A Jewish, Statist, and Democratic Israel

On reducing religious coercion
while reinforcing a statist Jewish identity

Language and narrative

This document aims to clarify the definition of a Jewish state, describe the existing problems and propose actionable solutions. It addresses the meaning of Jewishness in the context of the state and the role of the state in the context of Jewishness, in theory and in practice.

Although Jewishness is manifold, public discourse tends to adopt a trichotomous view of it. It is viewed as either a religion, a culture or an identity, and religion seems to be the more dominant definition of the three. As far as the public and state are concerned, matters of Jewishness always relate to issue of "religion and state" and the longstanding conflict between the secular and religious sectors. This remains true even though for most Israeli Jews, Jewishness is a mix of all three: it is a culture, religion and national identity all at the same time.

More than once, this exclusively religious approach towards Jewishness has led the state to relinquish its responsibilities and put them into the hands of various private religious organizations. This situation, where the state bears no responsibility, creates islands of private sovereignty—a stateless, undemocratic reality that violates the rights of many. Furthermore, organizing the discourse in a way that equates Jewishness with Judaism begets coercion, alienation, political deals, and most importantly, does not allow Jewishness to function as a shared identity that unifies a diverse population—an identity Israeli society needs in order to face the challenges of globalization, much like all other nation states.

We wish to put aside both the "secular vs. religious" struggle and the "working agreement" that gives the religious factions responsibility for Israel's Jewishness and puts the secular factions in charge of civil liberties and rights. We assume a shared desire to live in a Jewish state that cultivates a diverse-yet-distinct Jewish identity in its citizens, and we propose to achieve this by balancing the scales. On the one hand, we wish to reduce coercion, which begets alienation; on the other hand, we wish to reinforce a Jewish identity and put the responsibility for Israel's Jewishness—which we define as an identity, a religion and a nationality all at the same time—back into the hands of the state. We offer "dos", not just "don'ts". With this combined action, we seek to "turn from evil and do good." In other words—reducing coercion while reinforcing a statist Jewish identity.

The four working principles

"Both/and": All values, good and just as they may be, carry a cost. The cost of a Jewish public sphere is a certain level of coercion, and the cost of civil liberties is the loss of the collective, the community and its shared characteristics. Either path would carry significant consequences for Israeli society, should this polarized approach prevail. These issues reflect deep ideological conflicts in Israeli society—conflicts that touch on our

whole circle of life and the cultural space we, as a society, occupy. We have therefore chosen to view these issues through the lens of reducing coercion as much as possible without losing the sense of belonging to a collective, and simultaneously strengthening our identity as much as possible in a way that reinforces said sense of belonging without excessively reducing civil liberty.

A new statism: In our approach to various issues, we wished to emphasize that the core responsibility lies at the state-national level. The state cannot absolve itself of responsibility for significant issues that touch upon its people's entire lives. This approach acknowledges that a lack of state involvement always creates islands of self-sovereignty, anarchy, a lack of enforcement and democratic difficulties. The demand for statism does not mean that the state must provide any and all services, nor does it necessarily mean centralization. Statism is the opposite of the threatening jungle of statelessness. Decentralizing the state's authority and delegating some responsibilities to local authorities or to the community is entirely possible and indeed welcome, as long as this decentralization is carefully structured and backed by informed big-picture decisions.

Reducing conflict: Rather than achieving definitive solutions to problems, our proposals aim to reduce conflict. This approach is informed by the understanding that partial solutions have value. They can rally the public and garner broad support. Even if people do not agree on the whole picture, they may agree on the steps taken. This is why, in most of our proposals, we do not presume to try and solve the problem, but rather try to reduce the existing tensions.

Traditionalism as a way of thinking: Traditionalism recognizes the importance of a nation's sense of togetherness, of having a shared past and future. Importantly, this togetherness does not drown out the individual, nor does it express a liberal discourse. Instead, it demands reduction, compromise, love and waiting. In the words of one Israeli poet, "we are happy together," and for this joy of togetherness, everyone has to make concessions.

Our process

We have sorted all the relevant issues into two categories: issues relating to public and individual time, and issues revolving around physical and metaphysical spaces. Of those issues, we selected the ones where the level of coercion caused significant identity harm that exceeded the benefit to the collective, and issues where an inclusive strengthening of identity was possible. As part of our work process, we have consulted secular, religious, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Israelis, men and women committed to the existence of Israel as a Jewish-democratic state. All of them view Jewishness as a mixed package, even if each of them evaluates the weight of each component differently.

