



J Street's Spiritual Conceit

David M. Weinberg

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The pious spiritual claptrap that characterizes J Street's conference in Washington this week is both a conceit and a new form of Jewish apostasy. Conference speakers earnestly broadcast their "profound" Jewish and "spiritual" identities in order to besmirch the mainstream Jewish community and engender a distancing in US-Israel relations. This certainly does not fool the American Muslim leaders who are speaking at the conference. They know and appreciate exactly what J Street is up to.

It was the Buddhist seders that tipped me off to the real conceit behind J Street. The sensitive "progressive" types behind the new Washington lobby are deeply concerned, it seems, for the morality and soul of Israel.

Gee, thanks.

A love for Buddhist seders, a penchant for avant garde poetry (including a ballad entitled *The Queer Intifada*), and an abiding concern for Israel's spiritual quintessence – all while being intermarried down to nearly the last Jewish soul among them – is how *The New York Times* recently characterized the founders and key staff members of J Street. They seek, you see, justice and holiness and Jewish meaning in the world. Especially in the Arab-Israel conflict.

This explains the preponderance of numerous, vaporous spiritual types at this week's big J Street hug-in in Washington. Rabbi Sharon, Rabbi Amy, Rabbi Tirzah, Rabbi Jennie, Rabbi Julie, Rabbi Toba and Rabbi Melissa are among the

prominent speakers. They are "diversity facilitators," "spirituality counselors," and "interreligious leaders" at places called Neve Kodesh, Brit Tzedek, Dorshei Tzedek and Just Vision.

So much "Tzedek" (Justice)! So much "Kodesh" (Holiness)! So much overflowing of honey, holiness and justice! At a political lobby conference, no less. Perhaps the organization should be renamed Spiritual Street.

You know that all this righteousness just needs to be exported – through tough love, if necessary – to Israel. To repair the Middle East. To spiritually save Israel in spite of itself. Or at least to salve the sacred American Jewish soul.

Well, enough, I say, of this misty, sentimental and self-serving gobbledygook. All this soft spiritual urgency, supposedly on "behalf of" Israel, belies a triple conceit; or should we say, a great deceit.

Firstly, J Street is peddling the nutty notion that spirituality has anything to do with Mideast peace. The latent chutzpa is the insinuation that authentic identification with the Jewish prophets and morality dovetails with the dovish side of the political map. If only American Jews and Israelis were more religiously dovish and in touch with the forgiving and compassionate side of their Jewish souls – we would do the "left" thing and concede more generously to the Palestinians. Then, lo and behold, peace would come to the Mideast.

The second conceit is that such J Street-peddled nonsense – along with J Street support for talks with Hamas, opposition to military action against the Hamas, and opposition to sanctions or military action against nuclear Iran – represents the majority of American Jewry. Hogwash. Patently false.

The third conceit is that, if only Israel were to change – and it is J Street's job to get America to force Israel to change – then peace would come to the Mideast. As if Israel was the party unwilling to compromise. As if Israel hasn't already offered the Palestinians at Oslo and Camp David and Taba and Annapolis just about everything they want of post-67 Israel. As if the Palestinians have compromised on their demands one wit since the great handshake on the White House lawn. But it is Israel that needs to be pressured, say the J Street moral oracles.

J Street is a new form of Jewish apostasy. Its adherents hasten to embrace their Jewishness (even if they don't really know much about authentic Jewish tradition and morality) in order to besmirch Israel and the mainstream Jewish community. They earnestly declare how "profoundly" Jewish they are, in order to engender a distancing in US-Israel relations.

I guess that's why J Street has spent most of its resources bashing long-standing supporters of Israel – calling them extremists and right-wingers and accusing them of a "silencing" – and listing things that Israel must be made to do. All this, instead of calling out the dangers of Iranian nuclear weapons or Palestinian genocidal anti-Semitism. That's why they fret over the Jewish soul instead of working to save and protect the physical Jewish State of Israel.

The only people clearly not fooled by all this spiritual mumbo-jumbo are Salam al-Mayarati, Ziad Asali, Trita Parsi and other leaders of the American Muslim Public Affairs Council, American Task Force on Palestine and the National Iranian American Council – all of whom are speaking – surprise, surprise – at the J Street Jewish soul jamboree this week. They undoubtedly see past the pious claptrap, and know – and appreciate – exactly what J Street is up to.

The writer is director of public affairs at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. He blogs at www.davidmweinberg.com.

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