



**ENGAGING THE ISRAELI DIASPORA:  
TORONTO AS A CASE STUDY  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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## Glossary / Concepts

**North American Jewish Sabra (NAJS)** Israelis who identify as Israeli-North American Jews (or Israeli-Canadian Jews) and thus demonstrate a hybrid tri-dentity. The NAJS understands the importance of his/her connection to the Jewish people as a whole; still cares deeply about his/her home country, even if he is critical of government policies; and finally, has successfully integrated into North-American professional, academic, and/or cultural life.

**Israeli Hybrid Social Space** Israeli Hybrid Social Space is the physical, virtual, and conceptual space that merges into one constellation three identities – Israeli, Jewish or all North American – previously perceived by Israelis as separate alternatives to their desired way of life in the diaspora.

**Criteria for Hybrid Social Space** Reut proposed four parameters that are essential for the creation of the Hybrid Social Space: vision-driven leadership of the hybrid community, meaningful engagement with the Jewish community, Jewish education and Hebrew, and connection to Israel.

Reut suggests that these should be practiced in Israeli-Canadian community initiatives in efforts to cultivate the Hybrid Israeli Social Space.

## Team

**Reut's team in this project:** **Eran Shayshon** (Director of Policy and Strategy); **Alissa Breiman** (Head of the Jewish Diaspora Team); **Daphna Kaufman** (Team Leader); **Etan Cohen** (Analyst).

**Netaly Ophir** and **Talia Gorodess** worked on earlier stages of the project.

The Reut team would like to acknowledge our interns, **Sybil Ottenstein** and **Yoav Schaeffer**, for their important work on this project.

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**The ideas presented in this document reflect the Reut Institute's position alone.** Below is a partial list of those who contributed to this work (alphabetical order):

- **Kate Abazov**, Russian Community Representative, UJA Federation
- **Prof. Irving Abella**, Shiff Professor of Canadian Jewish History, York University
- **Sigal Almog**, Owner, Sigal Books

- **Sagi Balasha**, CEO, Israeli American Council (IAC)
- **Ronny Barrelli**, CEO, TrendyMED Inc.
- **Simone Blankstein**, Director of Cultural Affairs , Israeli Consulate
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- **Irit Frid**, Real Estate Trader and Investor
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- **Meir Klein**, Executive Vice-President and Director of Research & Development, Canada Israel Chamber of Commerce and UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Respectively
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- **Uri Leventer-Roberts**, Planning Executive, Commission on the Jewish People, UJA-Federation of New York

- **Sarah Mali**, Director of Israel Engagement, UJA Federation
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- **Adam Milstein**, Board Member, Israeli Leadership Council
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Schwartz/Reisman Centre

- **Ariel Zaltzman**, Managing and Education Director, Kachol-Lavan – The Centre for Hebrew and Israel Studies, Schwartz/Reisman Centre, Toronto
- **Rabbi Yoseph Zaltzman**, Senior Rabbi, Jewish Russian Community Centre of Ontario

## Executive Summary

1. **In recent years, the growth of the Israeli diaspora has garnered the attention of and challenged the State of Israel and Jewish world.** Estimated 500,000 Israelis that are building a communal life abroad are shaking the Jewish boat.
2. **Traditionally, The State of Israel and Jewish communities alienated from Israeli immigrants due to the inherent tension between the phenomena of Israeli immigration and Zionism.**
3. **In recent years, however, this has changed. The State of Israel and Jewish communities increasingly realize that the Israeli diaspora can be a political, economic, social, and cultural asset.** Jewish communities recognize Israelis' strategic significance as instrumental in strengthening Jewish Peoplehood. Additionally, Israelis help in Jewish community efforts to develop pride in Jewish identity. Finally, Israelis offer opportunities for real engagement with Israeli society and can mobilize and be mobilized against the assault on Israel's legitimacy. Accordingly, the State of Israeli and Jewish communal organizations are beginning to engage Israelis.
4. **Following years of alienation, the Toronto Federation has changed its approach toward Israeli immigrants. Today, the Toronto Federation is the leading Jewish organization seeking to engage the Israeli diaspora. In that, it has been paving the way for the Government of Israel and for other Jewish communal organizations globally.**
5. **Yet, most Israeli-Canadians still perceive the connection with the Jewish community as not relevant, not important, not a badge of pride, and certainly not a duty.** Most of the North-American Israelis made little effort so far to engage with the local Jewish community and see little value in investing in Jewish life abroad. Among Israelis we met, there is a strong suspicion toward the Jewish communal establishment and "Israeli" activities, which is also a result of ignorance toward the Federation's role. Looking for the familiar, Israelis established *de-facto* a "Little Israel", where Israelis can socialize in Hebrew in schools, cafes and gyms.
6. **At the same time, many Israelis realize that striving for an exclusively Israeli identity for their children lacks resilience in the absence of connection to Jewish culture and heritage. Meanwhile, the Israeli and Jewish identity of second- and third-generation Israelis is fading.** Thus, "Little Israel" is not good enough for cultivating a resilient identity. Thus, second- and third-generation Israelis are moving away from their parents' Israeli national identity towards the all-Canadian national identity, skipping over their inherent Jewish identity.
7. **This understanding heralded the emergence of a new type of Israeli leadership, the North America Jewish Sabra (NAJS). The NAJS seeks to opt for a hybrid identity comprised of both an Israeli identity and a strong connection to Jewish life.**

8. **It is the task of the NAJS leadership, the Jewish communal organizations and the Government of Israel to meet the challenge of consolidating a resilient identity among second- and third- generation Israelis in the diaspora.**

### **Strategy and Policy Options**

9. **The heretofore approaches to the Israeli diaspora have proven ineffective:** The negation of the Israeli diaspora did not bring back the Israelis to Israel; any attempt to fully integrate Israeli-Canadians into the community fails due to the lack of trust of first-generation Israelis in Jewish organizations; and “Little Israel” is evidently not producing another generation of Sabras. **Thus, the Reut Institute offers an approach intended for the next generation:**
10. **The Vision: Facilitating the integration of second- and third- generation Israelis into the Jewish community,** acknowledging that the gap between first-generation Israelis and the Jewish community is too wide to close;
11. **The Mission: Cultivate a hybrid Israeli social space.** Relevant actors should focus on challenging the concept of "Little Israel." To do so, they must further cultivate a social space that is hybrid, which encourages the emergence of a resilient identity constellation – this includes a strong Israeli dimension as well as a robust connection between Israelis, Judaism and the local Jewish community.
12. **The Strategy: Build the organizations of the "Diaspora in the Making".** The Government of Israel, the Jewish community, and Israeli leaders should work together to establish programs and institutions that reflect the desired hybridism between 'Israelism' and Judaism. These programs and institutions would provide the necessary infrastructure and support, as well as a relevant toolkit for the next generation of Israelis to become active members of Toronto's Jewish community. This effort will also incentivize hybridization among the many existing Israeli informal organizations.
13. **The Reut Institute outlined four criteria aimed at cultivating the Hybrid Social Space: Vision-Driven Hybrid Leadership, Meaningful Engagement with the Jewish Community, Jewish Education and Hebrew and Connection to Israel.** Implementing these into platforms and programs is essential for success.
14. **At the Strategy and Policy Options section, we provide detailed recommendations, which mainly draw upon the Schwartz Reisman Centre (SRC) to illustrate how to implement these parameters.** That is due to our belief that the SRC is uniquely positioned to strengthen the Israeli-Canadian identity.

## Introduction

1. **In recent years, the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto (hereinafter the Federation) has become the leading Jewish organization in efforts to engage the Israeli Diaspora community,** serving as a model for Israeli governmental agencies and Jewish communal organizations.

The vision of the Federation's "Tomorrow Campaign" is to build and revitalize centers of the Jewish community for the next generation. One of campaign's stated goals is to engage the Israeli community in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and to create a strong and diverse Jewish community.

2. **The goal of this document is to draw upon the case of Toronto, identify opportunities and challenges in the relationship between Israelis abroad and local Jewish communities, and offer guidelines for meeting them. This document represents the outcome of a strategic partnership between the Reut Institute and the Toronto Federation.**
3. **The policy options proposed in this document can be applied broadly, though are mainly directed at the Toronto Federation, and particularly the Schwartz Reisman Centre (SRC).** Additionally, the recommendations are relevant to Israelis abroad, Jewish communities worldwide, and Israeli government agencies.
4. **The broader context of our work is Israel's relations with the Jewish world and the concept of Jewish Peoplehood.** Our work with Jewish organizations and Israeli government ministries on this issue are guided by the taskforce's conceptual framework titled: ['A new relationship between Israel and the Jewish world.'](#)
5. **Within this context, the Reut team zoomed in on the Israeli Diaspora, which was identified as a blind spot.** Our team has focused its efforts on this issue early 2011 and **published a [conceptual framework](#) a year later (3/12) on the potential of the Israeli Diaspora in strengthening Jewish peoplehood.**

Since then, we have worked on this issue with the Israeli government, Jewish world organizations, and Jewish and Israeli communities in North America. Our work included study visits to the Israeli communities in Los Angeles, New York, and Palo Alto; co-hosting a conference with the Jewish Agency for Israeli leadership from around North America in New York; and co-hosting a workshop at the 2012 General Assembly of the Jewish Federation of North America (hereinafter the JFNA GA) with the Toronto Federation on the place of the Israeli community within Jewish communal life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following are key benchmarks that shaped this document: **Reut participated in the first global conference of Israelis living abroad held by the Toronto Federation (2010); conducted study visits to Israeli communities in Los Angeles** as guests of the Israeli American Council (4/11) and New York (10/11); **published its [conceptual framework](#) (3/12) on the Israeli Diaspora as a catalyst for Jewish Peoplehood; co-hosted a conference for Israeli leadership from around North America** (hereinafter, NA) (3/12) together with the Jewish Agency (hereinafter, JAFI); **conducted a study-visit in Toronto** (6/12), meeting with over fifty members of the Toronto Israeli and Jewish communities; **presented its findings in Toronto and participated in webinars, consultations, and meetings for initial feedback** (2/13); **joined the**

6. **In the process leading up to the writing of this document, Reut conducted a two-week study-visit in Toronto (6/12).** During this visit, members of the Reut team met with over fifty members of the Israeli-Torontonian community and Jewish professional and lay leaders. Reut's team returned to Toronto to get a first round of feedback on the team's insights (2/13). The feedback has been incorporated into this document.