The issues we chose to address

- **Synchronizing the school year with the Hebrew calendar: starting the school year on the 1st of Elul and shortening the summer holidays**
Unlike the school holiday calendar, which corresponds with the Jewish holidays, the beginning and end of the Israeli school year is not aligned with the Hebrew calendar. This misalignment disrupts the continuum of studies at the start of the fall semester, creating an absurd situation where the Tishrei holidays (Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot) can begin after a mere five days of school. As a result, Israeli children are unfamiliar with the holidays and spend a long time away from school at the very start of the school year. Furthermore, this situation negatively impacts the Hebrew calendar's cultural status. Accepting this proposal will have the double benefit of reinforcing the children's Jewish identity while boosting the Israeli economy. We therefore propose aligning the start of the school year with the Hebrew calendar, shortening the summer holidays to six weeks, and adding four or five long weekends throughout the year, similar to bank holidays in the United Kingdom.

- **Creating a spousal registry and standardizing the domestic partnership status (Yeduim BaTzibur)**
There are between 400,000 and 500,000 Israeli residents registered as having "no religious affiliation." These people have no way to get married in Israel because, according to Halakha, they are not Jewish, despite belonging to the Israeli Jewish collective. This situation is not in line with the values of statism, nor is it democratic. While solutions like the Spousal Covenant (Brit HaZugiyut) enable some of those whose Judaism is unrecognized by Halakha to obtain a form of recognition for their relationships, these solutions only apply when both partners are registered as having "no religious affiliation." There is also the option of registering a domestic partnership, but it involves considerable bureaucratic hassle. We propose a solution that would significantly increase the number of couples whose partnerships can be formally recognized by the state. Our solution entails changing the name of the registry to "The Spousal Registry" and allowing couples to whom Halakha marriage laws do not apply, and who are therefore not required to comply with the strict requirements of Jewish law in respect of divorce ("get lechumra"), to register their partnerships. This definition will allow couples where one of the partners is not Jewish, as well as same-sex couples, to have their partnerships formally recognized by the state via a single state-supervised registry. In addition, we propose to standardize the domestic partnership registration process to reduce the bureaucratic burden on couples who need or desire this form of recognition.

- ## Symbols and ceremonies
  Nowadays, with the crises of trust and social cohesion permeating society, Israeli and national symbols and ceremonies are dragged into the political discourse, weakening at least one of the ceremonies' cornerstones. Thus, for instance, public days of celebration and national days of mourning have often been removed from the domain of statism and forced into divisive and exclusionary political frameworks. Normativity has been replaced with criticism and political sensitivity, both of which impede the ability to establish a collective tradition. In this document, we propose that Israel reconstitute the statist nature of its national symbols and ceremonies using, among other means, a new, first-of-its kind collaborative effort to create an official website with information about every Israeli symbol. The website will serve as a platform for young artists, Israeli culture, and diverse commentaries and interpretations. We also propose an educational project revolving around holiday symbols and icons and a new tradition of written announcements issued by the state on public days of celebration and mourning.

- ## Public transportation on Shabbat
  Although there are various solutions and proposals in the sphere of public transportation in general, and on the topic of public transportation on Shabbat in particular (including some independent local initiatives), none of them consider the political complexity of having to meet the needs of Israel's diverse population. We propose to adopt the principles of subsidiarity and vertical decentralization, which state that public policy issues should be the responsibility of the smallest and most local available democratic authority.

- ## Tish'a Be'Av
  In today's national mindset, the meaning of Tish'a Be'Av is mostly religious. The vast majority of non-religious Israelis who attended secular schools do not acknowledge this day or recognize its meaning. However, Tish'a Be'Av marks a formative event in the history of the Jewish people. Forgetting it means forgetting our past. To clarify, by "our past" we mean more than the destruction of the First and Second Temples; the past we are referring to carries important lessons about the loss of liberty, about multiculturalism, and about accepting those who are different from us. Tish'a Be'Av is about more than baseless hatred (Sin'at Chinam), as the public tends to view it. It is a day that enables us to look at the multiple crises interspersed throughout Jewish history and remember the lessons we can learn from them. We believe that despite the restrictions this day imposes, we must bring the identity issues at the core of Tish'a Be'Av back into the public sphere. It is a formative step on the path toward healing Israeli society and bringing its different factions closer to harmony. It is a step toward balance—a step begging to be taken. In this case, we wish to shift the balance not by addressing barriers (seeing as these are virtually nonexistent), but by bringing to the forefront the deep values at the heart of existing practices.

