Chapter 4

HEBREW IN RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL SPHERE

"Because of four things our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt. Two of the four reasons are that they did not change their names and did not change their language" (Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus 32: 5). Hebrew and Judaism have been crucial in making, shaping and maintaining what Jews are today. Both the language and the religion shape the Israeli society today. This chapter tries to study the role of Hebrew in religion and the role of religion in shaping the society and its culture. In the case of Israel's coalition governments, religious parties have dominated the Ministry of Education and Culture and thus had access to young minds. So, the state machinery was utilized in creating a future generation that had strong affiliation with Judaic elements. But since there are different religious streams of Judaism in Israel today; the second part explores the attitude of the religious groups behind language in general and non-religious groups in particular. Bible was used for the acculturation of the new society in Israel and served both the political and religious needs of the time. An effort is also made to understand if the centrality of Bible that helped in some degree of conciliation between the secular and religious be helpful in doing so with the Arab citizens of Israel.

Religion is an important element in Jewish life. In most part of the Diasporic life they maintained their identity around religious activities and had a culture that revolved around religious believes. These religious and cultural traits are represented in modern Israeli symbols and have become a part of Israeli identity and nationality. The Star of David, the *khanuka* lamps and the national anthem are just a few to mention. Religion and religious rituals and practices had an important role in maintaining the Jewish identity and culture shaping it in different times and at different places, kept the ethos alive and provided the raw materials for the new nation that was established in Palestine.

The religious community in Israel today has a special place in the society and the secular-religious divide is no longer sublime. The conflict surfaces itself in different forms at different times. One important area where this conflict is most
apparent and frequent is in the field of education and culture. Israel has developed two different streams of education primarily because of religious differences. The religious group is a minority in Israel but the secular majority, as tax payers, fund the separate autonomous religious schools. Remarkably, the state’s intervention is inversely proportionate to the funding i.e. the higher the level of funding the lower the state intervention in the schools. The ultra-orthodox schools get full state funding and have the greatest autonomy.

The Role of State and Religion in Cultivating Culture: An Overview

Most scholars now believe that education has a functionalist role. Critical sociology of education points out that “Education was not about equality, but inequality...Education’s main purpose of social integration of a class society could be achieved only by preparing most kids for an unequal future, and by ensuring their personal underdevelopment” (Willis, 1983: 110). The unequal future is perpetuated along class, gender, and ethnic lines. Thus, “schools are stripped of their political innocence and connected to the social and cultural matrix of capitalist rationality” (Giroux, 1983: 258). It is here that the state intervenes by means of influencing curriculum, language and culture and related things. The state asserts its power by shaping cultural hegemony and cultural legitimization. Cultural hegemony is defined as the imposition by the dominant group of its cultural design through its possession of power, while the group’s culture is reproduced and distributed by socialization agencies including schools (Bourdieu, 1977). Giroux (Giroux, 1981: 23) defines cultural hegemony as “The successful attempt of a dominant class to utilize its control over the resources of the state and civil society, particularly through the use of the mass media and the educational system, to establish its view of the world as all inclusive and universal.”

A hegemonic curriculum reflects the values, ideology, and culture of the dominant group in a society (Shamai, 1990: 449-463) where this group controls the society’s cultural and educational system, including the explicit and hidden curriculum. The dominant groups impose their views, beliefs and culture on the rest of the society, primarily by using the educational system to establish their views. The part of culture that becomes legitimate by the hegemony of the dominant group
creates the cultural (and curriculum) hegemony which overrides the real concerns of large numbers of students who are from subordinate groups (Giroux, 1983: 268). The latter are expected to subordinate their own culture to the values of the dominant culture.

The state and its organs particularly schools and mass media establish and disseminate certain sets of cultural traits that is referred to as cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Basil Bernstein, 1971-1977). Cultural capital consists of selected sets of values, beliefs, attitudes and competencies possessed by some students, which are selectively endorsed and transmitted by the schools in young age and consolidated through mass media. The society perpetuates itself and reproduces its cultural and social hierarchy for the benefit of the dominant groups.

The state of Israel, like any other state, sees and manages conflicts among and between various classes, genders and groups such as religious and secular. However, the dominant group controls the state, and hence the schools as well. Through economic, cultural and ideological practices, the state intervenes in the schools and controls the teachers, parents and the curriculum. Bowles & Gintis (Bowles, 1976) states that the social organization of the classroom mirrors the social organization of the workplace.

Public education is controlled by the state, which exercises its power by controlling the school budget and by supervising every aspect of school life: ideology, curriculum, staff hiring, student admission policies etc. The state is not a neutral entity, and culture is highly contested and biased entity. The bias benefits the dominant group, as it controls the power of the state. The theory of critical sociology of education emphasizes dominant-subordinate relations, which promote cultural attitudes in favour of the dominant group.

**Religious Stream of Education in Israel**

The divide in the Israeli society is best manifested in the education field and this too has a historical background to it. Until the First World War, Jewish education in Palestine was controlled by and affiliated to various Jewish organizations and communities in the Diaspora. The Jewish people were divided into many factions, and each promoted its own belief through various means including sponsoring education. In the secular camp, socialist and Marxist ideas prevailed and competed with Zionist
ideology. Zionism started as a secular movement and was therefore deemed sacrilegious by the religious leaders of Jewry, who awaited God to lead the Jews to the Holy Land. However, some religious leaders gradually started to accept Zionist ideas. In so doing, they divided the religious orthodox camp into three approaches to Zionism: the Mizrachi group, which gradually joined in; Agudat Israel, which hesitated; and other ultra-orthodox (consisting of many small groups), which rejected Zionism. The issue of control over the new Zionist educational system triggered fierce debate in the earliest Zionist congresses. Some wanted to promote a secular Zionist culture, while others were influenced by the ideas of the religious groups. The debate and pressure was so intense that even Theodor Herzl, the leader of the Zionist movement, had to postpone taking a decision on the issue from one congress to the next.

In the first four congresses (from 1897 to 1900) the secular representatives were not successful due to lack of coordination and organization. However, the situation changed at the fifth Zionist Congress, in which Herzl was unable to block a resolution that called on the Zionist organizations to conduct educational work in the ‘national spirit’, meaning the secular and not the religious way (Bat-Yehuda, 1986: 3-22). The ‘Democratic Faction’, headed by Chaim Weizmann went to the 1901 Congress fully prepared with control over the cultural committee, and tabled a motion in their favour which was finally approved by the Congress. The religious representatives’ position at the Zionist congresses was that cultural and educational activities should not be dealt with by the Zionist movement, but should be handled by local communities. The religious groups wanted autonomy over their communities in order to avoid secular influence (Bat-Yehuda, 1986: 15). In reaction to this resolution, in 1902, the Mizrachi movement was founded, and the need for religious education was at the heart of its first manifesto (Keil, 1973: 106-110). From 1902 onward, the religious groups pressed for control over the religious education. In the same year at the Russian Zionist conference in Minsk Ahad Ha-Am, a prominent secular Zionist leader, who headed the secular faction, accepted the religious representative’s demands for autonomous religious education. He had two reasons for doing so. He did so to avoid split in the Jewish camp and for that two autonomous educational systems, secular and religious (Schweid, 1981), seemed to be the logical conclusion.

But the Minsk resolution of the Russian Zionists did not solve the issue. At the 1911 Zionist Congress, the secular faction raised the issue once again and passed a
resolution that entitled them to shape Zionist cultural life. They established the Department for Hebrew Culture, which was responsible for education and publishing along with the Hebrew Language Academy. Despite fierce opposition by the religious groups, the secular representatives tabled and pushed through a resolution that gave the secular Zionist organizations monopolistic powers to conduct ‘cultural work’ in the Land of Israel; however, it had to be carried out without giving offense to religious Jews (Shilhav, 1981).

The secular takeover of the language and cultural aspect of the Jews alienated a section of them who in 1912 formed a new movement, Agudat Israel (Bat-Yehuda, 1986: 18), which rejected any educational support or intervention by the Zionist organization (Kahana, 1969: 371-374).

But after the first World War, the Jewish schools in Palestine were in financial difficulties. The religious schools gave in and the secular Zionist movement took over, financially and pedagogically. The Zionist movement was the most organized and economically established group in Palestine (Elboim-Dror, 1990). Though under economic constraints the religious groups continued to mobilize for control over cultural affairs and for religious autonomous education systems with a curriculum of their choice. The fierce clash between the religious and secular groups resumed. On the other hand the labor Zionist view, expressed by prominent leaders was to protect secular Jewish education from religious influences (Rinot, 1986: 106-110). At the Zionist Congress in London in 1920, an agreement was reached that assured religious groups substantial autonomy over its schools (Bar-Lev, 1991: 608-618), including control over a seven-member ‘Orthodox Supervisory Committee’ that had been established. All its members were orthodox, and they received full authority over all aspects of the religious schools. Two pedagogical conditions were attached to the religious school’s autonomy: Hebrew must be the language of instruction; and a certain minimum of general studies (not only religious studies) would be taught (Zameret, 1997). A supervisory committee was also established for general education.

The establishment of an autonomous education stream by the religious groups was the first step in a ‘cultural shift’: the beginning of ‘cultural surrender’ by the secular group and of ‘cultural advancement’ by the religious group. The socialist groups maintained their own autonomous ‘workers’ stream since 1923 (Shilhav, 1981). This meant the abandoning of the idea of a common Zionist education for a partly common and a (separate) secular and religious education. That situation
signaled a ‘structural pluralistic’ division. To secure the integrity of the fragile Zionist camp, and to maintain its own ideological (worker’s) education stream, the secular camp gave up the idea of a common (shared) education for all and yielded its status as the dominating force in the Zionist movement. The religious Zionists who were organized managed to achieve autonomous education, and to improve their status from a subordinate group to a group with equal rights to the secular group. Interestingly, that pattern of behavior of the religious groups of expecting financial support and retaining educational autonomy-continued ever since the British mandate until the present day.