## **Background: Israelis Abroad – From Past to Present**

7. **The changing paradigm in the relationship between Israel and Jewish communities abroad forms the backdrop of Reut's work on the Israeli community in Toronto (see annex).**
8. **Connected to the changing paradigm is a growing understanding that a vibrant Diaspora is critical for a thriving global Jewish collective.** While in the past, the main project of the Jewish people was building the State of Israel, the focus today has broadened and includes the strengthening of Jewish communities worldwide.
9. **The Israeli diaspora is a new phenomenon.** While Israeli immigration is not new, its scope and scale have increased in recent years and with it, the emergence of nascent Israeli communities outside of Israel.
10. **The emergence of these Israeli communities outside of Israel constitutes a new challenge and opportunity for the State of Israel and Jewish communal organizations.** Strong, resilient Jewish communities – the backbone of a vibrant diaspora – must be responsive to the changing nature, needs and opportunities of their members.

## **Traditional Relationship between the Israelis and Jewish Communities**

11. **Traditionally, Israeli immigrants have lived in relative detachment from the local Jewish community.** This arose from a number of historical factors, which include the following:
  - a. **Classical Zionism was based on the negation of the Diaspora and a strong moral and ideological call for the imperative of *aliyah*.**
  - b. **Thus, *yerida*,<sup>2</sup> was perceived as a liability to Zionism. The Israeli Government and the Jewish world perceived those who had left Israel as**

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**inaugural meeting of JAFI's taskforce on Israelis abroad (10/12); co-hosted a workshop at the JFNA GA with the Toronto Federation** on the place of the Israeli community within Jewish communal life (10/12), in which the opening words of Jewish Federation of Toronto President, Ted Sokolsky, sent waves through the organized Jewish world (Natan Sharansky, Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, was also a panel member and emphasized the Israeli Diaspora as a strategic priority for the Jewish world); and **Participated at the 2013 AIPAC Policy Conference**, where the session on Israeli Diaspora leadership hosted by the Israeli-American Council (IAC). **Finally, Reut is currently working with the Jewish Agency on developing a vision for a national body of Israeli leadership** in North America.

<sup>2</sup> The term '*yerida*' (literally, descending) refers to the emigration from Israel.

betraying the Zionist dream, and were called *nefolet shel nemushot* ('weaklings');<sup>3</sup>

- c. **Local Jewish communities view Israeli immigrants as 'outsiders,'** primarily due to a dissonance between their presence and classical Zionism (see above), but also because of a variety of cultural and societal factors;<sup>4</sup>
- d. **Israeli immigrants tend to see themselves as culturally different from local Jewish families.** For example, Israeli immigrants often find it 'unnatural' to attend synagogue, which is the prevailing form of communal interaction in local Jewish communities;<sup>5</sup>
- e. **Israelis are "a-communal".** The pervasiveness of the Jewish public sphere in Israel rendered the role of communities in protecting the Jewish identity irrelevant. The vast majority of Israelis in Israel do not live in communities. Generally, Israeli immigrants do not see value in investing in formal communal institutions;
- f. **Underdeveloped philanthropic awareness in Israel** – Israelis are accustomed to seeing themselves as aid recipients from the Jewish world, and not necessarily as those responsible for providing aid to others;<sup>6</sup>
- g. **First-generation Israeli-North-Americans view Hebrew, and not Judaism or connection to the Jewish community, as the main vehicle for maintaining their identity.** The ability to communicate, read, and write in Hebrew is seen as important as both a way for parents to feel comfortable at home with their children, and as a supposed guarantee that their children's 'Israeliness' will be preserved;<sup>7</sup>
- h. **Many Israeli-North-Americans have little connection to Jewish life.** Many Israelis define themselves by their nationality first, and only then by their religion. Moreover, many Israeli immigrants completely withdraw from organized Jewish life and tradition.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin coined this phrase in 1976.

<sup>4</sup> Steven J. Gold, *The Israeli Diaspora*, University of Washington Press, Seattle; 2002, pp. 152-162.

<sup>5</sup> Sergio DellaPergola, 'Jewish Demographic Policies: Migration from Israel,' *The Jewish People Policy Institute Report*, pp.154-155; Rebecca Spence, 'Wanting to Connect: Israelis Find Religion,' *The Jewish Daily Forward*, April 24, 2008 in issue May 2, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Professor Steven M. Cohen and Dr. Judith Veinstein, 'Israeli Jews in Greater New York: Their Numbers, Characteristics, and Patterns of Jewish Engagement,' *A UJA-Federation of New York Report, March 2009, pp., 42-43*; World Council of Israelis Abroad, Minutes from Meeting at 1st Conference for Israelis Living Abroad: 'Business, Social and Professional Involvement in Israel,' Toronto, Canada; January 19, 2001, p.3; David Yaari in a presentation at the Dor Chadash Board Retreat, 2006, describes this mindset: "I spent three years of my life giving to this country - don't ask me to be involved with charity organizations."

<sup>7</sup> Cohen and Veinstein, 'Israeli Jews in Greater New York,' pp.31-32; Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, 'Hebrew in America: Final Report,' Submitted to UJA Federation of Northern New Jersey, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> The establishment of the State of Israel and the accompanying emphasis on the "national home" caused many Israelis to create a mental separation between their Israeli and Jewish identities. See: Moshe Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances: Israeli Emigrants in New York*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London; 1988.

12. **As a result of these dynamics, Israeli newcomers were generally not integrated into, Jewish communities. This is exemplified in Toronto, where the geographical and physical intertwining of the Israeli and Jewish communities in Toronto highlights further that the two communities don't "mix".**

### Signs of Engagement Surfacing

13. **Reut's analysis<sup>9</sup> shows that emerging trends are increasingly influencing the traditional factors underlying Israeli immigrants' detachment from local Jewish communities:**

- a. **From *aliyah/yerida* to acceptance of a 'life of fluid movement'** – The dichotomous relationship between *aliyah* and *yerida* is changing: an increasing number of Israelis are choosing to build a life in more than one Jewish community, sometimes even holding homes and businesses in more than one community simultaneously;<sup>10</sup>
- b. **The Israeli diaspora is now beginning to be courted as a political, economic, social, and cultural asset to the State of Israel.**<sup>11</sup> The Government of Israel has shown signs of interest that go beyond attempts to bring Israelis back to Israel. These are expressed in issues such as proposed voting rights, public diplomacy efforts abroad, and programs to harness the scientific and technological successes of the Israeli Diaspora among other issues.<sup>12</sup>

There is also a greater understanding within Jewish communities that Israelis have the potential to strengthen and enrich the local Jewish community and **bolster the idea of Jewish peoplehood** (see more below);

- c. **Local Jewish communities are beginning to engage Israelis.** In recent years, Jewish institutions such as Federations, Jewish day schools, and JCCs have begun to invest resources in reaching out to their local Israeli community. This can be seen in the increased number of programs in Hebrew and Israeli cultural events.
- d. **Israelis are increasingly seeking to be part of the Jewish community.** Recent years have seen a surge in the number of Israelis who attend

<sup>9</sup> Reut Institute, '[A new relationship between Israel and the Jewish world.](#)'

<sup>10</sup> Ted Sokolsy, president and CEO of the UJA Federation of Toronto, in an interview with the Jerusalem Post, explained that the newer members of the Israeli Diaspora "do not see themselves as *yordim* (people who have left Israel), but as Israelis working and living abroad." Quoted in Rhonda Spivak, '[World Council of Israelis Abroad gets down to business.](#)' *Jerusalem Post Online*, January 31, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Dobner, 'Transformation of Identity.'