- ## Issues related to burial laws and practices

  In line with its longstanding Jewish tradition of honoring the deceased, Israel is one of the only countries in the world to offer burial services for free. Despite the importance of this value, the way burial services are handled in Israel seems to indicate that the state has abdicated all responsibility on this topic. The sphere of burial services has been given over to dozens if not hundreds of private religious organizations that operate unsupervised and unbound by any standards. Most notably, they are under no requirement to demonstrate their commitment or accountability toward the Israeli citizen. In this document, we propose a general reform of Israeli burial services. However, the path to such profound changes is a long one. Until the proposed systemic changes are in place, we suggest adopting a number of smaller-scale solutions that may mitigate the damage and address the sense of alienation the current situation evokes. Namely, we recommend creating a single website or document with all the information that a deceased person's family needs in the first few days after the passing of their loved one. The document or website should be made accessible to the public, regardless of organizational affiliation or place of residence. In addition, we propose to standardize the burial of soldiers deemed non-Jewish according to Halakha in order to prevent deliberations and unexpected changes that might be disrespectful to the deceased soldiers' families and to the memory of their loved ones.

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From State-Religion Relations to a Jewish-Statist Israel

The idea of Israel being a Jewish state is something most Israeli citizens agree upon. It is a fact and a direct expression of their desire. But what do we mean when we say, "Jewish state"? What does a Jewish state look like? This question is at the root of one of the deepest divides in Israeli society. This dispute goes far beyond questions about the relations between religion and the state or even questions about the Halakha and civil rights. Indeed, at the heart of this conflict lies a far more fundamental question: when we define Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, what do we mean by "Jewish"?

The problem

Absurdly and unfortunately, Judaism and Jewishness, which could have been a unifying force improving social cohesion in Israel's Jewish sector, instead has the opposite effect. It has become one of the main points of contention in our society. "The end of the Jewish state" has become the most effective battle cry shouted by today's political opposition, and conflicts around Israel's Jewishness are often the impetus that tear coalitions apart. The desire to live in a Jewish state, the very reason the state of Israel exists, has become a threat to Israeli society's unity.

The main reason we cannot agree on the definition of a Jewish state is that Israeli public discourse defines Jewishness in three different ways and views these definitions as mutually exclusive. According to the first definition, "Jewish" denotes a religious affiliation, wherein Judaism is a given system of beliefs and commandments that revolve around the special covenant between the Jewish individual and nation and God. Proponents of the second definition view Jewishness as a nationality, the idea of one's belonging to the Jewish family-nation-tribe. The third definition maintains that to be Jewish is to belong to a culture that keeps constituting and reconstituting itself generation after generation. While not necessarily mutually exclusive, these views do emphasize different aspects of Jewishness and different ideas about the Jewish state.

The clash between these views has been plaguing our society for many years. In fact, it is one of the greatest challenges the Zionist movement has faced since its emergence. To avoid the problem, all Israeli governments, starting with the very first one, have adhered to a document called "The Status Quo Letter." Written before the founding of Israel, in the days of Mandatory Palestine, the document outlined an arrangement that aimed to allow religious and secular Jews to coexist by addressing issues like the Shabbat, marriage, kashruth regulations and education. In addressing the status of Judaism in Israel, the document relied on the assumption that the fundamental dispute about the definition of Jewishness and the meaning of the Jewish state could not be settled. In other words, the document adopted the view that equates Jewishness with Judaism and offered guidelines for dealing with Israel's challenges based on that view.

Over the years, this document has lost its relevance. This happened first and foremost because the social context in which it had been written has changed beyond all

recognition. The Status Quo Letter was written in a time where every person had some religious affiliation. However, in today's Israel, there are hundreds of thousands of people who are not Jewish according to Halakha but still belong to the Jewish collective. This discrepancy has created a gaping regulatory void in the sphere of marriage and domestic partnerships. The letter had been written for a society that used public transportation for most of its travel needs, which meant that public transportation on Shabbat had significant implications on public spaces. In contrast, today's Israelis mostly rely on private vehicles. Furthermore, the letter had been written at a time when the Israeli economy was austere and highly centralized. In today's competitive and consumerist Israeli economy, the prohibition on opening shopping centers on Shabbat is a dead letter.

