party", [Israel Affairs](#), Volume 9, Number 4, June 20.

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[40] Ibid, 121. Martin Edelman, *Courts, Politics and Culture in Israel* (London 1994) 77.

[41] Ibid, 131-134.

[42] Ibid, 135.

[43] Ibid, 140.

[44] Ibid, 158.

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Religion in Israel is a central feature of the country and plays a major role in shaping Israeli culture and lifestyle. Religion has played a central role in Israel's history. Israel is also the only country in the world where a majority of citizens are Jewish. According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, the population in 2011 was 75.4% Jewish, 20.6% Arab, and 4.1% minority groups. The religious affiliation of the Israeli population as of 2019 was 74.2% Jewish, 17.8% Muslim, 2.0% Christian. The role of religion in Israel may be studied from a range of disciplines, including sociology, history and law. In this chapter, we will offer a broad survey of the topic and try to give a little bit of everything to offer a basic introduction to this topic. Since Judaism is the biggest religious group and Israel defines itself as a Jewish state, I will focus on Judaism. Beginning with an historical background, I will not mention numbers and percentages since the published reports are conflicting and the definitions used are inordinately vague. How Religious are Israeli Jews? The unexpected victory of the religious (meaning Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox) parties in Israel's elections surprised many people. For years, reporting from Israel and the comments of those Israelis whom the reporters cover or interview has suggested that Israeli Jews are divided into two groups: the overwhelming majority who are secular and a small minority who are religious.