<sup>12</sup> Gold, *The Israeli Diaspora*, pp. 149-152; DellaPergola, 'Jewish Demographic Policies,' pp.156-157; The recently established *Knesset* sub-committee '[For the relations of Israel with world Jewish communities.](#)' headed by MK Einat Wilf, undertook as a key focus the engagement of Israelis successful in the fields of science and technology in North America.

synagogues, send their children to Jewish day schools, or even sit on the board of local JCCs;<sup>13</sup>

- e. **Israelis are beginning to self-organize in nascent communities** (see below);
- f. **Israelis are beginning to develop a culture of giving.** More Israeli immigrants are starting to assume responsibility towards their community and are developing a culture of giving. This is especially true of those Israelis who have abandoned the mindset of ‘living out of their suitcases,’ and instead have made a conscious decision to make their new adopted country their home;
- g. **Israelis are realizing that ‘Israeliness’ is not enough.** Many first-generation Israeli parents are beginning to understand that Hebrew-language instruction and meeting with other Israelis regularly is no guarantee for sustaining a strong connection to Israeli culture or to the Jewish people. Accordingly, the Hebrew language is increasingly seen as only *one* component of maintaining these vital connections;<sup>14</sup>
- h. **More Israelis are seeking a connection to Jewish life.** More Israeli immigrants seek a connection to Judaism on their own terms. They realize that striving for an exclusively Israeli identity lacks resilience in the absence of some form of connection to Jewish culture and heritage.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For more on this trend, see: Sam Greenberg, 'NY Israelis have high level of Jewish involvement' and Sara Dobner, 'Transformation of Identity: The Israeli-Jewish Dilemma,' Speech delivered at the 1st Conference for Israelis Living Abroad, World Council of Israelis Abroad, Toronto, Canada; January 18-20, 2011. David Yaari, founder of Dor Chadash New York, described a trend among Israelis living in New York, aged between 25 and 45: While in the past many Israelis have wanted little involvement in organized Jewish or Israeli life in New York, many now “visit Israel often and want to participate in Israeli organizations and cultural events,” and are becoming increasingly interested in involvement in wider Jewish life.

<sup>14</sup> Cohen and Veinstein, 'Israeli Jews in Greater New York,' pp.53-56; Dobner, 'Transformation of Identity.'

<sup>15</sup> Dobner, 'Transformation of Identity.'

## Chapter 1:

### New Israeli Leadership Emerging in the Jewish World

14. **The trends discussed above created a new 'Israeli hybrid social space'<sup>16</sup> and eventually led to the emergence of a new type of Israeli leadership.**
15. **The hybrid social space merges three identities**, previously perceived by Israelis as separate alternatives to their desired way of life in the diaspora:
  - a. **Remaining Israeli in 'Little Israel'** – Historically, upon arrival, an Israeli immigrant tended to gravitate toward a 'pure Israeli' space in which life felt most familiar. In several cases, such as in Toronto, the physical gathering of Israelis created a "Little Israel" *de-facto*. Even after a decade or more in North America, some Israelis distinguish themselves from the local Jewish population and fear their children may 'assimilate' and become Canadian Jews;<sup>17</sup>
  - b. **Becoming a North-American Jew** – There are Israelis who – in an effort to live an active Jewish life and in the absence of Israeli institutions – immerse in the Jewish community, attend the local synagogue and the local JCC, and acquire Canadian Jewish friends.<sup>18</sup> However, this option is rarely actualized.
  - c. **Assimilating into 'all-Canadian' society** – The 'all-Canadian' Israelis see themselves first and foremost as Canadians; their Israeli identity usually comes second. These 'all-Canadian' Israelis are likely to associate mainly with their immediate surroundings, workplace,<sup>19</sup> and Canadian culture, while retaining some Israeli characteristics.

Naturally, there has always been considerable interaction between the three seemingly distinct identity blocs. However, until relatively recently, one's identity

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<sup>16</sup> The concept of 'social space' is widely used in sociological discourse to refer to a physical, virtual, or conceptual space within which there is interaction between one's personal and collective identity. For a general definition, [click here](#). For a more detailed and specific discussion, see: Ronald R. Sundstrom, 'Race and place: social space in the production of human kinds,' *Philosophy & Geography*, vol.6, no.1, 2003; Dr. Lilach Lev Ari, 'Social identification among Israeli migrants' descendants in North America: Is it diasporic, assimilative or transnational?' Kristin Ross, The Emergence of Social Space, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988; Anne Buttner, 'Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective,' *Geographical Review*, no.59, 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Dr Lilach Ben Ari, 'First and Second Generation Emigrants and their Perception of Local Jewish Communities.' Speech delivered at the 1st Conference for Israelis Living Abroad, World Council of Israelis Abroad, Toronto, Canada; January 18-20, 2011; Dobner, 'Transformation of Identity'; Gold, *The Israeli Diaspora*.

<sup>18</sup> Dobner, 'Transformation of Identity'; Cohen and Veinstein, 'Israeli Jews in Greater New York,' pp.57-59.

<sup>19</sup> Many studies have shown that Israeli immigrants tend to do well economically in North America compared with other immigrant groups. Reasons include the Americanization of Israeli culture, and the fact that many Israelis have relatives in North America who make the adjustment period easier. Uzi Rebhun, 'Israeli Jewish Diaspora in the United States: Socio-cultural Mobility and Attachment to Homeland,' in Eliezer ben-Rafael and Yitshak Strenberg (eds), Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Advent of a New (dis)Order, Boston, Brill; 2009, p.318; DellaPergola, 'Jewish Demographic Policies.'

was in most cases primarily contained and sustained within one of the three aforementioned spheres.

16. **The Israeli hybrid social space has provided fertile ground for a new identity constellation to surface – the 'North American Jewish Sabra'** (hereinafter, NAJS). A typical NAJS would be any Israeli who identifies as an Israeli-Canadian Jew, thus opting for a hybrid tri-identity. The NAJS understands the importance of his/her connection to the Jewish people as a whole; still cares deeply about his home country, even if he is critical of government policies; and finally, has successfully integrated into North American professional, academic, and/or cultural life.<sup>20</sup>
17. **With the surfacing of the NAJS, a new type of Israeli diaspora leadership has emerged**, blending Israeli elements with Jewish culture and involvement in Jewish communal life.
18. **Who are the new NAJS leaders?** Israeli-North-American leaders are typically Israelis who have spent at least a decade outside of Israel;<sup>21</sup> are no longer 'living on their suitcases';<sup>22</sup> express willingness to invest time, efforts, and resources into the community; and understand that 'Israeliness' alone is not enough to sustain a resilient identity.<sup>23</sup>
19. **The new phenomenon is the rise of nascent NAJS communities.** While Israeli immigrants may often choose to congregate in geographic clusters, the NAJS sees the value in, and takes responsibility for, the transition from constituting a collection of individuals to becoming a self-organized community. Indeed, local Israeli community organizations have begun to blossom in recent years all over the world, showing a thirst for a vibrant Israeli life.

There are several models of self-organizing NAJS. Examples include the Los Angeles model of the Israeli American Council (formerly known as the Israel Leadership Council), which is an independent Israeli self-communal-organization, and the Palo Alto model, represented by the Israeli Cultural Connection ([ICC](#)), which operates through the JCC. Other organizations that support this trend

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<sup>20</sup> While this document is concerned only with trends and processes among the Israeli Diaspora, a broader understanding of identification processes among other immigrant groups provides an important context. For some insight into this broader context see, for example: Dr. Lev Ari, 'Social identification among Israeli migrants' descendants in North America'; Kara Somerville, 'Transnational Belonging among Second Generation Youth: Identity in a Globalized World,' *Journal of Social Sciences: Interdisciplinary Reflection on Contemporary Society*, no.10, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Newly arrived immigrants tend to be mainly preoccupied with day-to-day concerns, and have little time to worry about the broader community, let alone identity construction. Those who have spent at least a decade outside of Israel tend to be more engaged with questions of identity, education and community involvement;

<sup>22</sup> Many Israeli immigrants, including those who have raised their children in the North America, see their life in the Diaspora as transitional, a quality not conducive to fostering a feeling of long-term responsibility towards one's community. The NAJS, in contrast, understands he is not going back to Israel, and is therefore committed to the long-term well-being of the community.

<sup>23</sup> In early phases of immigration, many Israelis rely on the 'Israeli' identity component to maintain their children's connection to being Jewish and Israeli. The NAJS understands that this container is insufficient and begins to search for alternative components with which to enrich his children's identity.

include: Dor Chadash New York, Bina in Los Angeles, Tarbuton San Diego, Yisraelink Chicago, Israelis in Brooklyn, the Israeli Business Club in London, Krovim Rechokim and Israelis in Berlin.

20. **NAJS communities are rooted in the developing notion of Jewish Peoplehood.** The growing centrality of the concept of Jewish Peoplehood removes much of the tension previously associated with life in the Diaspora, making it easier for Israeli immigrants to stay abroad and still retain a strong connection to Israel. As a result, more Israeli immigrants feel a growing sense of responsibility toward the local Jewish community.<sup>24</sup>

## A Community Forming: The Case of Toronto Israeli-Canadians

21. **Israeli-Canadians are highly diverse, like Israeli society,** and are further differentiated through several waves of immigration. The most recent wave of immigration, for example, comprises relatively young and educated immigrants who were fully integrated into Israeli society, and possess high degrees of international mobility. In contrast, many immigrants who arrived after the 1973 Yom Kippur War had not successfully integrated into Israeli society.<sup>25</sup>
22. **The Russian-Jewish immigration wave adds layers to the picture.** Many Jewish Russians in Toronto came from Israel, to where they had moved at a young age. Many of them served in the IDF and see themselves as Israelis. Like the Israeli community, the Russian-Jewish community possesses certain attributes applicable to an autonomous community.<sup>26</sup>
23. **Common estimates size the Israeli-Canadian community at approximately 50,000, although the spectrum ranges from 11,000 to 80,000.** The uncertainty regarding the numbers emanates from difficulties in defining who is an Israeli-Canadian, such as in whether to include first-generation Israelis who do not speak Hebrew, and subsequently in defining second-generation Israelis, children from mixed marriages, etc. **For the purpose of this document, an Israeli-Canadian is anyone who self-identifies as an Israeli.**

<sup>24</sup> There are a multitude of initiatives - projects and organizations - throughout the Jewish world that focus on the centrality of Jewish Peoplehood. See, for example, Nathan Jeffay, 'No Longer in Exile: Overhaul of Diaspora Museum reflects a New Zionist Narrative.' Jewish Daily Forward, July 8, 2009 in edition July 17, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> On the importance of integration in countries of origin, see: Jean-Christophe Dumont and Georges Lemaître, 'Counting Immigrants and Expatriates in OECD Countries: A New Perspective,' Organization for Economic Co-ordination and Development.