In an attempt to replace the outdated Status Quo Letter, several social covenants have been laid on government officials' desks over the years, including the 1996 Tzameret Covenant, the 2000 Gavison-Medan Covenant, and the 2001 Kinneret Covenant, all outlining frameworks for compromises and new legal arrangements on controversial issues. Although none of these proposals has made it to legislation, they have shaped and framed public and political discourse by bringing the questions of religion and state to the forefront of public and government attention time and again. While somewhat more relevant than the ones included in the 1948 Status Quo Letter, the arrangements proposed in these newer covenants still adhere to the framing that equates Judaism with Jewishness and build on the assumption that our goal is to enable religious and secular Israelis to coexist. So far, the "Jewish state" discourse has revolved around state–religion relations and the conflict between secular and religious Jews

Where do we go from here?
We believe the dichotomic view of these issues—as a conflict between the secular and the religious, or as pertaining to the relations between religion and the state—no longer serves us. This framing is obsolete for three reasons. The first reason is that the division of Israeli society into religious and secular sectors no longer applies. On many questions concerning Israel's Jewishness, religious Israelis can be found on both sides of the argument, as can secular Israelis. The latest controversy around the Kashruth and Giyur reform was, for the most part, an argument within the religious sector. Perhaps the rise in popularity of the traditionalist stance, which defies the religious-secular dichotomy, by definition, is the strongest indicator that the binary view is no longer in line with reality. Traditionalism, a stance viewed for years as an indecisive refusal to commit to a path, has, in recent years, gained traction and recognition as legitimate religious practice.

The second reason is that the "state vs. religion" framing equates Jewishness with Judaism and excludes all other definitions of the term. The comprehensive studies conducted by Camil Fuchs and Shmuel Rosner prove that the vast majority of the Jewish public in Israel is living Israeli-Jewishness—a mix of Jewishness and Israeliness that contains varying degrees of a religious, national and cultural identity. On one end of this spectrum are the proponents of the "Jewish state" ideal, those who would have Israel become a religious country and enforce Halakhic laws. On the other end are those who
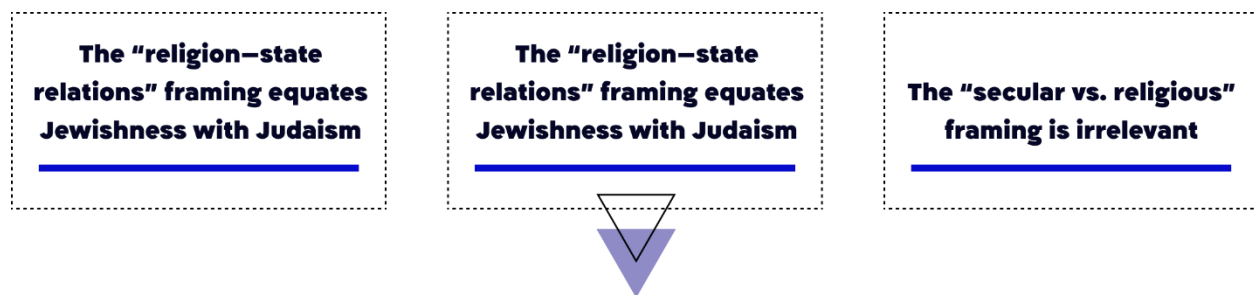
want to live in a democratic Israel, a country where religion and state are completely separate, despite its Jewish majority. But these are only the edge cases. These voices are loud, but they represent minorities. The vast majority of Jews in Israel are somewhere in the middle of the Jewish-Israeli spectrum. Their Jewishness is "both/and". It is a religious, national and cultural identity all at once.

Everything we have said so far is relevant to the Zionist public. Things are different when it comes to the ultra-Orthodox public. And because this demographic is quite large, we cannot dismiss it as an edge case. The ultra-Orthodox sector is unusual in the relative homogeneity of its views regarding the definition of a Jewish state. However, within the ultra-Orthodox sector, there are still two main schools of thought. There are those who take the "Give me Yavneh and its sages" approach, seeking full autonomy and wishing to live by their own rules, but with no desire to force them on the general population. Conversely, there are those who are very much trying to use state laws to enforce Halakha in the public sphere and in public spaces. Neither side makes a good negotiating partner.

The third reason is the substantial changes in Israel's political culture. The Status Quo Letter and the covenants that followed all reflected a discourse of compromises, negotiations, agreements and political deals. This political culture no longer exists. Much like the rest of the world, Israeli politics are drifting away from the idea of compromise as success and toward an ideal of "standing up for one's principles at all costs", even if those costs include an endless struggle and ever-present social tension.

All this does not mean there is no value in striving toward solutions, reaching agreements and reducing conflict around the meaning of the term "Jewish state." Instead of facilitating negotiations between the secular and the religious, Israeli and Jewish, left-wing and right-wing, we propose a language and a discourse that frame Jewishness as an ensemble, rather than just one thing—a bundled definition of Jewishness.

The "religion–state relations" framing equates Jewishness with Judaism	The "religion–state relations" framing equates Jewishness with Judaism	The "secular vs. religious" framing is irrelevant

A new language and a new discourse expressing a Jewish-democratic-Zionist worldview adapted to meet current needs; the idea of Statist Jewishness—Jewishness as a mix of religion, nationality and culture.