**Agudat Israel**

During the British Mandate period, three autonomous public-funded Zionist streams of education operated in Palestine: the secular and nonaffiliated general stream; the socialist worker’s stream; and the religious stream (Reshef & Dror 1999). The Zionist organization’s stand regarding finances placed Agudat Israel education in a difficult situation. The ultra-orthodox (Agudat Israel) movement was not funded by Zionist bodies because it opposed Zionism. However, in 1947, after the Holocaust in Europe had put an end to any financial support, it wished to become an ‘official’ educational stream in order to receive full financial backing. In that year, Agudat Israel was denied autonomous status because of its rejection of the pedagogical conditions for funding religious educational groups (Zameret, 1997). But a year later, at the height of Israel’s War of Independence, for the sake of the country’s survival, the Israeli government relented and recognized the Agudat Israel stream, with hardly any limitations on its autonomy, as the fourth educational stream. It was entitled the ‘independent stream’, which it indeed was. This time, the secular camp not only gave up the idea of common education for all, but it gave up even the minimal limitation on the autonomy that it demanded from all state-funded educational streams. This was the next step in the ‘cultural shift’: totally abandoning the idea of a common Zionist education. At that time, the secular ideology was still alive in the ‘workers stream’, which was growing, and the Agudat Israel stream was struggling for survival, so the risk of conceding to the ultra-orthodox did not seem so great.

In 1951, the incumbent Israeli government resigned because of the aggressive way the left-wing secular camp (the labor’s stream) used its political power to
encourage people to enroll in their schools. The melting-pot ideology, which in fact was assimilation, prevailed. As a result of the public uproar in Israel and in the Diaspora, a national committee was established, chaired by a Supreme Court judge, Gad Frumkin. The committee concluded that the education system systematically interfered with religious studies, and forced the cutting of side-locks of religious boys. This was not carried out as an intentional war against the religious, but as a process of preferred adaptation as perceived by government representatives (Zamcret, 1993). The elections were thus about politics, education, and religion. David Ben-Gurion, after being re-elected as prime minister, planned to merge all the streams into a single national current. This goal was the subject of fierce controversy. The arguments were similar to those already outlined. The religious politicians wanted to assure the existence of their own educational streams. Ben-Gurion was concerned about the influence of socialist ideology in the workers’ stream, and he did not invite the (more extreme) socialist party (Mapam) to join the government (Zameret, 1997). Moshe Sharett (who later became the second prime minister of Israel) feared religious influence on secular education (Rinot, 1986).

**State Education Law on 1953**

In this background the State Education Law was passed in 1953. The law distinguished three different types of schools: state schools (fully funded, without autonomy), ‘recognized’ schools (partly funded with close to full autonomy), and ‘exempted’ schools. Today, ‘exempted’ education satisfies the requirements of the Education Law, and its schools are therefore exempt from the Compulsory Education Law and have no pedagogical restrictions imposed on them. Most of the ‘exempted’ schools are ultra-orthodox and anti-Zionist, and do not request or receive any state financial support. It is these schools which still use Yiddish as a language of instruction and communication among themselves. Hebrew is considered ‘holy’ enough to be used for day to day activities.

The 1953 law, regarding the Jewish schools, forced the two secular streams (the general and the workers’ streams) to merge into a new state (secular) educational stream, and their supervisory committees were abolished. The Mizrachi stream, however, became the state religious educational stream. Mizrachi’s political control of state religious schools was secured by the party’s supremacy on the Council for
Religious Education (which replaced the Orthodox Supervisory Committee) that, since 1953, has been in charge of state religious education. This council operates independently of the Ministry of Education and Culture, reporting only to the government. The majority of council members are nominated by orthodox religious politicians. Apart from being solely responsible for making decisions regarding religious education, the council is also authorized by law ‘on religious grounds only, to disqualify a person for appointment or further service as a principal, inspector or teacher at a religious state educational institution’ (Goldstein, 1992: 44). Similar arrangements for state secular education do not exist. As there is no secular council for state education, it is not protected from religious influence. The 1953 law was an important step in the advancement of religious power.

While the secular group continued its educational surrender the religious section continued its cultural advancement. The religious streams were separated: one became public, but kept its political affiliation; and one chose to become a nonpublic stream, as *Agudat* Israel feared for its independence. The *Agudat* Israel schools are classified as private schools. ‘This situation is again a function of the recognition of the need for autonomy in religious education as well as that of the desire for the creation of exclusive and total religious educational environments as distinguished from merely adding to or subtracting from curricular subjects’ (Goldstein, 1992: 60). The *Agudat* Israel politicians were afraid that the State Education Law 1953 would limit their absolute autonomy, so they opted out of state education. They received the status of ‘recognized’ schools, which in practice meant total freedom for their educational system but less state financial support. However, their political advantage, namely holding the balance of power between the left and the right in the government, resulted in a steady rise in the financial support they obtained from the state. It has become about equal to that received by state schools (Goldstein, 1992). The Israeli political arena is divided into several parties. The Jewish political parties are clustered around three groups: the right-wing, the left-wing, and the religious parties. The latter are traditionally part of any coalition; they sometimes hold the balance of power because of their electoral strength, but also because their inclusion is part of their broader social influence on Israeli society. One of the main cultural sources of Zionism is the Jewish religion (Kimmerling, 1993: 106-110).
Shas

In the 1990s, a new stream of religious education was founded by Shas, a fairly recently formed political party. It is in part ethnically and religiously based on West Asian Jews and an ultra-orthodox theology and discourse. It accuses the secular Ashkenazis (Jews of European and American origin) of discriminating against the Eastern Jews and keeping them in the lowest segment of Israeli society. Shas began as a local party in Jerusalem in 1983, but ran in the 1984 general elections for the Knesset (Israeli parliament). Since then Shas has grown, and is currently the third largest party in the Knesset and the largest religious party in Israel. In 1985, it founded El Hamayan (To the Fountain), a network of institutions engaged in non­formal education for children, youth, and adults. El Hamayan branches exist in almost every Jewish town in Israel and offer a large variety of extra-curricula religious activities: Bible lessons for adults, lectures for women, and courses for children and adults. According to its director, in 1997, the movement supplied more than 600,000 hours of orthodox religious activities. In 1991, a Shas network of formal education officially received the status of a ‘recognized’ educational stream: the Fountain of Religious Education. In only a few years, the network has increased its activities to 80 daycare centers, 650 kindergartens, and 140 elementary schools. Its institutions are attended by 38,000 children, taught by 3000 school teachers and kindergarten and nursery school teachers, who are paid the same salaries as teachers in the state schools (Dayan, 1998: 4-13).

Funding

Strangely, in return for granting more money, the state relinquishes its supervisory power. State religious education receives more than the secular state education. Seventh grade state-religious students receive one weekly hour more than secular students; eighth-graders receive 2 hours more, and ninth-graders 3 hours more than secular students (3-9% difference). In addition, state religious schools have specific financial aid that is unique to them and includes budgetary items such as ‘sex separation’ (splitting the age group to female- and male-only classes, thus increasing the number of classes), special hours for rabbis, and additional extra-curricular religious studies (Sahar, 1999: A1, A12). However, the gap increases with regard to the degree of religiosity. The extra financial support is received in different ways. In
1997, students in independent education received 15% (22% in 1996) more hours than students in state education (religious and secular), and each hour of independent education cost 7% more than each hour of state education. In 1996, students in Shas education received 31% more hours, and in 1997 47% more hours, than students in state education (religious and secular), and in the latter year each hour of Shas education cost 13% more than state education (Schiffer, 1998). In a different study (Swirski, 1998: 12), findings on the basic hours allocated per student are shown to be similar: students at the independent schools receive 14% more hours than those at state schools, and those at Shas schools receive 57% more and interestingly, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport obstructs any attempt to obtain this information (Swirski, 1998: 13). This account applies to the elementary school system, but matters are no different in high school. Shas education, being a new network, does not yet have high schools. However, 25,000 students of the 'private' independent stream study at junior high (Grades 7-9), and high schools receive 40-50% more financial support than state education students (Schiffer, 1998).

The less a school is financially supported by the state, the more it is supervised. State schools do not have the power of the independent stream. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport does not intervene in the various religious schools' curricula, 'as any attempt to intervene in the ultra-orthodox religious education will bring about intervention on the political level' (Ilan, 1998). Thus, the next step in the cultural shift has occurred: the minimal curricular requirements are not practiced, while the level of financial support has risen above that of the state schools. The religious sector continues its cultural advancement; it has thereby created a situation that has become a model for another religious educational stream.

The establishment of *Agudat* Israel and Shas nonpublic education, which is funded as public education but has no limitations, was another move against the secular unifying forces. The secular groups gave up the financial power that they might have used as pedagogical and curricular strings for political considerations. The education system was the arena in which the religious and secular groups struggled. The growth of Shas education manifests the cultural (advancement) shift of the religions sector: from marginalized ultra-orthodox education at the end of World War II to total independent fully financed education.
The Jewish religious groups are very conscious about their identity and culture. They bargained and pushed to promote their position viz. a viz. identity and culture. They are aware of the role of language in acculturation. Language comes with its package of ideology and culture. The religious groups, therefore, had a distinction between Jewish language and non-Jewish languages. Among the Jewish languages Yiddish was the most favoured language and Hebrew faced some initial resistance in everyday use due to its “holiness”. The attitude of this community towards non-Jewish language depended on the historical background and contemporary situation.

In Oriental countries, there was usually no negative connotation among observant Jews associated with the study and use of non-Jewish languages particularly Arabic. In Europe, however, after the Enlightenment period, the attitude towards the study of non-Jewish languages, both local and foreign, became a topic of debate among Jews. Language, and particularly western European languages, were considered the transmitter of a culture, and in view of the threat that the Age of Reason posed to Judaism, traditional rabbinical authorities increased their strictures against the study of foreign languages. During the Emancipation (mid-18th to 19th centuries), Jews throughout Europe were forced to teach official local languages in their schools, in order to assimilate into the local culture and society. Rabbinical opposition ensued, beginning the modern cultural battle for and against language teaching.

In parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire or Russia where either no such law existed or was not enforced, the local vernacular was not taught in Jewish schools, but was learned on a “need to know” basis (Weinryb, 1972). Despite the negative rabbinical attitude towards the formal teaching of non-Jewish languages in the school system, European-Jewish antipathy to the teaching of foreign languages never received an official Jewish legal sanction. This situation was reversed in Jerusalem during the late 19th century when, due to the poor economic situation, several Ashkenazi Haredi schools belonging to the Old Yishuv (the pre-State settlement in Israel) requested rabbinical permission to teach pupils Arabic in order to assist them in obtaining better employment. Fearing that teaching a foreign language would break the barrier of ethnic Jewish separatism, a number of Ashkenazi rabbis placed a ‘ban’ on the teaching of foreign languages. This ‘ban’ was rejected by major rabbis in
Egypt and Europe. More recently, a compromise was reached whereby pupils could study languages in small groups of two or three (Spolsky, 1993). Thus, the economic pragmatism forced the hand of religious or ethnic separatism, although the ‘ban’ which was passed ultimately did allow the teaching of foreign languages, albeit within a circumscribed framework. A century later, this ‘ban’ is still considered by some to be in effect and is obeyed in a number of the schools, including one where English is taught.