<sup>26</sup> Jewish Russians first arrived to Canada during the 1970s through Israel, Italy and Wien. Many of them are integrated today within the local Jewish community. Yet, principally, the Jewish communal organizations in Toronto gave them a cold shoulder. Rabbi Yosef Zaltzman from Chabad is still considered by many as the leading catalyst in the efforts to engage the Jewish-Russian community.

Another wave of Russian immigration took place in the years 1999-2001. Many newcomers who spent 7-9 years in Israel and generally 'feel Israeli', represented this wave of immigration.

Many among the late waves of immigrations, between the years 2007-8 were born in Israel, but are also proud of their Russian identity. Additionally, they are less keen to engage with the Orthodox Chabad institution.

## Personal Perspective

### Sara Dobner\*

*"One of our biggest challenges is to raise our kids with a strong sense of Israeli & Jewish pride and identity. Our kids could not be Israelis because they weren't born in Israel; they had to be raised to be part of the local Jewish community. We knew however, that we were never going to feel fully comfortable with the Diaspora 'Jewish Hat', as the mentality and cultural gaps are too wide.*

*Thus, raising our kids to be fully versed in both Israeli and Jewish cultures became our goal. We sent our kids to Jewish schools and summer camps, and lived in a Jewish neighborhood, all of which strengthened their Jewish identity. At the same time, we also strengthened their connection to Israel by speaking Hebrew at home, visiting Israel frequently and sharing with them stories and news about Israel.*

*We felt that that our financial and emotional commitments on this issue were worth paying for. The satisfaction from watching our kids blossom with the dual pride and identity is indescribable. When our daughter recently led a Birthright trip to Israel, it felt like 'mission accomplished'.*

*If there is one thing I regret, is not including synagogue affiliation in our lives. As secular Israelis, we could not see its importance. However, now, with a better perspective, I understand that that is also an important part of 'Jewish Diaspora' community life."*

\* Sara is a Senior Policy Advisor at the Provincial Government, the Chair of the Israeli Identity Program, Vice Co-Chair of the Israeli Division at UJA, and sits on the Advisory Board of Kachol-Lavan.

24. **While as a whole, the Israeli-Canadian community is not as established as the Jewish community, some aspects of community infrastructure are forming.**

25. **The Federation has been leading efforts to cultivate an Israeli-Canadian-Jewish community, partnering with Israeli-Canadian leaders.** The Federation entered into a strategic partnership to this end, endorsing the Israeli Forum, which several Israeli-Canadian leaders formed in 2006. The driving force behind this initiative, Galya Sarner, was the first Israeli the Federation ever hired for the purpose of engaging the Israeli-Canadian community.

Later, the Federation established the Israeli Division, which was incorporated into the Executive Community of the UJA Campaign. One of the most prominent Israeli-Canadian leaders, Ran Mesterman, is even a member at the Federation's Board of Directors.

**The "Toronto model" of partnership between Israeli-Canadians and the Federation** was presented recently in New York in an event Reut co-hosted with JAFI to bring together Israeli leadership from around NA (3/12).

26. **Israeli-Canadians have also taken upon themselves leadership roles independently, in their efforts to consolidate the community.** Several Israeli-Canadian leaders have initiated autonomous efforts to cultivate a more resilient Israeli-Canadian community by connecting between Israeli, Canadian, and Jewish spheres.

Examples include the Hebrew newspaper **Shalom Toronto**, an Israeli-Canadian initiative, which aims to better immerse Israeli-Canadian readers within Canadian and Jewish-Canadian politics and society. The newspaper's English edition targets both the Jewish community at large and at second-generation Israelis who have difficulties reading in Hebrew. Another example is the Israeli **Chabad** office in Toronto, headed by the Israeli *shaliach* Rabbi Yisroel Landa, who is currently engaging in building a new community center for Israeli-Canadians.

27. **In practice, "Little Israel" thrives –**

- a. **An Israeli public sphere –** Due to the geographical concentration of many Israeli-Canadians (around Thornhill and across Bathurst Street), many Israelis in Toronto "exercise" their 'Israeliness' in a supposed Israeli public sphere. Israelis meet each other at cafés, supermarkets, gyms, and cinemas which are predominantly frequented by Israelis. Furthermore, in some public school classes, sixty percent of the students are Israeli-Canadians!

- b. Dozens of formal and informal Israeli organizations and groups** – There are an abundance of Israeli organizations that provide services to local Israelis. This is to such an extent that today, in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Israeli-Canadians can get an "Israeli" experience in almost all aspects of life, from an Israeli Kindergarten (Gan Tiki) to an Israeli night club (Hava Nagila), and through a Sunday school ([Kachol Lavan](#)), youth movement ([Tzofim](#)), newspaper ([Shalom Toronto](#)), theatre ([Hamifgash](#)), radio station ([Israel Today – Radio Show in Toronto](#)), Israeli local TV show ([The Israeli Network](#)), Israeli business club ([Canada-Israel Chambers of Commerce](#)), Israeli-Canadian summer camp ([Gesher](#)), Beit Chabad, Israeli motorcycle club, [The Israeli Artists Group](#), and dozens of social groups (such as Kinneret, History Club, and Ochel Le-Machshava).

With Israeli musicians that frequently visit Toronto as guests of Motek Productions, twelve Aroma cafés, and dozens of Israeli restaurants (such as Ba-li Lafa, me-va-me, Tov-li), it is likely that Toronto provides the most authentic Israeli experience anywhere outside of Israel.

### **The Challenge: The Identity of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Israelis**

28. **"Little Israel" is not good enough for cultivating a resilient identity.** While there exist dozens of Israeli communal platforms, the vast majority tend to be centered around keeping Israelis in 'Little Israel.' In most cases, Israelis seek to replicate Tel Aviv or Haifa in Toronto, thereby strengthening their sense of familiarity and belonging. However, these efforts fail to maintain a thriving Israeli and Jewish identity among Israeli immigrants.
29. **Additionally, given that most Israelis are unlikely to return to Israel, it is crucial to engage this constituency and bring them closer to Jewish community and culture.**

**The assimilation rate among Israeli-North-Americans is believed to be higher than that of North-American Jewry.** Many Israeli-Canadians do not interact with community institutions and their children grow distant from Israel and Judaism to a greater degree than North-American Jewry. The following factors may play an important role:

- a. A resilient Israeli identity necessitates a personal formative experience in Israel.** Many Israeli parents realize too late that speaking Hebrew with their children, eating at Aroma, and meeting with other Israeli-Canadians is not a sufficient basis for a sustainable Israeli identity. Without a personal formative experience in Israel, it is impossible to impart an Israeli identity to second and third generations.
- b. On the other hand, many Israeli-Canadians lack a Jewish identity.** The public space in Israel supports secular Israelis' Jewish identity, yet when these Israelis move abroad, it tends to take time before they see value in investing in organized Jewish life.
30. **Without a strong Jewish identity and a formative experience in Israel, second- and third-generation Israelis are moving away from their parents'**

**Israeli national identity and towards the all-Canadian national identity, skipping over their inherent Jewish identity.**

## Chapter 2:

### The Jewish World and the Government of Israel (GOI) Begin to Embrace Israelis Abroad

31. **The organized Jewish world and the Government of Israel are undergoing broad changes on matters relating to Israelis abroad.**

Specifically, there is an increasing acceptance of the idea of Jewish Peoplehood, expressed through a 'fluid lifecycle of movement' in the place of a formerly, largely dichotomous approach polarized between *aliyah* and *yerida*. Against this backdrop, looms a reality of ever-increasing numbers of Israelis abroad coupled with a unique set of challenges facing Israel and the Jewish world. Taken together, these trends have contributed to an institutional realization that Israeli immigration actually represents an unrealized political, economic, social, and cultural asset to the State of Israel.