This proposal is necessary not only because the Status Quo Letter and the covenants that followed it are all obsolete, and not only because of the social cohesion crisis, but also because of the globalization challenge. Jewishness can do more than heal the fractures in Israeli society. It can also reconnect the younger generation to its ancient, historical homeland, acting as a counterweight to the erosion that globalization has brought to all nation states. Worldwide, distinct cultures are being eroded by the tide of globalization. With technology, social media and consumerism sweeping the globe, Western culture threatens to completely engulf local cultures, traditions and languages. Israel is no exception. The children of older generations felt at home in Jewish and Israeli culture. Their language, the books they read, their calendar and the collective historical narrative that shaped their mindsets were all Hebrew, Jewish and Israeli. Unlike them, Millennials and Gen Z are much more likely to view themselves as citizens of the world. Social media, human rights, low-cost flights, the erosion of national identity, the globalized job market—Jewishness cannot stand against all of these forces if it remains a mere religion (or indeed an exclusionary nationalist identity) enforced by state mechanisms. With things as they are, it is no surprise that members of the younger generations feel less and less connected to Jewish culture and succumb to the lure of Cosmopolitanism. As a country and as a people, we need the younger generations to feel a deep connection to Jewish culture. This connection is a prerequisite for their choice to keep living here. Our continuity depends on it.

The Zionist project was in large part about the ability to guarantee Jewish continuity by means other than living a religious life. For years, the state of Israel has guaranteed the continued existence of the Jewish people not just by being a safe haven from persecution and genocide, but, and perhaps even mostly, by shielding us from assimilation and the loss of our identity. With its education system, culture, public sphere, national symbols and Israeli-Jewish calendar, Israel has ensured that the Jewish people can live on even without keeping the mitzvot. It has allowed its citizens to raise their children Jewish with no special effort on their part. Globalization and the view that reduces Jewishness to Judaism drive away those who do not keep the mitzvot.

This is a tough challenge to face, because it holds a paradox.
The prevalent assumption today is that a having a public sphere that enables the cultivation of Jewishness as a culture, a language, a religion and a national identity with no effort expended by the individual necessitates a considerable amount of coercion.

Thus, for instance, the desire to create a public experience of Shabbat means forcing businesses to close and reducing public transportation—and these are coercive measures. The same coercion also evokes feelings of estrangement and rejection distances people from their Jewish identities, and there is no positive regard toward Jewish culture and identity to counter those feelings. And so, we have a catch-22. The very things that cultivate an identity also alienate people from it. However, we wish to put aside the "secular vs. religious" debate and the "working agreement" that gives the religious factions responsibility for Israel's Jewishness and puts the secular factions in charge of civil liberties. Given that we all have a shared desire to live in a Jewish state

that allows us to cultivate a diverse but distinct Jewish identity, we seek to find balance between closing and opening, between regulations and freedom of choice—on Shabbat and on other issues.

Given that this is not about state-religion relations but about shaping a Jewish state, we must ask not only "what does it mean for a state to be Jewish," but also "what is a state". Is a state a collection of citizens, or does it, as the republicans would argue, have its own essence?

If a state is no more than its citizens, then its Jewishness depends solely on the extent to which its individual citizens identify as culturally, religiously or nationally Jewish. But if we accept that a national identity is more than the sum of the citizens' individual desires, then a Jewish state must have Jewish laws and an otherwise Jewish character even if its citizens make different choices in their personal lives. The focus is on the state's laws, its institutions, its public life, i.e. A Jewish and Statist Israel.

The tension between these views sometimes creates a zero-sum game as enforcing a law means using coercion and force, and significantly reducing the citizens' freedom of choice—all things that naturally lead to anger, alienation and rejection. An act that strengthens one view therefore weakens the other. Thus, the prohibition to publically display Chametz during Passover reinforces the state's Jewishness according to one view but undermines it according to the other. This is because as a coercive move, it results in a backlash, and can even lead to rebellion and actions taken out of spite. This phenomenon becomes evident if we look at the extremely high rate of Jews who circumcise their sons and hold a Seder on Passover. The state has never been involved in these practices, which is perhaps why they are so common despite the emotional difficulty around circumcision.

We believe we must embrace both views and allow them to feed off of each other. Even staunch liberals and individualists must acknowledge that public life and laws help construct people's individual identities and that identities are not formed in a vacuum but negotiated with society and tradition. Even proponents of declarative law must recognize that there is a limit to the establishment's ability to force people to comply with laws that do not resonate with their identities.