Both in Europe and in Palestine of the 19th century, traditional Ashkenazi Haredi education was entirely Torah-oriented and was conducted solely in Yiddish and Leshon Kodesh. Early attempts among Haredi educators to switch to Hebrew were forcibly rebuffed (Sourasky, 1967). During a later period and in certain areas, even Bible and Talmud studies had to be taught in Yiddish, so as not to pollute the Holy Tongue with anything but sacred words, Yiddish being given the status of a quasi-sacred language (Lowenthal, 1993; Glinert & Shilhav, 1991) was used as a language of instruction.

The connection between educational content, language of instruction and the teaching of foreign languages becomes apparent when examining gender-related factors dealing with foreign-language education in the late modern era. As it is traditionally incumbent upon Jewish boys to learn the Torah, some Rabbis felt that teaching them other subjects, including languages, was a waste of time. Being exempt from learning the Torah, or actively exhorted to refrain from its study, girls were granted more leeway in terms of secular education, including language study (Gurock, 1988). Although the fear of outside influences existed for both males and females, rabbinical authorities turned a blind eye to the fact that girls were taught certain subjects including languages, as women, traditionally considered lightheaded compared to the Torah-laden male, were not a subject of educational or cultural debate. This rabbinical lacuna changed in the 20th century with the opening of ultra-orthodox schools systems for girls in Eastern Europe, after which women’s education received appropriate consideration.

Until the end of the 19th century, despite laws pertaining to the introduction of the official State language in all school frameworks, in practice, various Jewish communities throughout central and eastern Europe were granted educational autonomy in terms of administration and curriculum (Weinryb, 1972). Consequently, boys could receive a Torah education without learning about the country in which
they lived, or becoming proficient in its language (Stampfer, 1988: 3-24). After the First World War, when many central and eastern European countries became independent, certain State governments took control of school curricula, demanding that the local language be taught. In response, most Haredi boys' schools scheduled secular subjects in the late afternoon, while the best hours were reserved for Jewish subjects (Sourasky, 1967). A similar policy is implemented today in many Haredi schools in the USA (Kranzler, 1995; Kamen, 1985; Kranzler, 1995; Rubin, 1997).

The girls, who were segregated from the boys generally studied in local schools. The religious heads were concerned about their interaction with other local secular girls. This concern led to the establishment of the first Haredi girls' school in 1917 known as Beit Ya'akov [The House of Jacob], which metamorphosed into a school network including elementary and high schools, along with a teachers-training seminary (Weissman, 1976). The establishment of an orthodox Jewish girls' educational network was a radical innovation as it provided orthodox and ultra-orthodox girls and young women with a serious religious and comprehensive secular education. Sarah Schenierer, the founder of Beit Yakov, obtained rabbinical approval for her school was the leeway traditionally given to girls in terms of secular education (Baumel & Schacter, 1992).

The change in the political scenario after the second world war certain Haredi leaders heightened their opposition to any factor that they saw as threatening to their ethnic and cultural separatism, including the use of the local vernacular (including Modern Israeli Hebrew), or the study of non-Jewish languages. Despite this common attitude, in practice, different language policies developed in Israel and abroad among various Haredi groups.

**Haredi Attitudes Towards English**

The developments in the Jewish history have given shapes to certain attitudes toward teaching a non-Jewish shapes to certain attitudes towards teaching or learning a non-Jewish language particularly English. These attitudes can be classified under three main titles: “particularistic”, the “proselytizing”, and the “pragmatic”. Each attitude is germane to a particular group, sect, or gender.
The “Particularistic” Attitude

The “particularistic” attitude prevails mostly in Hassidic and Mitnagdic Haredi boys’ schools (with the exception of Habad elementary schools and a few Habad boys’ high schools), and also in a growing number of Shas boys’ schools. It is expressed by the fact that English, along with other secular studies, is almost never taught in a Yeshiva Ketana or Metivta. In the elementary schools of these movements, most of which are under the supervision of the Ashkenazi Khinuch Atzmai (Autonomous education) or the Sefaradi Ma’ayan Hahnuch Hatorani (Torah Studies), English is listed as a subject of study. However, in reality it is never emphasized.

The particularistic attitude towards the teaching of English accentuates changes that have been taking place in the Haredi world since the 1950s. Even since the 1953 Education Laws which marked the two streams of education including one for religious groups, the Hinuch Atzmai elementary school system included a full curriculum of secular study, including English language as required by the law. But, gradually, most of the boys’ elementary schools under the supervision of the Hinuch Atzmai system have disregarded much of their secular curriculum. In practice, they now teach basic secular studies such as arithmetic, a certain amount of Hebrew grammar, and no English. As the supervision in these schools is carried out only by Hinuch Atzmai inspectors, it was always possible to state that the boys were studying English, as required by the Ministry of Education curriculum, while in practice they knew little more than the basic alphabet. Even those schools teaching some English do not wish to advertise this fact, following the particularistic-separatist line of their movement. This situation is common among most Talmud Torahs in Israel with a large number of Mitnagdic pupils. These schools make no distinction between teaching language per se and teaching language through the use of culturally desirable or undesirable texts. The study of foreign languages is considered a waste of time and a subject that, if it has to be taught at all, should be skimmed through as fast as possible.

Sefaradi Haredim follow a similar policy with regard to teaching English in boys’ schools. While emphasizing ethnic separatism and stressing how their movement is revitalizing traditional Sefaradi religious culture, Sefaradi Haredi educators seem to have taken their education cues from the Mitnagdic world in which
many of them had initially received their religious education. Consequently, most Sefaradi Haredi boys’ schools teach either a minimal English program or none at all. Similar to their Ashkenazi counterparts, in Sefaradi Haredi Yeshivot at the high-school level, English is not taught in any form. The rationale behind the reluctance to teach English to boys among these groups is religious. Jewish males are supposed to devote their lives to learning Torah, although traditionally this did not supplant the necessity of earning a living. However, as Friedman (1991) has shown in his study of Haredi society in Israel, with the creation of the aforementioned “society of scholars” in Israel and later abroad, growing numbers of Haredi men continued their religious studies long after marriage while being supported by their wives. Consequently, it became accepted practice in Israel to teach Haredi boys until the age of *par-mitzvah* (13 years) the absolute minimum of secular studies required by law in order to maintain government subsidies and completely eliminate such study after that age when they are considered adults by Jewish law. Today, many Haredi men join the workforce only in their fourth and fifth decades, often staying within the Haredi community, as educators, menial laborers, craftsmen and tradesmen, professions in which they have little need for English on a daily basis. However, the growing numbers of Haredi men recently joining computer-based industries as programmers, repairmen etc. has raised the need for basic English skills, and the Haredi world is slowly adapting its educational frameworks to fit this need.

An additional explanation for the particularists’ reluctance to place any importance upon the study of English, even for those under 13 is the fact that it is considered a conduit for secular, forbidden culture.

The “Proselytizing” Attitude

The proselytizing attitude towards English teaching draws its rationale from pragmatic interpretation. English teaching is permitted and even encouraged as it will act as a linguistic conduit to allow religious knowledge to be spread outward. The major Haredi group following this attitude is *Habad*, not only in girls’ schools, but even in many of its educational establishments for boys.

Thousands of schoolchildren throughout Israel study at *Habad* educational institutions, boys’ and girls’ schools, Yeshivot and women’s seminaries (Morris, 1995; Hartman, 1984). Despite variations in student body, curriculum, matriculation
policy and certification, all of these institutions follow the Habad guidelines and most prepare their students for a future position in the outreach movement. In an official Habad publication detailing educational goals, Habad educators emphasize that the dual purpose of a Habad education is to provide students with facts and information while educating them morally and preparing them for a suitable leadership task upon reaching adulthood (Hartman, 1984). These guidelines appeared to be a central factor in understanding Habad language policy in the education.

Most Habad schools teach English. Schools that do not teach secular studies are mostly populated by veteran Habad families, many of whom had kept Habad tradition alive in communist and pre-communist Russia. The Jerusalem ‘ban’ forbidding the teaching of foreign languages (Spolsky, 1993: 179-192) is cited as the main reason for not teaching English at the Talmud Torah of Kfar Hubad. However, the general Habad ideology relating to language use and study is that except for the study of Modern Israeli Hebrew and Yiddish, there is a generally a negative attitude towards teaching non-Jewish languages and secular subjects to young children. Until the age of nine, attempts are made to avoid teaching languages altogether. After that time, the attitude towards languages is pragmatic. At the Heder and Talmud Torah, English is not taught because of the ‘ban’. Habad elementary and high schools in Israel teach English according to a curriculum that basically follows that of the Israeli Ministry of Education even though certain schools use individual worksheets geared to a lower language level than those of the Ministry. This is also due to the need for culturally suitable texts. Other Haredi schools teaching English use the same teaching materials utilized by secular and State-religious schools: those of Eric Cohen Publications or UPP (University Publishing Projects, Ltd). Some utilize these textbooks together with those produced by the Hinuch Atzmai or Beit Ya’akov network, while a third group uses only the Haredi produced textbooks5.

The Beit Rivka [House of Rivka] Habad girls’ elementary school uses the English curriculum of the Ministry of Education as its guide but produces much of its own teaching material, dealing in part with Habad subjects. Other handouts include reading comprehension material on various topics in print and script. This may be

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5 Hinuch Atzmai/Beit Ya’akov English textbooks include the elementary-school level series of English for Us by Miriam Karelstein. She is the English coordinator of the Beit Ya’akov elementary schools. The high-school level English books are by Batya Rotenberg, Golda Pali, Mindy Alter, Elishava Shub etc.
seen as both an ideological and sectoral choice, as Habad schools prefer their own material, stressing Habad topics, over the material produced by the Khinuch Atzmai which is of a general Haredi nature. The language policy evidencing itself within the Habad educational frameworks appears to work in tandem with Habad language ideology, as expressed in the various speeches and writings of the Habad Rabbis. In that sense it acts as a form of language management, instilling this ideology into the youth of Habad through educational methods and personal example. One sphere in which this becomes evident is the Habad attitude towards non-Jewish languages in general and towards teaching English in particular.