32. **Thus, the GOI and Jewish communal organizations are beginning to change their approach towards Israeli immigration.** Today, we are seeing signs of interest from the GOI that go beyond attempts to bring Israelis back to Israel.<sup>27</sup> Examples include:

- a. **The Ministry of Diaspora and Public Affairs** – With the blessing of Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Ministry launched a seven million NIS project titled [Mitchabrim](#), which established several cultural centers for Israelis living in North America. This project aimed to reconnect Hebrew culture with the state of Israel;
- b. **The Jewish Agency (JAFI)** has undergone structural changes to accommodate a new focus on engaging Israelis abroad, and to this end, launched the Global Israeli Communities task force. JAFI is also currently engaged in developing the vision for an Israeli umbrella organization in North America;
- c. **The Knesset** sub-committee '[For the relations of Israel with world Jewish communities](#)' adopted the engagement of Israelis in North America as a key focus;
- d. **Jewish communal organizations** – In recent years, Jewish institutions such as Federations, Jewish day schools, and JCCs have begun to invest resources in reaching out to the Israeli community. This is evident in the increased number of programs in Hebrew and Israeli cultural events. The issue of Israelis abroad has been elevated in the institutional discourse and exemplified in events held at the General Assembly of the Jewish Federation of North America (GA JFNA) (10/12) and in the Israel-

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<sup>27</sup> See also: Gold, [The Israeli Diaspora](#), pp. 149-152; DellaPergola, 'Jewish Demographic Policies,' pp.156-157

American-Council-hosted session on Israeli Diaspora leadership at the 2013 AIPAC Policy Conference.<sup>28</sup>

## **Jewish Communities Recognize Israelis' Strategic Significance**

33. **The factors that incentivize the Toronto Federation to engage with its local Israeli community are relevant to other Jewish communal organization around the world.** These factors include:
- a. **A need to stay relevant in a demographically changing community** – The Federation's adoption of a new approach is likely to herald a global Jewish trend because it is driven by 'the numbers'. Estimates indicate that there are up to 800,000 Israeli immigrants abroad. In Toronto, Israeli immigrants comprise up to one-quarter of the Jewish community. The strength of Jewish communities will depend on their ability to meet the needs of their changing constituent demographics;
  - b. **Israelis can be instrumental in strengthening Jewish Peoplehood.** Promoting Jewish peoplehood has become a rallying cry in the organized Jewish world. A "thriving Jewish people" is rooted in a robust network of Jewish communities, which is inclusive, diverse, and subsequently resilient. Israelis must be integral members of these communities. In addition, Jewish Peoplehood is nourished by common denominators such as language. Israelis can enrich Jewish communities through offering direct exposure to contemporary Hebrew culture and by providing a living example of modern Hebrew as the language of the Jewish people;
  - c. **Israelis can be partners in efforts to develop pride in Jewish identity.** As a new immigrant community, concerns about the preservation of their children's Jewish identities are especially acute. Thus Israelis are natural partners in realizing this goal. Developing pride in Jewish identity is a stated goal of the Toronto Federation;
  - d. **Opportunity for real engagement with Israeli society** – Even among "Israeli-engaged" Jewish communities, like the Torontonians, it seems that the engagement is more with the idea of Israel than with Israeli society; The **Mifgash** Theatre, which produces contemporary plays and hosts contemporary Israeli theatre personalities, is an example of a venue through which the Israeli-Canadian community can offer the Jewish community a window into Israeli society.
  - e. **Countering the assault on Israel's legitimacy** – The 800,000 Israelis living outside of Israel are a strategic asset in countering the ongoing assault on Israel's legitimacy. Today, few Israeli-Canadians in Toronto have mobilized against the delegitimization challenge.

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<sup>28</sup> Sam Greenberg, 'NY Israelis have high level of Jewish involvement,' *Jerusalem Post Online*, May 3, 2009; Among others, the establishment of 'Israeliness' at 92ndY in Manhattan, and the UJA Federation of New York's taskforce on the Israeli community of New York are examples of recent efforts.

### Personal Perspective

Orli Santo\*

*"The gulf between us runs deep — much deeper than we assumed when we first reached over it to shake hands. It took me an entire year to understand that "We should definitely meet again" doesn't mean that we will meet again. It took much longer to realize that you were waiting for me to stop talking before you started, and that I should do the same, or that harmless phrases like "Don't be stupid, listen to me!" translate badly in English. And through it all, I could never know if you liked me, feared me or hated my guts: I just couldn't tell the difference. I've been here for over six years now, and I still can't tell. My friends are all Israeli's"*

[From the Jewish Week](#)

## The Toronto Federation Provides a Leadership Role

34. **The Federation's opportunity for pioneering global leadership** – Toronto is uniquely positioned to realize the potential of integrating its Israeli community members into mainstream Jewish life, and thereby further enhancing its global leadership role in strengthening Jewish Peoplehood.

The Federation's existing assets on this issue include Toronto's unique demography, in which Israeli and non-Israeli Jewish community members are geographically concentrated and intertwined; a committed Israeli Consul-General;<sup>29</sup> an abundance of Israeli-Canadian organizations; an exceptionally Israel-engaged Jewish community; and the Toronto community's role as a Jewish world hub.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, since 2005, the Federation, under the leadership of Ted Sokolsky, has been seeking to re-invent its relationship with the Israeli-Canadian community. Sokolsky asked for the forgiveness of the Israelis for, in his own words, "the paternalistic and cold approach" of the Jewish community toward them.<sup>31</sup>

35. **The Federation's unique approach: Partnership, not integration** – The Toronto model does not seek to absorb the Israeli community, but instead pursue their partnership in creating a new communal model.

For example, the Federation: helped to fund the Israeli-initiated Toronto-Israeli Forum, followed by the Israeli Division in the Federation; built the new leading community center, the Schwartz Reisman Centre, with a significant focus on catering to the Israeli-Canadian community in the area;<sup>32</sup> assembled and hosted the first-ever gathering of Israeli leaders abroad; and co-hosted, alongside Reut, a session in the JFNA GA on Israelis abroad. It also pursues partnerships with the local Israeli community by inviting them to impact from within the Federation system as lay leaders or as members of the Emerging Communities Committee and its associated sub-committees.

<sup>29</sup> The current Israeli Consul General DJ Schneeweiss and his immediate predecessor, Amir Gissin, are engaged in realizing the potential of an engaged Israeli community in Toronto.

<sup>30</sup> Toronto's Jewish community has central access to the key global networks, and networked platforms in the Jewish world, including the [JCCA](#), [Schusterman Foundation](#), [Taglit-Birthright Israel](#), [Hillel](#), [JFNA](#), [March of the Living](#), and [Jewish Agency for Israel](#).

<sup>31</sup> [Shalom Toronto](#), 20/11/12

<sup>32</sup> The Federation's forward-thinking investment in the northern end of Thornhill, with the Lebovic Community Campus and Schwartz Reisman Centre, exemplify this strategy.

36. **Despite the above-mentioned emerging trends within the Israeli-North-American community, as well as the fresh approach within several Israeli governmental agencies and Jewish communal organizations, the extent of engagement and integration of Israelis into mainstream Jewish communal life has been limited. Toronto is no different in this regard.**

In the following chapter we will try to articulate the main stumbling blocks.

## Chapter 3:

### The Stumbling Blocks: Lost in Translation

37. **Toronto's engagement of Israelis into mainstream Jewish communal life has been limited**, despite the leadership role the Federation has assumed.
38. **A number of factors constitute the key stumbling blocks to engagement. These emanate from fundamentally incompatible perceptions held by many Israeli-Canadians and non-Israeli Jews regarding the most basic pillars of Jewish communal life.** Manifestations of these different vantage points include:
- a. **Fundamental lack of trust of Israeli-Canadians towards Jewish communal institutions** – While the Toronto Federation is overtly invested in engaging Israelis, most Israelis the Reut team met expressed an ingrained lack of trust towards Jewish communal institutions, including the Federation. Israeli-Canadians often perceive Jewish institutions as irrelevant, inefficient, and corrupt. This mistrust is not unique to Toronto. Underlying reasons include:
    - **In some regards, Israeli-Canadians are not very different from North American Jews** – In recent years, Jewish communal organizations across North America have faced a decline in membership and in their share of Jewish fundraising. In other words, the JFNA is experiencing a more fundamental challenge of relevance.
    - **Ignorance regarding the role of Jewish communal organizations** – Israelis are thoroughly unfamiliar with, and often carry an overt aversion toward, Diaspora Jewish life and the central role of Jewish communal institutions within it. **A change in approach has been detected in recent years with several** attempts to organize Israeli-North American communities under an umbrella organization.
    - **Undeveloped culture of philanthropy in Israel** – Israelis tend to treat institutions, particularly those seeking financial contribution, with suspicion and even hostility. Thus, Jewish institutions are often perceived to be in constant pursuit of "our wallets."
  - b. **Israelis are "a-communal"** – Israelis are not familiar with community life in the Diaspora and do not understand its value and structure. For example, protecting Jewish identity is one of the community's vital roles in the

diaspora, which is less relevant in Israel because the Israeli public sphere is Jewish. Thus, many Israelis regard synagogues as sites of worship solely, and fail to understand their cultural and social roles in Jewish communities.

**Furthermore, Israeli-Canadians differ from other Jewish immigration minorities.** Jewish immigrants, even including those from the former Soviet Union where Judaism was suppressed by Communism, are usually more familiar with the most basic cornerstones of the community.

Thus, while Toronto's local Jewish community is organized around institutions, the Israeli-Canadian nascent community is organized around dozens of informal social groups and programmatic platforms.

- c. **Different perception of leadership** – A recurring claim of Jewish community leaders and professionals has been regarding the lack of Israeli-Canadian leadership aside from a few who were the, “exception to the rule.”

However, the Reut team's impression was different. There is an abundance of Israeli leadership, though it conducts differently than those emanating from the Jewish community. Israeli-Canadian leadership resembles other national minority leadership in the sense that it is first and foremost: preoccupied with the immediate welfare needs of its community members; grassroots in nature; invested in niche services; and suspicious towards external intervention, including that of the Jewish community.