The proposals in this document stem from a Jewish-statist worldview that acknowledges both individual identities and the aspect of the state, and recognizes the importance of the Jewish state idea for Israel's continued prosperity and existence.

Guiding Principles

The object of this document is twofold: first, to propose a package of statist solutions that can achieve harmony and synthesis in Israel's definition as a Jewish and democratic state; second, to propose a language that expresses centrist thinking, i.e., reduces religious coercion while reinforcing a statist Jewish identity.

"Both/And"

In every issue we approached, we wanted to address the tensions, the clash of values that underlies the problem, and the dilemmas it raises. We are not trying to pave a path toward compromise between social groups. Rather, we are trying to find balance between conflicting values. We maintain that if we find the balance between two important values, we will not need to give up on either of them. Focusing on point of equilibrium will enable us to think more flexibly, reach agreements, foster acceptance, and most of all, it will help us out of the paralysis induced by dichotomic thinking. We are not seeking answers to value questions like "who is right" or "what is just." Rather, we recognize that all values and all decisions, good and just as they may be, have a cost. The cost of a Jewish public sphere is coercion, and the cost of civil liberties is the loss of the collective, the community and its shared aspect. Either path would carry significant consequences for Israeli society, should this polarized approach prevail. This is why the foundation for our work is what we call the "Both/And" principle. How does one make "both/and" decisions? These issues reflect deep ideological conflicts in Israeli society—conflicts that touch on our whole life cycle and the cultural space we, as a society, occupy. We have therefore chosen to view these issues through the lens of reducing coercion as much as possible without losing the sense of belonging to a collective, and simultaneously strengthening our identity as much as possible in a way that reinforces said sense of belonging without excessively reducing civil liberty. Only through a lens of quantitative continuity can we reach creative solutions that consider and balance out the existing tensions. Yes/no questions will not serve us here.

A new statism

In our approach to various issues, we wished to emphasize that the core responsibility lies at the state-national level. This principle maintains that the state cannot absolve itself of responsibility for significant issues that touch upon its people's entire lives. This approach acknowledges that a lack of state involvement always creates islands of sovereignty, anarchy, a lack of enforcement and difficulties. We are not calling for full state involvement in the lives of its citizens. We support civil liberties and people's right to choose and shape their lives, but at the same time, we know that our lives are composed of an infinite number of public spheres where different ideas and ideologies meet.

These are the questions we asked ourselves: Does the current scope of the state serve us? What is the state's responsibility? Who takes this responsibility upon themselves in place of the state? Thus, for instance, the fact that many couples in Israel have no legal

way to marry is not only unjust, but anti-statist and undemocratic. It creates a normative vacuum. The complete absence of standardization for couples who want their partnerships formally recognized by the state creates chaos and violates human rights. When privately-owned NGOs are the sole bodies responsible for burial in the country, burial services remain ungoverned. This is a violation of Israeli citizens' fundamental rights. However, we must stress that the demand for statism does not mean that the state must provide any and all services, nor does it necessarily mean centralization. Statism is the opposite of the threatening jungle of statelessness. It means order and effective regulation in all areas. Decentralizing the state's authority and delegating some responsibilities to local authorities or to the community is entirely possible and indeed welcome, as long as this decentralization is carefully structured and backed by informed big-picture decisions.

Thus, for instance, we support the idea that the Israeli government should delegate some of its authority to local governments and have them decide on and be responsible for issues pertaining to their communities, their local spaces and their time. In delegating responsibilities to local authorities, the government recognizes the differences between communities and regions in Israel and acknowledges the tension between this act of delegation and concerns about strengthening the communities' sense of autonomy. Furthermore, delegating responsibilities to local authorities lets individuals feel that they can live their lives in public spaces shaped in accordance with their worldviews. This feeling is essential for people to see themselves as equal partners in the wider public circle, and for reducing the antagonism we see today. For every issue we addressed, we based our proposals on the idea that conferring authority on matters pertaining to Jewishness and the state into the hands of local governments will help create an environment that meets the needs of the local public, thus cooling the heated debates and reducing the polarization of discourse on the national level.

Reducing conflict

Rather than achieving a definitive solution to the problems, our proposals aim to reduce conflict. This approach is informed by the understanding that partial solutions have value. They can rally the public and garner broad support. Even if people do not agree on the whole picture, they may agree on the steps taken. In Israeli politics, issues pertaining to the balance between religion and the state are viewed as hot potatoes. Indeed, in many cases, the state chooses not to handle these issues at all. We have already mentioned the consequences of this avoidant behavior. Beyond the no man's lands these issues have created, we believe the right way to solve these issues is gradually and incrementally. This is why, in most of our proposals, we do not presume to try and solve the problem, but rather try to reduce the existing tensions.