Habad's generally positive attitude towards English teaching stems from its ideological belief and linguistic pragmatism. Ideological belief draws from Habad's traditional attitude towards the sacred tongue, and its relationship to other languages. According to the founder of Habad, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, letters are like stones used in building. But as Hassidic thought believes that the ordinary can become sacred, all language is potentially Hebrew. According to this belief, the sacred tongue Hebrew is the source of all language, and all languages can be elevated to the sacred tongue. This fits the central idea of language and communication in Habad, which is an expression of elevation and transformation – in this case, of a profane language into a sacred one.

To this ideological belief one must add linguistic pragmatism that is connected with Habad's outreach ideology. Outreach has been one of the mainstays of Habad ideology since the reign of the seventh Rabbi, Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (1902–1994). The fervor with which the Habad community adopted the outreach program was expressed in both word and deed, including an acceptance of the fact that language, and particularly English, is an important outreach tool and should be taught in both boys' and girls' schools. Language is to be used as a conduit for shlihat [emissaryhood], bringing the word of Habad to Jews throughout the world. As many young people in Habad are expected to act as emissaries for the movement, the positive attitude towards teaching English – either in high school or in the future – can be understood in this pragmatic framework as well. If the particularistic group fears English study because it serves as a conduit for secular culture, the proselytizing groups promote the study of English, which serves as a conduit to bring Habad culture to the secular Jewish world.
Yet another influential factor in the proselytizing attitude is the attitude of Habad parents and their values. Large numbers of Habad families are themselves the product of Habad proselytizing. These newly religious Habad parents, often the products of secular educational systems, recognize the need to know English even if one remains in the ultra-Orthodox world. This attitude, together with the traditional Habad attitude towards languages as described above, creates a supportive system for the Habad educational frameworks, which teach a certain amount of English to their pupils.

The “Pragmatic” Attitude

The third Haredi attitude evident in Israel towards the teaching of English is the “Pragmatic” one prevalent in most Hassidic (apart from Habad) and Mitnagdic, Ashkenazic and Sefaradic Haredi girls’ schools. Unlike boys, who are barely taught English in elementary school and rarely in high school; girls study English from a young age and even take matriculation style, Szold, exams in English. Some also study it in the upper Seminary grades in order to later teach it in Haredi girls’ schools. Most of the girls’ elementary schools that are either under the umbrella of Khinuch Atzmai or the parallel Shas system use the English curriculum of the Khinuch Atzmai, which differs from that of the Israeli Ministry of Education in matters of form, grade, scope, comprehensiveness, and content (Baumel, 1999).

The reason behind the language policy expressed within this group is a clear indicator of the “pragmatic” attitude of this group. As opposed to the boys, who are groomed for a life of scholarship and, when necessary, will take their place in the workforce by going into in trade or the like, Haredi girls are being trained to support their future scholar husbands. In addition, girls are not required (and in some Hassidic sects, such as Satmar, not allowed) to study the Torah, and can therefore be taught secular studies, including languages, without having to worry about wasting time that should be devoted to religious studies. Girls are therefore not only encouraged to study secular subjects, such as English, that will enhance their position in the workforce, but are also provided with the opportunity to achieve advanced degrees. These include a teaching certificate after passing the Szold examination in high school, or in rare cases, even a matriculation certificate of the Israeli Ministry of Education. Both Gerrer and Mitnagdic families usually send their daughters to Beit Ya’akov
elementary schools, many of which teach a full secular curriculum, including English. These schools often use English textbooks developed by the Beit Ya’akov-Hinuch Atzmai educational system, which are usually very similar to their secular and modern-religious counterparts, including vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and unseen texts, but only those suitable for a Haredi lifestyle. Pictures of boys and girls appear in these textbooks; however, they are dressed appropriately. Following the Ashkenazi-Haredi lead, Sefaradi Haredi girls’ high schools and seminaries place great score in teaching a full English program and preparing the pupils for matriculation-type (Szold) examinations.

The decision to teach girls English has forced Haredi educators to face the problem of its acting as a cultural conduit for the “outside world”. Haredi educators have inculcated these girls with a belief that the study of English is to be regarded as no more than an economic tool for supporting their family and allowing their husband to continue his religious studies. Any cultural interface that takes place at work as a result of their being familiar with a non-Jewish language should be left outside the doorstep of the home, or even the neighborhood. Unlike in the past (Parush, 2001), when Haredi women had acted as agents of secular socialization due to their study of languages, Haredi girls in Israel are now being educated about the dangers of this interface. This ensures that they remain what El-Or (El-Or, 1994) terms “educated and ignorant”, literate (particularly in non-Jewish languages such as English) but inculcated not to use their literacy for anything but the bare economic minimum outside the Haredi world. Using the same logic, one could state that Haredi men could also be inoculated with ideological counteragents to the dominant culture; however, in their case the argument of not wasting time on other subjects that should be spent upon studying the Torah takes priority, negating the need to find a rationale for language study, as is done in the case of girls’ education.

Just as a surrounding community can either be an agent of tradition or a “bad” outside influence (Rosenack, 1999: 155-172), educational frameworks can either act as reinforcements of cultural or linguistic tradition or introduce dangerous foreign elements into the lives of the young pupils. In the Haredi world educators are faced with dilemma. While wishing to act as agents of tradition, providing girls with the same type of basic circumscribed religious education that their foremothers received, they are aware of the need to diversify linguistically in order to assure the girls’ future employment. Consequently, they must teach foreign elements, such as English, for
pragmatic reasons. In order to solve the cultural dilemma of doing what Haredi society considers forbidden, they emphasize that these tools are to be used solely in order to reinforce what they project as traditional Haredi roles (women as breadwinners, supporting scholarhusbands). Yet in fact, these are roles which were never anchored in the broader or normative Jewish tradition but are a modern, post-World War II social construction.

**Imparting Jewish Values and Culture**

The religious control over the education and culture sector was so strong that even the state machinery that was under the control of the secular Zionists showed great deal of influence. Initially the task of running the Hebrew teaching programmes to the new immigrants was under the ministry of immigration and absorption (Fischler 1987: 136) and the *Ulpans* showed great Jewish religious content. The *Ulpans* has been unique in its emphasis on teaching the Hebrew language in its cultural context. It was perceived as an institution where the Hebrew language should be taught together with cultural values, together with Jewish heritage. Despite the fact that in various documents the *Ulpans* is defined as “highly intensive institution for learning the language” (Weinberg, 1993:73), its founders and initiators did not perceive it as merely “a school for language,” but rather as an institution where the everyday functional language is taught as part of a religious, cultural, social and historical complex (Polani, Weinberg, Rivlin 1994:8). The objective of the *Ulpans* is to create a sense of ‘heritage’, of Jewish continuity; and the belief that creating a sense of heritage is feasible if Judaism, Jews and the Land of Israel becomes a regular and integral feature of the education programme.

The very term coined to teach in the *Ulpans* is “LeHanchil” which means to impart or inculcate. Berl Katzenelson who coined this term saw in it the utmost achievement of the new Hebrew culture. (Kirmayer, Paul et.al. 1999:84) (Adult Education in Israel V, Israel Ministry of Education, Jerusalem. Adult Education Division). For him Hebrew was not merely a means of communication but a key to spiritual possessions of the nation, the very gate to the Jewish cultural treasures of all generations (Weinberg 1992: 23). Through Hebrew cultural values were imparted to facilitate the integration into the Israeli society (Weinberg 1992:73). Values mean the development of the ability to appreciate and evaluate problems and be a good-citizen.

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Pointing out the objectives of Ulpan Shlomo Kodesh says, apart from other things, is to bring the students of the Ulpan closer to the land of Israel and to create in them a sense of pride and emotional belonging to the land of their fathers; to infiltrate their souls with the eternal values of the Bible which is our certificate of ownership of the land of Israel; to motivate them to be a part of the forming Israeli society...; to change their distorted attitudes regarding military service, physical labor as a profession, agricultural work, attitude which originated from Diaspora life and which left their mark on the Jews...; to enhance their total identification with the state of Israel to the extent of giving their life for its existence. These values are acquired by learning the Bible, Talmud, Hebrew and Jewish history and literature. Textbooks and curricula reflected this philosophy.

The subjects of the curricula included things essentially Jewish at all the levels of education. This remained unchanged in all the curricula. It contained topics like kibbutz, moshav, Jerusalem, holidays and memorial days etc. In the primary Ulpanim curriculum of 1993 two of the twelve areas of functioning included Media and Civil Studies like Knesset etc. Other topics include “The Land and the Culture” which covers areas like flag, national anthem, immigration and ethnic groups, the different forms of agricultural settlement, Jerusalem, Jewish figures, chapters in Jewish history etc. These are clearly “content” areas rather than functional areas. Apart from this there is a chapter entitled “The World of Judaism” which includes subjects such as Hebrew calendar, the Jewish life cycle and the Jewish bookcase and these subjects are an integral part of the education programme of each class.

This continues in the higher levels of the Ulpanim. In the secondary Ulpanim level the contents are aimed at producing in the students an affinity to the country and its culture and expose the student to classic Hebrew to enable them to read and understand Jewish sources in the original and enjoy them. With this aim the curriculum includes three sections: language, the Jewish heritage subjects such as Jewish history and Zionism, Judaism and geography, and the third is Israeli society. One half the lessons should be allotted to the Jewish heritage subjects. Even the examinations had questions full of content elements like: “What are the boundaries of the land according to God’s promise to Abraham?”; “What does the Law of Return say?” “Write the name of the month in which each of the Jewish Holidays occurs?” etc.
The main linguistic objective of the Ulpan today is to enable the learner to acquire linguistic survival skills which translate into the five language skills: speaking the language, comprehending it, reading and writing, and understanding a televised text.

Teaching the Bible as a Common Culture

The teaching of Bible in the Israeli public school with a secular curriculum defines the study of the Bible as a prime agent of Zionist acculturation. This definition, however, was challenged by many who perceived it as an important component in defining Jewish religious identity and not the secular and political identity which Zionism ought to preach. The new immigrants experience in the Diaspora of Biblical teachings reflected itself in some form of reservation and criticism. At the same time there were others who adopted the new interpretation.