The Jewish community looks for leadership with which it is familiar. In other words, the Jewish community perceives a good Israeli leader as one who would act like a Canadian Jew, exercising leadership in the context of investing time and money in the organized community.

## Strategy and Policy Options:

### Facilitate the Integration of the Next Generation

39. **Generally, the approaches of the existing GOI, Jewish communal organizations, and Israeli-Canadian leaders have proven ineffective:**
  - a. **The negation of the Israeli diaspora is not working** – The large number of Israelis abroad illustrate that the "traditional" approach of alienating the Israeli diaspora is not useful in bringing Israelis back to Israel, or even in minimizing the phenomena of Israeli immigration. If anything, it widened the gap between Israeli expats and the State of Israel and the Jewish world;
  - b. **Attempts to fully integrate the Israeli-Canadians into the local Jewish community at the present time is due to fail.** The stumbling blocks between first-generation Israeli-North-Americans and the Jewish community have created alienation and mistrust, which is unlikely to change instantly;
  - c. **The "Little Israel" approach will not produce second- and third-generation Sabras.** The attempt to duplicate life in Israel in the diaspora has failed to create a resilient Israeli-Jewish identity in later generations. As stated above, without a formative experience in Israel, second- and third-generation Israelis are likely to move away from the Israeli national identity of their parents to the all-Canadian national identity, skipping over the Jewish identity.
  
40. **The Reut Institute offers a different approach:**
  - a. **The Vision: Return second- and third-generation Israelis to the Jewish Diaspora.** Reut proposes that the Jewish community, Israeli-Canadian leadership, and the GOI strive to facilitate the future integration of second- and third-generation Israelis into the Jewish community, acknowledging that the gap between first-generation Israelis and the Jewish community is too wide to close;
  - b. **The Mission: Cultivate a hybrid Israeli social space** – NAJS leaders, Jewish organizations, and the GOI should focus on challenging the concept of "Little Israel." To do so, they must further cultivate a social space that is hybrid, which encourages the emergence of a resilient Israeli-Jewish-Canadian tri-identity constellation. This social space would provide a meeting place for Israeli-Canadians and non-Israelis Jews, and thus catalyze a hybrid identity to include a strong Israeli dimension as well as a robust connection between Israelis, Judaism and the local Jewish community.
  - c. **The Strategy: Build the organizations of the "Diaspora in the Making"** – NAJS leaders, Jewish organizations, and the GOI should work together to establish programs and institutions that reflect the desired hybridism between Israeliness and Judaism. These programs and institutions would provide the necessary infrastructure and support, as well as a relevant toolkit for the next generation of Israelis to become active members of Toronto's

Jewish community. **This effort will also incentivize hybridization among the many existing Israeli informal organizations.**

Nevertheless, creating hybrid programs and institutions does not mean duplicating parallel programs that cater to the local Jewish community. Instead, these programs should offer a space in which Israeli-Canadians can strengthen their Israeli identity and connect with the Jewish community.

41. **The unique Toronto approach and the derived best practices offer a global model** – The Federation's policy of engagement with Israeli-Canadians has been paving the way for the Government of Israel and for other Jewish communal organizations globally.
42. **Many of the following recommendations and insights are based on existing practices and knowledge.** Reut's contribution lies in conceptualizing and modeling these best practices and knowledge. Our objective is to enhance the global Jewish community's shared understanding of the nature of the challenge, and to impact the mindsets of people in positions of influence and authority in contending with this challenge. We hope to accomplish this by catalyzing change in the related language, discourse, priorities, symbols, mechanisms, and patterns of conduct of the relevant actors.

## Parameters for Cultivating the Hybrid Israeli Social Space: The Schwartz Reisman Centre as a Case Study

43. **Several parameters are essential for cultivating the Hybrid Social Space.** By incorporating the criteria outlined below into platforms and programs, which service Israelis, these platforms and programs will become more hybrid and facilitate the future integration of second- and third-generation Israelis into the Jewish community. This paper mainly draws upon the Schwartz Reisman Centre (SRC) to illustrate how the implementation of the parameters can be in practice.<sup>33</sup>
44. **The Schwartz Reisman Centre** is a multi-faceted Jewish community center (JCC), operated by the Federation, which offers services in fields including education, recreation, arts, culture, health, and wellness. The SRC is the pinnacle of the Toronto Federation's Tomorrow Campaign, which aims to build a new and vibrant space for the community's next generation.
45. **One of the SRC's stated goals is to engage Israelis in the GTA and create a strong and diverse Jewish community.** Indeed, the SRC offers a wide variety of Israeli programming, is strategically located near a critical mass of Toronto's Israelis, and is already recognized as home for Israeli community professionals.
46. **Still, the potential exists for the SRC to further catalyze the consolidation of a renewed, diverse, and vibrant Jewish community for the next generation.**
47. **The challenge: The Bathurst Conundrum** – The main challenge facing the SRC in realizing its goal is posed by the public sphere within the GTA's "Israeli

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<sup>33</sup> The Schwartz-Reisman Centre is central to the Lebovic Jewish Community Campus (LJCC).

neighborhoods," especially across Bathurst Street. Because Israelis can seemingly enjoy a full Israeli life in Toronto – derived from the abundance of Israelis, existence of dozens of programs targeted to them, and prominence of the Hebrew language within that sphere – they do not need the SRC as a meeting place.

48. **Yet, the SRC has the potential to uniquely strengthen the Israeli-Canadian identity.** It can do so by becoming more hybrid and thus offering unique added value to Israeli-Canadians. The SRC could subtly integrate Jewish themes and content to an extent 'digestible' to Israelis, while still maintaining Israeli-Canadian parents' comfort level within a thoroughly Israeli environment.

While servicing the entire Jewish community, the SRC could become the hub and school of Israeli-Canadian leadership and should offer its members the infrastructure, programming, and services needed to support an active and fruitful Israeli-Jewish life in Toronto. Eventually, the SRC could develop a deeper connection to Israel among Israeli-Canadians and open a window to the local Jewish community, facilitating future cooperation and integration.

49. **Moreover,** by transforming the SRC into a flagship institution of the Hybrid Israeli Social Space, **the Jewish community of Toronto can serve as a model for emulation for Jewish communities worldwide, offering the blueprinted concept and the proof-of-concept site.**
50. **The suggested parameters below – vision-driven leadership of the hybrid community, meaningful engagement with the Jewish community, Jewish education and Hebrew, and connection to Israel – are critical to hybridizing the SRC or any other Israeli initiative or program.**

### Vision-Driven Hybrid Leadership

51. **Israeli-Canadian leaders should be at the forefront of new and existing Jewish community initiatives** and should be driven by the vision of facilitating the future integration of second- and third-generation Israelis into the Jewish world. Israeli leadership is imperative to harness a network of Israeli initiatives serving Israelis and to connect Israeli community leadership globally.

### Cultivating and Empowering NAJS Leadership

52. **In the face of the need for NAJS leadership, the fact remains that many Israeli-Canadians do not feel comfortable in Jewish communal organizations. While** Israeli-Canadians should assume a greater sense of ownership, **the Federation should do more to groom, incentivize, guide, learn from, empower, and enable NAJS leadership.**
53. **The SRC is critical for helping to groom the next generations of Israeli-Canadian leaders.** The SRC can build upon its current role enabling and facilitating programs designed for NAJS who see value in the four parameters of cultivating the Hybrid Israeli Social Space.
54. **Nurturing Ownership among NAJS: Israeli-Canadians must be stakeholders of the community.** For Israelis to connect and develop a sense of belonging to the organized Jewish community, a fundamental sense of ownership must be

nurtured. As long as Israelis feel like guests in the Jewish community, they are less likely to cooperate with relevant Federation programs.

### *Example*

55. **The YEAADIM Program** is an excellent example of a cutting-edge leadership program. The SRC and the Federation supply the platform for this community leadership program that connects young people to the larger Israeli and Jewish community, and seeks to cultivate new community leaders. Today there are communal leadership programs for families (Seeds); Parents (Horut); 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students (Tavor); 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (Amirim); and Israeli university students with Hillel (Pisga).

### *Recommendations*

56. **Create a more diverse "Israeli Council" and turn it into a catalyst for an Israeli-Hybrid community** – the Israeli Council, an informal gathering of the Israeli staff from the various Federation departments, has the potential to be much more than an informal forum to discuss Israeli issues.

The Israeli Council should strive to open its gates and become more representative than it is today. For that, we recommend that the Israeli Council sit at the SRC and strive to become more diverse, by inviting Israeli leaders that have a stronghold in the Israeli community and are not part of the Federation (like Chabad).

57. **Representative Democracy** – The Federation should provide Israelis with opportunities to impact the shaping of community platforms in which they may be interested in engaging. It is necessary to find a place for Israelis 'around the table' not solely based on the depth of their pockets. Such a place can be created, for example, through the formation of additional sub-committees within the Federation.
58. **Reaching Out to Israelis through Direct Engagement** – Special efforts are required to reach out to Israeli-Canadian leaders currently not involved with the Federation or other organized Jewish community organizations. Presently, constant attempts to expand the "Israeli mailing list" constitute the SRC's main effort to reach out to Israelis. This effort lacks field presence. Reaching out to Israelis requires building relationships, and this objective is better achieved through footwork, and not via mailing lists.

