

Elu v'Elu: Towards Integration of Identity and Multiple Narratives in the Jewish Renewal Sector in Israel

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Abstract

Secular Israelis are reconnecting to Judaism in an increasingly growing range of ways. This trend has been accelerating over the last ten years. Whether through *beit midrash* programs or communities of *kabbalat shabbat* prayer and celebration, Jews who had identified as secular and as such did not seek Jewish expression in their lives beyond the national Jewish calendar of Israel, are now finding ways of maintaining their secular identity while actively pursuing increased Jewish engagement at the same time. As the diversity of programs and activities expands, so do the ways of creatively connecting to Judaism and attempting to present a societal and cultural alternative to the previous “secular” and “religious” dichotomy. Both leaders of the organizations and participants in their various programs recognize that the process of reconnection to Judaism is not a passing phase, but a transformation of their identities as Israelis and/or as Jews. The pluralistic *batey midrash* and prayer communities deliberately provide the structures and processes by which the non-observant, with modern values, ideas, knowledge and lifestyle, can be integrated and transformed by an identity that can hold multiple narratives, views and attitudes. This takes place through transformative Jewish text study or community celebration, and a thoughtful educational approach. The article draws on theories

of transformative learning as well as the analysis of scholars who have examined the elements that contribute to integration and formation of healthy Jewish identity. It locates this phenomenon in light of changes taking place in the North American Jewish community and liberal Jewish communities in Israel, as well as the mutual, ongoing influences between and among these organizations.

Keywords: Jewish identity, pluralism, innovation, *tefila*, community, renewal, *batey midrash*, *kehilot tefila*