The secular and Zionist attitude towards Bible was one of liberal accommodation and tolerance. It viewed the Hebrew Bible as a masterful literary creation and powerful “national epic,” rather than as a binding religious text. They considered Bible as the first chapter in the biography of the Jewish people. This was how the Zionist narrative defined it. This approach was “translated” to curricular content by teachers in secular schools and accepted by their students. It also characterized Israel’s first nation-wide curriculum drawn up in 1954-1955.

Hebrew bible remained a reference point throughout Jewish history and particularly during Diaspora. This continued to be so in Israel. It secured a place for itself though it triggered a debate amongst different section of the society regarding its interpretation and approach. Nevertheless it was incorporated into the education curriculum as it aids in forming a collective national identity. Significance of education in the process of nation building has been widely recognized. It reinforces the beliefs the nation holds in common and instills historical memories. (Smith, 1991: 99-122) Eugene Weber has said the same about France, where the Third Republic established a secular primary education system, one of whose goals was to inculcate mass culture, so much so that Eric Hobsbawm has claimed that the French educational system actually invented tradition. (Hobsbawm, 1983: 88-94) In the United States, the daily ritual of saluting the flag illustrates one way in which the school attempted to create the national unity that was especially important in a country of mass

In Israel, too, education has a functionist role. The school system played a crucial role. The centralized educational system ensured a common approach adopted for studying the Bible. The preface to the curriculum adopted in 1954-1955 states that its objective was “to mold a specific character in graduates of elementary schools that corresponded to the highest aspirations and ideals of the state.” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1955) Achieving uniformity between the educational system and public discourse, between the values of the society and the avowed ideology of the Israeli school was very much at the core. In the words of Anita Shapiro, the Bible was “the primary text for shaping identity in the Jewish society that was then coming into being in Eretz Israel, (Shapira 2006: 1) turning the study of the Bible into a prime agent of Zionist acculturation.” However, the dominance of Bible as Zionist narrative was partially undermined by the fact that there are different views of Judaism. Israeli public schools are organized along distinct religious or secular lines, wholly separate school systems, where curriculum and orientations differ.

The Covenant – the Cultural Essence

Jewish studies was assigned an important place in the curriculum, beginning with the Bible. The Bible embodied the essence of Zionist ideology. It was only from the period of the Enlightenment, toward the end of the eighteenth century, that the Bible attracted renewed interest; not only the Torah, but the Prophets and Writings, too, were given attention. (Amit 2002: 241-242)

Non-religious Zionist educators began treating the Bible as a text that provides evidence for the historic existence of the Jews as a people, whose origins are ancient, and whose claim to the territory known as “the Land of Israel” was unimpeachable. Such thinking was the common denominator underlying Zionist ideology during the period of the Yishuv, which rested on the writings of people like Ahad Ha’am and other (non-religious) Zionists. As opposed to the millennial tradition that viewed the Torah as a religious document and the covenant it established as one between a people
and its God, the biblical covenant was now defined as one between nation, land, and culture.

Torah, Prophets and Writings together became a primary source attesting to the ages-old continuity of a nation with historical and cultural roots. It provided evidence of the nation's constant possession of Eretz Israel, the land of its forefathers, and of Jewish attachment to it. Religious Jews relied on the Bible as a source of faith, while the Zionist ideology, valued it for the historical testimony it bore. Thus the Bible was a common reference point for both the religious as well as secular Zionists. The texts and their accessibility (through print) help lay the foundations on which communities and individuals build to perceive themselves as part of a national unit (Anderson, 1991).

The Bible created a framework of laws and symbols that were held in common by Jews scattered throughout distant countries. At the center of this cultural framework stood Eretz Israel, the ancient homeland of the Patriarchs that all Jews revered. The Bible extensively speaks of the Patriarchs, the founders of the nation. In Israel its study meant historical continuity and therefore it was the central component in the Israeli curriculum.

A Memorandum written by the Director General of the Ministry of Education shows that in 1957, it was decided to waive the study of history in fifth grade. Historical material, it was explained, was acquired in Bible lessons. In the Zionist narrative, the Bible laid the foundations of the culture of the Jews as a people. The ancient Hebrew texts were defined as a first link in the story of the nation. Zionist thinking even co-opted traditional Jewish interpretations of the Bible developed over the centuries, making it part and parcel of the cultural legacy that shaped the nation.

The objectives of Bible study were historical, national, literary, linguistic and esthetic. The creators of the Israeli educational system put it as follows: "To inculcate in children the literary-esthetic values of the Bible...to instill in their hearts the original beauty of recitation, style and language, which had once been the natural spoken tongue of our nation in our land, until it affects their own spoken [Hebrew] speech." Teachers were told: "To instill in children the basic values of Judaism, as expressed in commandments and laws, in the good deeds of the patriarchs of the nation, its prophets, heroes and others..." (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1955: 15).
The Bible as an Agent of Acculturation

Bible studies as a part of the official State curriculum was meant to inculcate a body of knowledge and a specific outlook. Compulsory education offered by the State to all its citizens saw as its principal aim the molding of a collective identity, achieved through instruction in commonly held beliefs and historical memories. The Israeli society is made up of different groups and sub-groups. The issue is all the more complex and knotty when it comes to deciding which values to transmit. The Israeli state school system attempted to create a national consciousness and achieve an internalization of Zionist values by establishing a nation wide curriculum, which, it was hoped, would be recognized by all as having the power to mold the thinking of future generations. This last was especially important considering the role assigned the educational system in the absorption of mass immigration.

Furthermore, unlike other societies, the teachers in Israel were new immigrants. In most educational systems, teachers are themselves usually products of the educational system, who then teach the next generation of pupils. The teachers successfully served as the state representative and just like France were successful in creating a national consciousness by insisting on broad common cultural denominators (Eugene, 1976: 125-157). In the first and second decade of the State of Israel, teachers were the most concrete representatives of the establishment as it absorbed newcomers, socializing agents par excellence entrusted with achieving the sought-after Israeli social ethos, which they also actively fostered through personal example.

The Bible in the Israeli Public School

The Bible enjoyed a high status the in Israeli public school culture. This was the reason that the number of hours devoted to Bible was great: up to 16%, of all teaching hours in the public schools. Even this was sometimes insufficient to cover the required material, and teachers sometimes “stole” additional hours from other subjects to add to the many already allotted. The Pedagogical Secretariat of the Education Ministry was aware of this problem, and in 1962, it proposed an easier curriculum covering fewer chapters than the original one had demanded.
Another reason that Bible was taught enthusiastically was its universal appeal, especially in its Zionist guise. Teachers who had immigrated to pre-State Palestine seem to have no reticence about teaching the Bible as a national epic. For the ideologically motivated “the Bible taught the love of the homeland, and, as such, it was an important subject for immigrant pupils. The general approach to Bible of the immigrants from the traditional society was as a religious text. This approach was also taken by secular groups of teachers. New immigrant pupils from Morocco and Iraq, even in the secular schools, donned a kipa (skull cap) during Bible classes, whereas native-born Sabras would never have thought of doing this. The donning of kipa in Bible classes became a common culture even in secular schools. Many products of such schools who later became teachers would put on kipa in Bible classes. They limited this practice to Bible lessons, making its unspoken religious significance stand out. The head-covering retained the sense that the Bible was a “holy scripture,” especially for children reared in traditional, if not strictly religious, homes. The case of educators teaching the Bible in the spirit of the Zionist narrative to kipa-wearing immigrant pupils in a secular school is a classic example of acculturation.

Ritual Aspects

This new curriculum had its roots in a decision taken by Prime Minister David Ben Gurion. Which stated that: “In elementary schools, high schools and schools of higher education, the government will implement a program to deepen Jewish consciousness among Israeli youth.” (Basic Principles of the Government, section 44, November 1956). Shortly afterward, Ben Gurion asked the Education Minister, Zalman Aranne, to implement the policy (Yanni, 1996: 30). It is true that David Ben Gurion’s contemporaries who aspired to become “new Jews” (though Ben Gurion himself never used this term) rebelled against the religious and rabbinic establishment. However, Jewish traditions remained inscribed in their personal biographies, and they were somewhat ill at ease with those Sabras who viewed religion and halachah (religious law) as arcane, reminding them essentially of the near past and to which they could associate with through the yellowing pictures of their parents. Zalman Aranne, though younger than Ben Gurion, shared the latter’s concerns, and, accordingly, in the summer of 1956, Aranne directed the Director General of the
Ministry of Education, Moshe Avidor, to set about instituting a committee to “enhance Jewish consciousness”.

Headed by Avraham Arnon, this committee was composed of members drawn from the educational establishment, politics, academia, religious education, and various cultural groups, a diversity which suggests that Jewish studies (as opposed to other subjects in the curriculum) were not perceived as the responsibility of the formal educational system. A three-part program was drafted: the development of a broad historical consciousness, the search for affinity with the Diaspora, and an increase in practical and scholarly knowledge of Judaism and its legacy. This last included the Bible and its content.

Yet it was not until June 1959 that Aranne introduced the program in the Knesset. The discussion that ensued reflected the various approaches then held by the Israeli public toward Judaism. Somewhat emotionally Aranne said: “We have come to wrestle with the clerics, [yet also] to honor religion and adopt tradition”, “To wrestle with the clerics - because according to my view, religious coercion is as vulgar and rude as is anti-religious coercion. To respect religion - because pure religious faith causes the individual to become transcendent; to adopt Jewish tradition, which combines the foundation of religion with the foundation of the nation - because this tradition embodies mysterious glory, a glory that does not become old, and there is transcendency in the [transmission of this tradition] from generation to generation” (Arenne, Proceedings of the Knesset, pamphlet 30, 1960: 2183).

Most of his own party accepted Aranne’s outlook. He also received support from Knesset members in other parties, including the Progressives, the General Zionists, and some from Herut. Knesset members from the religious parties objected vehemently to this modern, “nationalistic” interpretation of Judaism. The ultra-Orthodox Agudath Israel party saw the Jewish Consciousness Project as an affirmation of the failure of secular Zionism’s raison d’Etre. One of the party’s members, MK Yaakov Katz, explained this supposed failure by saying: “We turn to the Education Ministry and to those who have started to develop the Jewish Consciousness plan with the request that if you now understand that we must instill Jewish awareness into the hearts of our children ...then we must inculcate all the values of the Jewish people! Do not take halfway measures; do not sit on the fence! If you believe in God, then follow Him. That is what we demand. It is our right to demand, from ourselves and others to return to God”. Mainstream religious Zionism,
as embodied by the National Religious Party, then at odds with the ultra-Orthodox, suggested a compromise: “We can achieve our goals only with through fundamental education in Torah and commandments” (Zameret, 1959: 66).