### **Strategically Integrating the Hybridity Goal**

59. **Adopting the hybrid vision needs to manifest in clear prioritization.** To maximize impact, the SRC should assess the programs it supports and provide incentives for programs not yet within the Hybrid Israeli Social Space to adopt the above outlined parameters.
60. **Today, the Federation supports multiple programs for the Israeli-Canadian community that represent more than one logic, and thus do not produce the desired strategic coherency.** Instead, the Federation should assess which current programs are hybrid and thus need to be expanded, and alternately, which should be incentivized to modify to become more hybrid.

### *Examples*

61. **Kachol Lavan vs. The Tzofim** – Today, the SRC physically hosts both the Hebrew supplementary school **Kachol Lavan**<sup>34</sup> and the **Tzofim** youth movement.

**Kachol Lavan** is the flagship project for the desired hybrid social space in Toronto, offering a unique program for Hebrew and Israel studies and an introductory curricula and experience for Israeli life in the Diaspora. It also opened its gate to non-Israeli Jews and thus also contributes to engagement between the Israeli and Jewish community.

**The Tzofim** operates under the logic of "Little Israel." The model of Shevet Hermon is built upon almost directly emulating Israeli scouts programs.

**Both projects fulfill the same genuine need for Israeli-Canadian youth (or their parents), which is to experience an all-Israeli environment in Hebrew.** However, Reut believes that hybrid programs like Kachol Lavan are likely to consolidate a stronger identity container for the second- and third-generation Israelis. The likelihood of a Kachol Lavan graduate to better understand the Jewish community, and become a contributing member, is greater than that of a Tzofim graduate.

**Meanwhile, the SRC should incentivize the Tzofim to incorporate into its activities different aspects of the hybridization parameters.** This does not mean shaping their agenda. Rather, sensitively cooperating with and encouraging existing "Garin Sabra" reforms. "Garin Sabra", which is the international Tzofim head office in Tel Aviv under which Shevet Hermon operates, is currently reassessing the Tzofim's programs and agenda so as to incorporate relevant Jewish curricula.

Examples for incorporating Jewish curricula include the Tzofim providing a platform for meaningful interaction between Israeli-Canadians and their non-Hebrew speaking peers from the Jewish community. This could take the form of structured opportunities for shared learning programs with non-Hebrew speaking members of other Jewish youth groups and organizations, or voluntary communal work with elderly members of the Jewish community.

### **Meaningful engagement with the Jewish community**

62. **Initiatives aimed at Israelis should meaningfully engage the local Jewish community, its institutions, and community members.** A stronger connection between Israelis and the local Jewish community is likely to accelerate the emergence of a hybrid identity.

### *Recommendations*

<sup>34</sup> Kachol Lavan is a unique center for Hebrew and Israel studies. Kachol Lavan operates a supplementary school for children from Grade 8, established by the Israeli Forum in Canada, Schwartz Reisman Centre and UJA Federation in 2005 to promote Hebrew studies, and awareness of Israel among the community's future generations.

63. **The SRC should become a meeting place that generates interaction between Israeli-Canadians and the Jewish community.**
64. **The SRC should incentivize Israeli programs**, such as the Tzofim and the Geshar summer camps, **to include meaningful interaction with local Jewish counterparts.** In addition to influencing Israelis, catalyzing activity aimed at Israeli-Jewish community engagement would also position the SRC as the leading Jewish community change agent in rising to the challenge of adapting the mindset of the Jewish community regarding Israelis.
65. **The SRC should develop new hybrid programs**, such as a hybrid Jewish Service Corps that coordinates efforts of local Jewish volunteers and Israeli-Canadian volunteers during times of crisis.

### **Lead the Change within the Local Jewish Community**

66. **The local Jewish community represents the glaring blind spot in Israeli-Canadian engagement efforts, and needs to adapt to the new reality.** Professionals dealing with the Israeli-Canadian community tend to focus solely on the community's conduct. However, engagement between the Israeli and Jewish community is also very much dependent on the latter's approach.
67. **The Federation is far ahead of the game** – The relevance and importance of the Federation's structural and strategic investment in Israeli engagement and in advancing Jewish Peoplehood is largely limited to the Federation's leadership. In other words, while the Federation's leadership recognizes the changing place of Israelis within the Jewish community, the mainstream Jewish community remains within the old paradigm, in which the Israelis represent both a burden to the Jewish community and an ideological liability.

The Jewish community, in general, still sees in the Israeli community a temporary phenomenon, which is not genuinely part of the larger Jewish community. Jewish community media outlets, which rarely cover Israeli community affairs, exemplify this mindset.

68. **Bringing Israelis into the fold of the Jewish community will require a significant investment and effort that draws from all corners of the Jewish community and across the Federation.** Doing so will not only benefit the Israelis – it will also enrich and strengthen the wider Jewish community.

### *Recommendations*

69. **The SRC is well positioned to drive the transformation from within the community from a mindset of classical Zionism to a new paradigm of Jewish Peoplehood.** Cultivating the Hybrid Israeli Social Space and engaging Israelis in Jewish communal life requires flexibility and leadership from the organized Jewish community.

For example, under the leadership of SRC senior personnel Jewish Day Camps should adapt their content according to the new paradigm by bringing a living, contemporary Israel into the center of its activities. Such an endeavor would

require adjustment on the part of the Jewish community and simultaneously open the opportunity for Israelis in Toronto to manifest their unique value proposition.

70. **An inclusive narrative guides a successful transformation.** The story the community tells about itself is critical to the way the community understands itself. Building a narrative around Jewish Peoplehood and the changing fabric of Toronto Jewry will shape the community's image of itself and its relationship with its Israelis.

### **Israeli Philanthropy: Grace Period for First-Generation Israelis**

38. **Being a fundraising organization, one of the Federation's clear motivating factors in engaging with the Israelis is to increase the pool of potential philanthropic community resources.** As a corollary, in Jewish world communities, the extent of philanthropic contribution often "buys" community members a seat at the decision-making table.
39. **Yet, the Federation's protocols and financial resources regulations impede the engagement with Israeli leadership.** Due to the embedded sense of emotional alienation and mistrust of Israeli-Canadians towards the Jewish community, a gap exists in place of a necessary confidence-building period that could ultimately lead to Israeli philanthropic involvement

#### *Recommendations*

71. **Change the protocol; it's a long-term investment** –Moving from the current status quo to one of vigorous Israeli-Canadian philanthropic involvement is a process. This process must aim at providing Israelis a sense of ownership. It requires long-term investment.
72. **Set parameters for the grace period** – The Federation must identify and groom the next generation of Israeli-Canadian philanthropists. However, the process of doing so may benefit from a "grace period" intended for first-generation Israeli-Canadians, with its parameters developed by the Federation.
- Such parameters should be designed to engage Israeli-Canadian leadership on terms to which they can relate,** to reserve them a place at the table. The terms cannot solely depend on the depth of their pockets. Parameters may include setting a low financial threshold to enable a greater diversity of Israelis access and not only to major donors. In some cases, parameters may recognize volunteerism in lieu of, or in addition to, financial contribution.
73. **Focus efforts on the next generation of Israelis** – Nothing has greater potential to catalyze NAJS leadership than parenthood, and specifically the concern of Israeli-Canadian parents regarding the identity of their children. This issue presents fertile ground for Israeli-Canadian engagement with the Jewish community, and similarly for the mobilization of their philanthropic activity. Thus, the SRC should focus on the education of the second- and third- generation Israelis. In addition, programs targeting children are most likely to provide a

'return on the investment' in catalyzing NAJS philanthropy in a relatively short time span.

## Jewish Education and Hebrew

74. **Jewish education is a vital foundation of the hybrid identity.** Many first-generation Israeli parents are beginning to understand that Hebrew-language instruction alone is no guarantee for sustaining a strong connection to Israeli culture or to the Jewish people. Therefore, there is significant potential in attracting the Israeli community to programs that combine Hebrew with a Jewish education to better prepare the next generation for an active Jewish life.

### *Recommendations for Jewish education*

75. **The SRC presents a unique opportunity to engage the Israeli community in Jewish life through education.** The SRC is pivotal in imparting Jewish culture and tradition to those Israeli-Canadians who lack this component as an integral part of their identity.
76. **Don't try to "convert" Israelis; meet them where they're at.** Bringing an Israeli from 'Little Israel' into the Hybrid Social Space begins with palatable 'baby steps.' In other words, an Israeli-Canadian parent is likely to send his child to the "hybrid" Israeli Sunday school Kachol Lavan because it is Israeli, and not necessarily because of the Jewish education it offers. Yet, within this platform, one can practice his/her Israeli identity, while enriching his/her knowledge about Judaism and the Jewish world.
77. **The SRC should implement arts programming for three types of audiences:** 'Judaism knowledgeable,' 'Judaism interested,' and 'Judaism ignorant'. Programming should be designed for all points of the life-cycle.
78. **There is a need for educational programs to formulate a curriculum of involvement** in the Jewish community, thus becoming a platform for leading a process for the Jewish community. Such curricula could introduce Israel-Canadian youth to, e.g. the make-up of the religious streams in the Jewish community and the structure of the Jewish community and the Jewish communal organizations.