Traditionalism as a way of thinking

We believe that traditionalism expresses the value of preserving a nation's sense of togetherness, of having a shared past and future. Importantly, this togetherness does not drown out the individual, but rather demands limitation, compromise, love and moderation. Neither is this togetherness the manifestation of a liberal "live and let live"

philosophy. Rather, we believe its sentiment is best expressed in the words of one Israeli poet, "we are happy together," and for this joy of togetherness, everyone has to make concessions. Moreover, traditionalist thinking offers us a calm, flexible space in the eye of the storm, untouched by the clash between religious and secular ideologies. Where dichotomic ideological views try to force reality into a coherent conceptual order, traditionalism responds to reality without trying to discipline it. Traditionalism recognizes its elusive power and so deals with it in different ways at different times. In the past, traditionalist lifestyles were criticized for being inconsistent and "not serious." Today, the power of traditionalist thinking is much easier to see as we come to address political challenges in a polarized, fragmented world with its multitude of clashing ideals. In today's reality, traditionalism has allowed us to look at every issue flexibly and with a questioning glance.
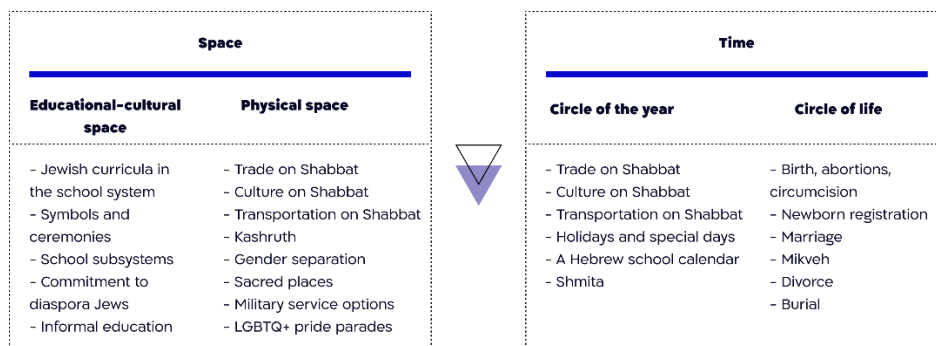
<h2 style="text-align:center">Our Work Process</h2>
<h2 style="text-align:center">From "state-religion arrangements" to a Jewish-Statist Israel</h2>

Our greatest challenge was leaving the confines of the "state vs. religion" box, which limits the discussion to legal and Halakhic debates. We wished to broaden the discussion to include the question of Israel's Jewish identity at different times and in different spaces. We believe this is necessary because the challenge of the Jewish state is bigger than the question of religion–state relations. We needed to change our way of thinking, remap the discussion and devise a new process.

As part of our thought process, we sat down with representatives of the Israeli Zionist centrist faction: secular and religious Jews, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews, men and women. What we all had in common was our commitment to Israel's existence as a Jewish state, even if each of us viewed the mix of components that make up this Jewishness a little differently.

We started by mapping all the issues in front of us, the ones we so readily categorize as pertinent to the conflict between religion and state. These included kashruth, Shabbat, marriage and transportation, but also issues related to the Jewish public sphere. We reached agreement about a division into time and space spheres, which allowed us to leave the "religion–state" box behind and expand the term "Jewish" to encompass other spheres.

Space		Time	
Educational-cultural space	Physical space	Circle of the year	Circle of life
– Jewish curricula in the school system	– Trade on Shabbat	– Trade on Shabbat	– Birth, abortions, circumcision
– Symbols and ceremonies	– Culture on Shabbat	– Culture on Shabbat	– Newborn registration
– School subsystems	– Transportation on Shabbat	– Transportation on Shabbat	– Marriage
– Commitment to diaspora Jews	– Kashruth	– Holidays and special days	– Mikveh
– Informal education	– Gender separation	– A Hebrew school calendar	– Divorce
	– Sacred places	– Shmita	– Burial
	– Military service options		
	– LGBTQ+ pride parades		

Based on the map we had made, we then selected issues based on the following parameters:

1. Relevance to statism—areas where the state has abdicated its responsibility: The selected issues symbolize the desire to bring the state back into the picture in places where it chose to leave in the wake of conflicts and difficulties. The first step is therefore to put the state back in charge of how it defines itself as a Jewish state, culturally, historically, religiously and in terms of individual and collective identity. As we have previously mentioned, this does not mean the state has to centralize its efforts. It may choose to delegate some of its responsibilities, supervise, and decentralize, but it cannot ignore these issues entirely, leaving entire spheres ungoverned.