The leading representative of the Workers Party, Yaakov Banai, claimed, “We will not teach Jewish consciousness through instruction in prayers and commandments! We will do this by actualizing moral values and Jewish humanistic culture” (Banai, 1957: 1-6). The heated discussion was not just a publicity ploy. Meetings of teachers and their supervisors debated the issue extensively. However, following the lead of Zalman Aranne and others in his party, the new program continued the policy of studying Bible as a national epic, albeit a number of curricular changes were made. Additional chapters from the Torah (Pentateuch) were added to the syllabus at the expense of those from the Prophets, and new units were added that included, for the first time, parts of Rashi’s commentary on the Torah.

The new material concerned Jewish festivals, which were to be studied close to the time of their celebration, in order to emphasize their religious aspects. The school calendar had always been synchronized with the Jewish one, as is normal in many countries, but now the religious and ritual aspects of the holiday dimmed somewhat the luster of the values the Zionist narrative had once assigned to the festivals. The same applied to the Sabbath. The formal curriculum of 1954-1955 emphasized the social aspects of the Sabbath and tried to view the religious laws of the day in terms of social justice, with the emphasis placed on the commandments between “man and man.” In the kibbutzim, this idea even received ritual expression.

Music and Jewish Culture

Music has been very intrinsically connected with Jewish culture. Music remained the mode of expression for good and bad times and this was a part of Jewish experience in most part of their history in Diaspora. Generally Jews have tried to seek refuge in music in tough and difficult times. The pioneers of the Israel had tough times executing their mission in the land of Israel and they turned to music at the end of long and hard day. Songs in Hebrew, laden with religious and Zionist themes like the land, its beauty, Jerusalem etc. and its place in the hearts of those singing them provided an escape from the hard reality. This music accompanied their singing, their dancing and even their dreams. Some where, it was building up an identity and
fostering a sense of belonging to Jewish culture and the larger Jewish enterprise. “Eretz Yisrael is not only another piece of land, it is not just a place to live. Above all, Eretz Yisrael is value; it is holy. Any conscientious Jew aware of his roots will never be able to treat Eretz Yisrael as a commodity... And just as there is a single Eretz Yisrael, there is only one nation of Israel (Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, FBIS-NES, 14 July 1992; Connor, 2005: 64).

But here again, the divide in the society was reflected in the Hebrew music too. The European immigrants had western influence on their music which did not confirm to the acetic values of the Sephardic descent. Despite the saying “One People, One Torah”, the prayers in the synagogues are sung in the styles and variations that have been passed through the generation in different parts of the Diaspora. Nusimovici points out that all of the great composers, through out ages, have drawn inspiration from the Book of Books: from classical and romantic composer - J.S. Bach, W.A. Mozart, J. Hayden, L.V. Beethoven, F. Schubert, F. Mendelssohn, J. Brahams, upto and including Frank and Kodally, the modern composers. Some of the most famous musical compositions are Hayden’s “The Creation”, Mendelssohn’s “Elijah”, Rossini’s “Moses” and Saint-Saén’s “Samson and Delilah”. Similarly Jewish figures, not from the Bible, too inspired many music composers in their works like F. Handel’s “Judas Maccabaeus.”

Many of the Jewish songs and folklores are quite emotive and are sung during religious and cultural occasions. It refreshes the memories of the Jews of their history. Israel Nejara, a mystic from the descendants of the Jews expelled from Spain composed several Sabbath songs which are still popular today. Shalom Sababazi from Yemen contributed immensely to the Siddur prayer book.

A major contribution to the Hebrew music is by the Hasidic movement established by Israel Baal Shem Tov in Ukraine in the eighteenth century. This movement drew the Jews into worshiping through happiness, songs and dance and soon became very popular in Europe. They took Sabbath meal together wearing white, singing, eating and even drinking. Sadness was seen as a sin, to be warded off with their songs and melodies.

The Klezmorim (Musicians of Hassidic music) hold a very special place in the history of Jewish music. In the eighteenth century itself they were the first professional troupes of music in Prague who played only Jewish music. In the twentieth century, with the Zionist movement Jewish musicians combined their
efforts in the building of the new state with their musical activities. They systematically collected Jewish tunes and melodies, old and new and consciously composed music that was thematically as close as it could be to what was considered “the spirit of the new land.”

Culture and Conflict: The Silver Lining

Despite the dominance of religious elements in Israel’s socio-political culture, the secular’s efforts to ensure a prominent space for them continued. A prominent figure was Ahad Ha-’Am. His central goal was to prove that Jew could be a Jew according to national sentiment, without his Judaism being dependent on faith and religious worship and that this Judaism could be exposed to and absorb western culture. This departure from the traditional thinking kept the secular and the religious going operating in their own sphere.

The religiously observant Jews, who subscribe to a religio-political culture represent roughly about 20 percent of the Jewish population. The radical secular population, representing about 10 percent of the Jewish population define themselves as totally nonobservant religiously and favour not only separation or religion and state but the dejudaization of the state. They are sometimes referred to as post-Zionists. Then, there is the vast majority of the Jewish population, who are somewhat observant of religious custom and who continue to favour a Zionist Jewish-state. They are the traditional Jews and the future culture of Israel depends a lot on them as they are gradually taking on the center stage in political assertion.

Judaism and Jewishness

The cultural understanding of all these divide vary and that too for obvious reasons. Traditionally Jews derived their identity and culture from Judaism – the religion. English distinguishes rather neatly between Judaism and Jewishness. The former relates to the Jewish religion with its theological doctrines and prescribed practices; the latter describes culture, ethnicity, and a historical sense of belonging to the Jewish people. English speakers have no trouble in speaking of Jewishness as a personal or communal sense of identity that does not necessarily entail Judaism in its spiritual sense. It is strange to note that Hebrew language itself doesn’t make any such
distinction. “One can speak of Yahadut, which is normally rendered into English simply as “Judaism”. One can construct indeterminate adverbial phrases such as betzura Yehudit (“in a Jewish way”). But one cannot-not without resorting to ungainly neologisms such as Yehudiyut – capture the meaning of “Jewishness” in its straightforward English sense. Hebrew compels the modern speaker wishing to differentiate between Jewish life as culture and Jewish life as religion to invent convoluted, unfamiliar linguistic forms” (Liebman and Susser, 1988: 15).

The ambiguity of nuance of the two terms in Hebrew is due to the self understanding of the Jewish civilization for two millennia and more. It reflects the undetachibility of the Jewish religion from Jewish culture prior to the Enlightenment and Emancipation. Hebrew accurately reflects the Jewish status quo where Jewishness and Judaism is in fact, much the same thing. Contemporary Israelis, who wish to convey the idea of Jewishness that is not religious in character, are, therefore, linguistically challenged by the weight of an uncomprehending past. The task of conceptualizing ethno-cultural Jewishness in modern Israel begins with a telltale linguistic handicap.

The religious and the secular Jewish population of Israeli societies is often presented as if they glare at each other across an unbridgeable cultural chasm. Israel is portrayed as a country riven into two camps, religious and antireligious, with distinct and incompatible worlds of moral axioms, ideological imperatives, and life patterns. The only question that appears to remain unresolved is whether coexistence and conciliation are possible or, for that matter, even desirable. Secular and religious Israel represents two irreconcilable cultures, and all the warmed-over pieties about Jewish unity cannot put them back together again. One mordant secular polemicist reminded the religious that there is a biblical precedent for dividing the land in two (Judea and Israel) and proposed that the religious take Jerusalem-where they can sacrifice animals and fight Palestinians-and allow the secular to have Tel Aviv, where they can enjoy the beach and pursue the peace process.

Jewishness, is not simply a form of Judaism; it focuses its concerns on history, culture, and ethnicity rather than upon religion per se. Jewishness, therefore, connotes a secular identity, even though many of its sources and practices may overlap with those of Judaism. Wanting to preserve powerful and immediate ties to the Jewish people and to Jewish history, many Jews turn to the Jewish heritage, to the practices contained in the Jewish religious tradition, and adopt them as their own. In this way,
religion is transmuted into folkways, theology into cohesiveness-enhancing family observances, and Orthodox devotion into communal solidarity. Secular Jews of this kind share a great deal with those conventionally spoken of as religious in terms of both practices and collective commitments to Jewish continuity.

At its heart, the religio-political culture is driven by the belief that halakha (Jewish law) is divine and eternal, that it ought to pervade all aspects of public as well as private life, that learned rabbis are the arbiters of this system, and, by extension, that the rabbis—in an ideal world, at least ought to be the ultimate authorities in all significant private and public concerns. Of all the communities, it is by far the most self-enclosed.

At the other pole, secular Israeli culture tends to be indifferent to Jewish tradition. Conventionally described as postmodern (in the consumerist, permissive, individualist sense), this cultural community is Western before it is Jewish. In its more radical forms, secularism evinces deep hostility to the religious community, scorn for religious practice, and a dismissive attitude toward religious belief.

Among the secular, the radical ones “post-Zionists” are considered as anti-traditional and reject the idea of a Jewish state. The postmodernism entails a deliberate effort to dissociate Israel from Judaism, the Jewish people, and the Jewish past. The moderate seculars are merely concerned with creature comforts and private needs and whose ties to Jewishness can take many forms, ranging from the indifferent to the warmly traditional. For the radicals, democratic pluralism is the banner under which Israeli society is to be dejudiaized, that is, liberated from the constraints of Jewish tradition in general and from Zionism-centered Jewish nationalism in particular. Amos Elon, for example, concedes that:

“... Zionism was useful during the formative years. Today, it has become redundant. There is a need to move ahead to a more Western, more pluralistic, less ideological form of patriotism and citizenship. One looks with envy at the United States, where patriotism is centered on the Constitution; naturalization is conferred by a judge in a court of law; identity is defined politically and is based on law, not on history, culture, race, religion, nationality or language” (Elon, 1996: 27-28).