### *Recommendations for Hebrew-language education*

79. **The SRC should promote a campaign among Israeli-Canadians to learn Hebrew.** The Hebrew language, as treated within the SRC, should be a modern, living language that connects to Israel's arts and culture and daily life.
80. **Hebrew language curriculum should be designed according to the following parameters:**
- Level of Hebrew language:** All.
- Target groups:** Early childhood, teens, adults, senior citizens.
- Platforms:** Hebrew learning can take place in a variety of platforms, including the following:

- a. **Kachol Lavan supplementary school** – This school has already opened its gate to non-Israeli Jews.
- b. **Camps** – Through Israeli summer-camp *shlichim*, Hebrew names for groups, Hebrew songs, Israeli films, Israeli music, etc.
- b. **Modern Hebrew classes** – Offer online Hebrew classes and dialogue opportunities with local Israeli teens.
- c. **Gym** – “Learn While You Burn”: Use Israeli songs, DVDs with Israeli sites on treadmill screens, etc.
- d. **Adult programming** – Offer traditional and online Hebrew classes.
- e. **Community-wide events** – Invite Israeli musicians, artists, authors, and filmmakers.
- f. **Infrastructure** – Hebrew signs, Israeli music, etc.

In addition, **a marketing strategy should be developed**. For example, a first step could be hanging Hebrew names on door signs or including them on business cards.

81. **Bilingualism** – Bringing Hebrew into the mainstream of Jewish life has a two-fold benefit. Hebrew can play an instrumental role in strengthening Jewish Peoplehood, for example in increasing the connection between the Jewish community, Israel, and other Jewish communities around the world. At the same time, with Hebrew accessible and mainstream, the Jewish communal space will become familiar to the community's Israelis. Key marketing and promotional materials aimed at Israelis, including the Federation's website, can be in Hebrew.

For example, several Israelis with whom we spoke praised the Jewish Immigrant Aid Service ([JIAS](#)). In particular, the usage of Hebrew in JIAS's website and the Hebrew speaking staff seem to have made many Israelis feel welcome there.

## Connection to Israel

82. **A community of Jews and Israelis that maintains a strong and vibrant connection to Israel is critical to the Israeli community in Toronto, to the Toronto Jewish community, and to Israel itself.**

### *Recommendations*

83. **The SRC can offer programming consistent with the Israeli calendar, which enables community members to act as 'goodwill ambassadors' for Israel in their day-to-day interactions with members of the wider community.** For example, commemorating *Yom Ha'Zikaron* (Israeli Remembrance Day) and celebrating *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Israeli Independence Day) can provide a deeper connection to Israeli, Israeli culture, and Israeli national holidays.
84. **The Israeli calendar should be viewed as an opportunity for the SRC to**

**catalyze collaboration with Jewish education agencies and organizations in Israel to convene the entire Centre around Israel issues.** For example, Partnership 2000 of JAFI could also serve as a melting pot for a new community by encouraging Israeli-Canadians and local Jewish youth to volunteer with their Israeli partnership peers in the partnership region in Israel or Canada.

85. **The SRC should take advantage of the presence of Israeli-Canadians in Toronto to promote Israel-engagement.** Toronto is one of the most Israel-engaged communities in North America, having pioneered best practices in the field. Yet, in many cases the engagement is with the idea of Israel rather than with Israeli society. This dynamic is reinforced by the reality that today, as a whole, the Israeli and Jewish communities in Toronto do not interact. To counter this reality in a way that also provides an innovative avenue for engagement with Israel, the SRC should involve Israelis directly in its Israel-engagement programming. This should be done, for example, by inviting younger members of the Israeli community to sit on committees and plan Israel programming for their peers.

*Example*

86. The **Mifgash** Program is aimed the social and cultural needs of the Israeli community. This program has evolved into several directions, including programs for creative writing in Hebrew, literature, book club, art underway, Bible studies, Cafe Kasit (that hosts guest speakers) and etc.

**The Mifgash Theatre**, which produces contemporary plays and hosts contemporary Israeli theatre personalities, is an example of a venue through which the Israeli-Canadian community can offer the Jewish community a window into Israeli society. Additional ideas for doing so include connecting young members through relevant programming such as Israeli cooking classes, and singles' events with an Israeli atmosphere.

## **Annex: Background – A Jewish world organized around Jewish Peoplehood**

- 1. The basis of this document is the changing paradigm in the relationship between Israel and Jewish communities abroad and the emerging place of Israelis abroad within this paradigm.**
- 2. The urgency of this topic stems from the large gaps in expectations between Israel and Jewish communities outside of Israel, of which Israelis living abroad are an organic part.** This gap often causes tension and friction, manifested in: increasing financial, structural and political difficulties experienced by many Jewish institutions in Israel and overseas; difficulties in engaging the younger generation with Israel; and a relationship between Israeli communities, organized Jewish life, and the State of Israel that is frequently beset by confusion, suspicion, a sense of guilt, and blame on the part of all the parties involved. **This reality corresponds with a dominant mindset within both communities, which, to a large extent, reflects the old relationship between Israel and world Jewry.**

### **The 'Old Relationship' between Israel and the Jewish World**

- 3. For years, the relationship between Israel and world Jewry has been based upon an unwritten 'covenant' that stemmed from Classical Zionism** and was shaped by the Holocaust and the miracle of the rebirth of the State of Israel. This covenant generated values, priorities, working assumptions, patterns of behavior, and institutions that have dominated the relationship for decades.
- 4. However, over the past years, it has become clear that powerful trends have been undermining this 'covenant' to the point of rendering it irrelevant.**
- 5. Trends in the Jewish world that challenge this old relationship include:** (1) growing interest in direct relationships that do not necessarily require existing communal institutions; (2) rise of Tikkun Olam as a mobilizing cause; (3) North American Jewry finds it increasingly difficult to speak with one voice, as it is turning into a multitude of communities, each interpreting Jewish life in its own way; (4) Israel has turned from a uniting issue to a source of tension and a divisive issue for many Jewish communities; (5) in a similar vein, the notion of unqualified support for Israel is on the decline, and organizations that are both Zionist and critical of Israel are gaining momentum;<sup>35</sup> and (6) the changing balance of power in the global arena is affecting American Jewry, which may, over time cease to be the 'Jewish world superpower' and become one of many Jewish power-centers across the world.
- 6. At the same time, Israeli society has been transforming as well:** (1) Israel has become relatively prosperous; (2) the influence of Israel's central government,

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<sup>35</sup> Examples of such organizations include: J-Street, Ameinu, Partners for Progressive Israel, Jewish Alliance for Change, and JSpaceCanada among others.

which is subject to a prolonged crisis of governance, is in decline and NGOs, philanthropists, municipalities, and other actors are rising in its place; (3) community life in Israel is surging, and more Israelis are engaging with their Jewish heritage and identity; (4) Israelis are increasingly interested in universal socio-economic issues such as education, health, and housing in Israel – rather than in traditional security and foreign policy issues; and (5) many Israelis live abroad for varying periods for education and work, and an Israeli Diaspora seems to be permanent in the foreseeable future.

## A New Relationship: Jewish Peoplehood is Taking Center Stage

7. **As a consequence of the above, we have seen a number of ideological, conceptual, and practical developments that have altered the relationship. Classical Zionism is morphing into a new 21<sup>st</sup> century Zionism, which includes the concept of Jewish Peoplehood, and views the mission of Israel in a broader, more nuanced context of the Jewish people.**

8. **The idea of Peoplehood emphasizes the sense of the Jewish people as a 'large family' that shares history, stories, memories, fate, destiny, and the desire to promote its well-being.** It cherishes and seeks to preserve the great geographic, ethnic, ritualistic, and cultural diversity of our people through collaborations and relationships, while devoting significantly less attention to differences of faith, observance or nationality. Its constituency includes all those who feel a part of the Jewish people and are committed to living in Jewish households. and raising Jewish children.

Some expressions of this phenomenon include a growing understanding that a vibrant Diaspora is an imperative for a thriving global Jewish collective; an acknowledgment of 'lifecycles of movement' to and from Israel, rather than a call for aliyah;<sup>36</sup> a changed perception from Israel as the 'poor nephew' of the wealthy Jewish Diaspora; and countless direct relationships between individuals, communities, and philanthropists in many cases replacing traditional actors such as the Government of Israel, the Jewish Agency for Israel, or other major institutions. **Finally, if in the past the main project of the Jewish people was building the State of Israel, the focus today is on building and strengthening Jewish communities – both within and outside of Israel.**

9. **Generally, the Jewish world is transitioning from relationships centered on institutions to relationships focused around issues or ideas.** In this context, there are six major issues that will capture the bulk of attention, energy, and resources of the Jewish world in the coming decades. **Each issue is essential for the security and prosperity of our people.** These issues include: (1) **building a global network of prosperous and resilient Jewish communities;** (2) **Tikkun Olam as the mission of our people;**<sup>37</sup> (3) **Hebrew as our global language;** (4) **strengthening an Israel that is prosperous, secure, democratic, and provides**

<sup>36</sup> The term 'aliyah' (literally, ascending) refers to Jewish immigration to Israel.

<sup>37</sup> See the Reut's [document on Tikkun Olam](#)

**a unique Jewish experience; (5) enriching our Jewish culture and tradition; and finally, (6) fighting anti-Semitism and the fundamental delegitimization of Israel.**

- 10. The 'six pillars' are designed to promote Jewish Peoplehood among Jewish communities worldwide, where each community, organization, or individual tailors the six pillars and adapts them to their own particular needs and unique added values.**
- 11. Israelis abroad can play an instrumental role in shaping a number of these pillars in Jewish life in Toronto.**