Gideon Samet, another prominent exponent of this position, believes that postmodern lifestyles are the irrepresible wave of the future. “It is possible”, he believes “that Israelis are getting rid of that old concerns about clarifying national identity” and have “moved from nationalist slogans to simple individualism”. Young
people, Samet believes, are turning to "Madonna and Big Mac" as part of a worldwide revolution in styles of cultural consumption and leisure activity. This universal pursuit of "popular music, movies, trips abroad, dress, even modes of speech" is taking the place of antiquated anxieties about national character and values (Samet, Haaretz, 28 July 1995).

Each of the two cultures relies upon the other to sustain its own sense of righteousness and its conviction that it occupies the moral high ground. For the seculars, the religious are portrayed as primitive. Visions of *haredi* assaulting policemen who try to keep the roads open on the Sabbath become the prototypical representation of religiosity in action. For the religious, scenes of homosexual exhibitionism or of young people with tattoos and nose rings, glassy-eyed on drugs and alcohol, constitute the preferred cautionary tale. Both sides present themselves as an alternative to the medievalism or decadence of the other.

Between these two extreme lies the majority of traditional Israelis that comprises almost 70 percent of the Israeli Jewish population. Jewishness is fundamental to their identity perceptions, and the idea of disengaging Israel from the Jewish people and its history is, for them, unthinkable. Many of them define themselves as secular. But they are traditional in the sense of being effectively and communally bound to the Jewish tradition while lacking either the theological intent or the legal rigor that is conventionally associated with religiosity in Israel's dominating Orthodox Jewish context. Terms like "civil religion" and "folk religion" are alternate designations to characterize this form of Jewish identity and practice.

For the religious, non-halakhic Jewishness has no religious significance whatever and its practitioners must be counted as betrayers of Judaism and as allies of the secular enemy. Traditionalism is, at best, only misguided attraction; at worst, it is a fraudulent and cynical exploitation of religious practices for alien purposes.

For the radical secularists, traditionalists cannot be counted upon in the coming showdown with the religious world. If they have mezuzahs on their doors which 96 percent of Israeli Jews do, Tom Segev declares, they cannot be considered real secularists, and "without enough real Israeli secularists, there is no hope of halting the influence of the religious." (Segev, 25 September, 1996)

Notwithstanding the desire to deny its reality, traditionalism patently exists as a form of Jewishness apart. Although it is disdained and dismissed by both religious and radical secular elites, traditionalism constitutes the dominant form of Jewishness
in contemporary Israel. It is here, in the evolving and distinct forms of traditionalist Jewish culture, that the future of Israel as a Jewish state will be determined. Traditionalism, by contrast, is soft, malleable, and possessed of many uncommitted resources— a source of potential surprise. Given its folk-religious, practice-centered, inarticulate character, it rarely justifies itself in principled, creative, or rebellious terms. There are no traditionalist manifestos, no traditionalist intellectuals, no traditionalist political parties. Neither is it ideologically outspoken or, indeed, even determinate on the right-left continuum as are religiosity and secularism. As widespread as traditional Jewishness may be, it tends to elude the ready categories of the analysts. It does not present itself as an alternative to Judaism in its dominant Orthodox mode. It does not distinguish itself in the Israeli public sphere by assaulting or even disparaging the regnant religious establishment. Since tradition is their focus, its practitioners have little desire to break ranks with tradition and create a new form of Judaism, such as that created by Conservative and Reform Judaism. For example, life-cycle events are overwhelmingly organized within the Jewish context. A survey of the attitudes, behavior, and beliefs of Israeli Jews, undertaken by the Guttman Institute, (Liebman, and Katz, 1997) reported 92 percent observing circumcision, 83 percent bar mitzvah, 87 percent marriage, and 90 percent mourning rites in a traditionally Jewish fashion. Seasonal rhythms, vacations from work and school, public and private celebrations and memorials, media programming, and so on are determined by the contours of the Jewish calendar. Kashrut is recast into a kind of normative national cuisine (two-thirds of Israelis report bringing only kosher food into their homes, while half keep separate utensils for meat and milk). Passover Seders, candle lighting on Hanukkah, Purim celebrations, and so forth are so overwhelmingly widespread that even those who think of themselves as entirely secular are likely to observe them in one form or another. Street names celebrating Jewish personalities or recalling the Jewish historical and religious heritage are omnipresent.

Traditional behavior is a conscious commitment to the continuity of the Jewish people. It is the intent of an ethnically loyal Jew rather than of a pious and devout one. Traditional Jews seek to communicate and consolidate cultural identities. They understand themselves as participating in a patterned form of observances that is not halakhic but observances that they have transformed into the folkways of a Jewish civilization. For them, halakha is not relevant, or at least not decisive, in determining
their ideological postures and policy preferences. Much like their casual bearing toward halakhic Judaism, they relate decorously to rabbinical opinions regarding politics but do not see them as obligatory or authoritative. Traditionalism, in a word, possesses the variable character of popular, ethno-cultural folkways that derive from religious sources; often utilizes religious symbols, practices, and language and yet is fundamentally not a religious phenomenon. It is, rather, a form of national self-identification expressed through the immemorial language of the Jewish tradition.

Traditionalism exists, but in an era of globalization and the intrusive Western mode, post-Zionist pressures, and, perhaps, the coming of peace in West Asia, Israel is witnessing an increasingly westernized younger generation. With these pressures the Jewish character of the state of Israel is surely fated to wear thinner and thinner in coming years. There is evident from the Guttman Report itself, regarding a gradual dissolution of the traditionalist population.

**Judaism and the Arab Population**

Despite the dominant Jewish culture in Israel which the Arab population find difficult to identify with, there is silver lining to it. The Jewish majority and Arab minority are pluralistic cultures largely perceived in Israel and abroad as dichotomous cultural groups (Auni-Segre, 1994; Kalekin-Fishman, 1994; Seliktar, 1994). They are typically distinguished from one another on the basis of religion. However, the Jewish-Islamic division does not create a true dichotomy of beliefs because many similarities exist in the two religions (Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2003; Peters, 1982). Each religion shares a historic tie with Christianity, and because of this, the three religions share many important underlying values and beliefs. For example, the monotheistic concept Allah and God are very much the same, and Moses and Abraham are prophets in all three religions. In addition, considerable variability in religious practice exists within each group. The Jews range from the ultra orthodox to the secular and, the Arabs too have great variability in Muslim religious observation. Furthermore, not all Israeli Arabs are Muslims; 10 percent are Christian and another 10 percent Druze or Bedouin (Barakat, 1993; Central Bureau of Statistics, 1999).

Language is another cultural component playing a role in this received Jewish-Arab dichotomy, even though Hebrew and Arabic share the same Semitic origins. Some authors write of the “Hebraization” of Jewish immigrants in which the Hebrew
language is promoted as a major source of identity and as a major cultural boundary maker (Ben-Rafael, 1994). Similarly, the local Palestinian Arabic vernacular is a source of Palestinian identity, as is the fact that Arab schools employ modern literary Arabic (Ben-Rafael, 1994). Having said this, language usage in Israel is anything but dichotomous. Hebrew is spoken by all Israeli citizens, whether Jewish or Arab, and Arabic is the first language of over 40 percent of the Jewish population.

Most Jews and Arabs educated in Israel speak more than two languages, Hebrew or Arabic as their first language and English or French as second or third language (Al-Haj, 1995; Hertz-Lazorowitz, 1988). Many individuals in both groups speak the language of the other group. However, Hebrew, as the dominant groups’ language, is more widely spoken by the Arabs within and outside of Israel than Arabic is spoken by the Jews (Hofman, 1988).

Other cultural differences that contribute to a sense of Arab-Jewish dichotomy include the Jews’ greater individualism, their use of low-context speech, their sense of monochromatic time, and their lower power distance, as compared to the Arab’s greater collectivism, their use of high-context speech, their sense of polychromatic time, and their high power distance (Feghali, 1997; Hofstede, 1980). However, these differences can be overemphasized; although they may hinder communication and lead to negative stereotyping, considerable variability exists within each group, and there is appreciable overlap between the groups on these dimensions. Some elite members of each group are comfortable with both of these sets of cultural syndromes due to the spatial proximity and high levels of inter-group contact among them.

Group differences have been overdrawn in other ways. Much of the Jewish research on the Arabs in general, and the Palestinians in particular, has perpetuated stereotypes and ignored intra-group variability in the service of blaming Arab-Jewish conflicts on the alleged psychological shortcomings of the Arabs (Barakat, 1993; Beit-Hallahmi, 1994). Similarly, until recently, Jewish sociologists have tended to interpret information about Arabs and the conflict in ways that support the Zionist aims of the state (Kimmerling, 1992).

**Changing Cultural Attitude**

Differences in lifestyle and economic stratification between the Israeli Jews and Arabs add to the perception of a cultural dichotomy, with the “fellaheen” or rural
peasant being a symbol and metaphor for Palestinian nationalism in opposition to the image of the urban Jew (Swedengerg, 1994). Class and ethnicity are so intertwined in Israel that it is difficult to separate them, resulting in a stratified society where the upper and middle classes are predominantly Jewish and the working and lower classes are primarily Arabs (Handelman, 1994; Smooha 1987). However, in recent years, increases in the levels of education and income among Israeli Arabs have been notable (Ghanem, 2001).

The Arab-Jewish differences is often presented as an ethnic dichotomy despite the obvious fact that the lines between them cannot be clearly drawn (Auni-Segre, 1994; Kalekin-Fishman, 1994; Seliktar, 1994). The majority of the Jewish population consists of Sephardic Jews who have come from Asian and African countries. Thus, the alleged Arab-Occidental ethnic division is a fiction.

However, ethnic identities are strongly linked to the ethnocentrism that plays such an important role in Israel and in Arab-Jewish conflict. Social survey data demonstrate mistrust, mutual rejection, and widespread stereotyping of the out-group by both Jews and Arabs (Smooha, 1987). Many Jews stereotype Arabs as primitive, violent, and lazy, whereas Arabs tend to stereotype Jews as racist, exploitative, and insensitive to self-respect and family honour (Smooha, 1987). Some authors have argued that the essence of Jewish ethnocentrism lies in their reluctance to have contact with Arabs and an unwillingness to extend equal rights to Arabs (Auni-Segre, 1994; Smooha, 1987).

The notion of primal ownership – that only the members of my people have a ‘true right’ to be here – is characterized by a mindset that perceives privileged status for the homeland people as a self evident right. An example of this mindset was dramatically demonstrated by two polls conducted within Israel during 1980. In one of the polls Jewish respondents were asked whether they favoured or opposed equal treatment for Arabs: 72.3 percent opposed equal admission to universities, 69.2 percent equal admission to private work places, 74.2 percent opposed equal admission to public work places, 73.5 percent opposed equal housing assistance to large families, 68.1 percent opposed equal social security allowances and 85.9 percent opposed equal opportunity for senior posts in government offices. In the second poll 89.2 percent of Jewish respondents opposed allocation of lands and funds to establish new Arab towns, 75.2 percent opposed enactment of a punitive law against discrimination of Arabs in jobs, housing assistance etc; 97.2 percent opposed
modifying state symbols (such as flag and national anthem) so that Arabs could identify with them. By contrast only 26.9 percent opposed a law denying Arabs the right to hold demonstrations, only 18.1 percent opposed restrictions on Arabs to prevent their becoming a majority, only 18.9 percent opposed seeking and using any opportunity to encourage Arabs to leave and only 15.8 percent of the Jewish community favoured equal treatment of Arabs and Jews, while 67.6 percent felt Israel should considerably favour Jews and 16.3 percent felt Israel should favour Jews to some extent (Smooha, 1987; Connor, 2005:64).

In addition, Ashkenazi Jews are treated more positively in the state of Israel than Sephardic Jews (Kalekin-Fishman, 1994). Called the conflict between the first and the second Israel, it is manifested in socioeconomic differences that favour the Ashkenazi minority. It is also exemplified by Ashkenazi discrimination against and negative stereotyping of the Sephardic majority (Schwartz et al., 1991). It is further exemplified in the more positive reception given to Russian immigrants than to Ethiopian immigrants to Israel, although some of this difference is related to the contrasting skill levels these groups brought into the Israeli labour force (Auni-Segre, 1994; Seliktar, 1994).

Despite obvious racial prejudice and discrimination faced by the Sephardic Jews, the effect of skin color or social relations in the Jewish community is considered to be a "non-subject" among social scientists (Kalekin-Fishman, 1994). Socioeconomic differences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews were for many years interpreted using funcionalist theory to argue that people from peasant societies have social and personality characteristics that make it difficult for them to adapt and assimilate to new cultures, particularly in urban communities (Kalekin-Fishman, 1994). It has even been the case that academic writing using competing theories like conflict theory was deemed "appropriate only to societies elsewhere" and was not even translated into Hebrew or Arabic (Kalekin-Fishman, 1994: 189). However, in the last two decades, critical approaches to the first and second Israel and the Arab-Jewish conflict, as well as an Arab sociology have emerged (Rosenhek, 1998).

**Conclusion**

It is difficult to comprehend Jewish life without religion. The notion of the 'chosen people' and the covenant with God are the elements of religious belief. Zionism itself
is a religious philosophy which entitles the ‘chosen people’ to the ‘chosen land’. So the political, social and cultural life of Israel carries strong religious elements and to a great extent draws its legitimacy from it. Religion shapes the mindset of the people and influences their social behaviour. But like any other religion, Judaism too is not monolithic. It too has several streams.

Apart from that the religious-secular divide in Israel is quite prominent. This conflict comes to the surface in different forms at different times but it is most manifested in the field of education and culture. The religious and secular symbols in Israel are overlapping most of the times and its meaning remains subject to interpretation. The religious group, though a minority in Israel has often been in a better bargaining position. The ultra orthodox schools get full state funding and have the greatest autonomy.

In the coalition governments of Israel the religious parties have largely secured the ministry of education and culture for themselves. They realized the importance of education for shaping the future of Israel and its culture. It was quite important for the religious groups in order to safeguard their own interest. They well understood the functional role of the state’s education policy. The state asserts its power by shaping cultural hegemony and cultural legitimization. This is essentially achieved through the education system through state’s control over the resources and it is maintained through the effective use of mass media.

The state apparatus is thus used to assert the dominant view. The curriculum reflects the values, ideology and culture of the dominant group. The dominant groups impose their views, beliefs and culture on the rest of the society primarily through education system to establish their world view. Members of the subordinate groups are expected to subordinate their own culture to the values of the dominant culture or at least to respect them. The state ensures this through intervention in public education. The state exercises its power by controlling the schools budget and by supervising every aspect of school life: ideology, curriculum, staff hiring, students admission policies etc.

The state is not a neutral entity, and culture is highly contested and biased entity. The bias benefits the dominant group, as it controls the power of the state. The divide in the Israeli society has resulted in different cultural streams. The Jewish people were divided into many factions and each promoted its own belief through various means including sponsoring education. In the secular camp, Socialist and
Marxists ideas prevailed and competed with the Zionist ideology. Zionism started as a secular movement and was considered sacrilegious by the religious Jews. But gradually, some of the religious Jews accepted Zionism, considering the larger interest of Jews. Thus amongst the religious people there were those who accepted Zionist movement, those who hesitated like Agudat Israel and the Ultra-orthodox who rejected it.

The debate and struggle for control and supremacy continued. The Post World War I scenario turned in favour of the secular Zionists who were better organized and economically better off. Though under economic constraints the religious groups continued to mobilize and organize themselves for control over cultural affairs and for religious autonomous education system with a curriculum of their choice. Finally, at the Zionist congress in London in 1920, an agreement was reached that assured religious groups substantial autonomy over its schools. Two conditions were attached to the religious school’s autonomy: Hebrew was to be made the language of instruction and a certain amount of general studies was to be taught. This was the first step in a ‘cultural shift’; the beginning of ‘cultural surrender’ by the secular group and of ‘cultural advancement’ by the religious group.

The two streams, secular and religious, which emerged as a compromise was intended to secure the integrity of the fragile Zionist camp. The secular Zionist camp yielded its status as the dominating force in the Zionist movement and elevated the political status of the religious groups which drew financial support from the secular camp to retain educational autonomy ever since British mandate. The ultra-orthodox Agudat Israel too received the mainstream Zionist patronage time and again in the larger interest of the Zionist movement.

Both the secular and the religious feared the influence of the other. The secular Zionists tried to safeguard their interest and at times overstepped inviting criticism in the society. David Ben Gurion after becoming the Prime Minister, planned to merge all the streams into a single national current. This became a subject of fierce controversy. In this background the Education law of 1953 was passed and as a consequence the secular group continued its educational surrender and the religious section continued its cultural advancement. The religious stream accumulated the political advantage by holding the balance of power between the left and the right in the government. This resulted in a steady rise in the financial support they obtained from the state. The religious practices have eventually been a part of any coalition
government in Israel. They hold the balance of power because of their electoral strength and also because of their broader influence on the Israeli society.

The Jewish religious groups have manifested their consciousness about their identity and culture. They understood well the role of language in acculturation. Language comes with its package of ideology and culture. The religious group had a clear distinction between Jewish language and non-Jewish languages. Among the Jewish languages Yiddish was the most favoured language. Hebrew was avoided in daily use because of its holiness. The attitude in general of this community towards other languages generally depended on relationship of the Jews with the native speakers of that language.

The Jews lived well alongside the Arab counterparts in West Asian countries and hence the Jews had no problem learning and using Arabic. In Europe, particularly after the enlightenment period, West European languages were considered transmitter of a foreign culture. As a result rabbinical authorities increased their strictures against the study of foreign languages. During the Emancipation (mid 18th to 19th Centuries), Jews throughout Europe were forced to teach official local language in their schools, in order to assimilate into the local culture and society. Rabbinical opposition ensued beginning the modern cultural battle for and against language teaching. Some time a decision on language learning was done for practical and local needs like obtaining better employment etc.

Traditionally a Jewish boy is required to learn Torah and some religious leaders feel that learning any other subject including foreign language was a waste of time. Jewish girls are preferably required to refrain from learning Torah and so have a better leeway in terms of secular education including language study. Secular studies particularly English was considered important for groups like Habad for emissary activities. While some fear English study would serve as a conduit for secular culture, the Habad promoted the study of English, which would help carry the Habad culture to the secular Jewish world.

In Diaspora, places where the intervention of the state in education was higher, the Jewish religious schools scheduled secular subjects in the late afternoon, while the best hours were reserved for Jewish subjects. Similar policy is implemented in many Haredi schools in the United States.

The institutions providing education in non-Jewish languages take extra care to forewarn the students of the dangers of foreign culture. They were cautioned of
such dangers during the interface. Any cultural interface that takes place at work as a result of their being familiar with a non-Jewish language should be left outside the doorstep of the home, or even the neighborhood. Thus the skill was to be used for most the bare economic minimum.

Despite the division between the secular and the religious, Bible remains the referral point for both. The different Jewish factions refer to Bible but with a different interpretation. Bible is taught in Israeli public schools with secular curriculum indicating at the centrality of the religious text in Zionist acculturation. For the secular Zionist the Hebrew Bible was a masterful literary creation and powerful national epic. They considered it as the first chapter in the biography of the Jewish people. This approach was “translated” in various subjects and school curriculum. This was considered important in forming a collective national identity. It reinforces the beliefs the nation holds in common and instills historical memories.

The centralized education system ensured a common approach adopted for studying Bible. The goal of this approach is to mold a specific character in the students that correspond to the highest aspirations and ideals of the state. Achieving uniformity between the educational system and public discourse, between the values of the society and the avowed ideology of the Israeli school was very much at the core.

Bible embodies the essence of Zionist ideology and so Jewish studies are assigned important place in the curriculum, thoughts and ideologies and is demonstrated in public domain. A major shift in the Biblical approach after the Zionist movement is the added emphasis on the study of the Prophets and Writings. This was necessary to provide ideological support and legitimacy to the Zionist movement. The Biblical covenant was interpreted in terms of nation, land and culture.

The Bible created a framework of laws and symbols that were held in common by Jews scattered throughout. At the center of this cultural framework stood Eretz Israel, the ancient homeland of the Patriarch that all Jews revered. The Bible extensively speaks of the Patriarchs, the founders of the nation. In Israel its study means historical continuity and legitimacy over the land. For the state it is such a genuine historical text that the Director General of the Ministry of Education waived off the study of history in fifth grade as the study of Bible sufficed it. The objectives of Bible study were historical, national, literary, linguistic and esthetic.
Religion and culture were the two main ingredients that retained Jewish identity throughout ages. Hebrew was central to this aspect. The founders of the Jewish state once again put to effective use Hebrew in creating a Jewish state and Jewish nation with predominantly a Jewish culture. Hebrew was revived to play a crucial role in the new society and in creating a culture that Jewish yet secular, ancient yet modern.