2. The possibility of balancing the scales: In addressing these issues, we strove toward balance. We chose to address issues where the level of coercion is harmful and alienating more than it is beneficial, and issues where we recognized opportunities for strengthening Israel's identity as a Jewish state. In other words—our goal is to reduce coercion while reinforcing a statist Jewish identity. Our overarching goal is to reinforce Jewishness while minimizing the level of alienating coercion.

3. Solution applicability: the definitions of Israel as a Jewish state cover a very broad range of topics. This document is not an attempt to cover all of them. Rather, it presents a few issues where we believe concrete steps can be taken to reduce coercion and reinforce people's Jewish-Israeli identities. In writing this document, our job is to outline the preliminary yardsticks that are practicable. Of course, we intend to actively lead any move toward implementing the proposals we have raised.

We believe that the mindset presented in this document can help Jewishness become a source of national unity and better manifest the connection between the Torah and the lives of Israelis. In our way of thinking, the Torah is the Torah of life, but it also exists alongside life and with it. It is all of these things at the same time.
In the next section, we will dedicate a chapter to each of the issues we selected.

1. Aligning the School Year with the Hebrew Calendar
2. The Spousal Registry
3. Symbols and Ceremonies
4. Public Transportation on Shabbat (Written by the Center of Judaism and State Policy, Part of Shalom Hartman Institute)
5. Tish'a Be'Av
6. Problems in Israel's Burial Services

We will describe the problems and challenges of each issue and their normative backgrounds. We will then explain our proposals, the advantages they offer, and, if needed, the rules of thumb we believe should be followed when working to resolve the issue. Because the issues differ greatly in scope and significance, they are described differently. However, our proposals all share the principles we have outlined: the

"both/and" principle, the new statism, reducing conflict, and traditionalism as a way of thinking.

Synchronizing the School Year with the Hebrew Calendar: Starting the School Year on the 1st of Elul and Shortening the Summer Holidays

"My advice to you is this: celebrate the holidays of your forefathers and add something of your own to the festivities, as much as you are able. The important thing is that you do it all because you believe, because you feel alive and because your soul craves it; and don't try to be too sophisticated. Our forefathers never grew tired of their holidays and their Shabbats, even though they repeated the same words many, many times throughout their lives. Each time, they felt in them a different flavor and found in them a new awakening. And do you know why? Because there was vitality in them, and the holiday blessing resided in their souls."

Haim Nahman Bialik

The problem

All the holidays in the Israeli school system are aligned with the Jewish holidays and the Hebrew calendar, except the summer holidays. The beginning and end of the school year follow the Gregorian calendar: the year starts on 1 September and ends on 30 July. This disconnect between the Jewish holidays and the start of the school year creates an absurd situation where students in secular and religious state schools leave for the Rosh Hashanah holiday mere days after starting the school year. In the school year 2021–2022, for example, students had only 7 school days before the Tishrei holidays started. The school year, as it is now, reduces workforce productivity, disrupts the continuum of education, and prevents the school system from shaping the students' Jewish identities and fostering unity.

Having frequent disruptions during the first month of school significantly impedes the teachers' ability to prepare classes about the meaning of the Tishrei holidays, which erodes the holidays' meaning and reduces their role in shaping children's identities. It also disrupts the continuity of studies. Starting the school year on the 1st of Elul will give teachers and students a full month of uninterrupted studies.

Background

In every culture, the calendar is a valuable tool for emphasizing shared values and cultivating a national collective memory. The calendar's uniformity and immutability allows families to come together, generation after generation, creating a global multi-generational continuity. The same is true for the Jewish people. Our calendar is an important identity-building device. For centuries, the Jewish calendar helped the Jewish people preserve their unique national identity in the diaspora. Scattered around the world and speaking different languages, Jewish families and communities would nevertheless celebrate their holidays, each in its unique way and in accordance with its own local traditions.

We wish to stress that the Jewish holidays are not just the purview of the religious demographic. Their deep historic meaning can be separated from the Halakhic issues many view as coercive. A 2009 CBS survey found that 67.3% of secular Jewish Israelis and 89.7% of Jewish Israelis who identify as "traditional" and "not very religious" light Hanukkah candles, and 81.6% of secular Jewish Israelis take part in a Seder on Passover. These traditions are all chosen freely by each individual, and they are part of Israeli culture.

The normative framework for determining school holidays is State Education Regulations (Recognized Institutions) 1953, which mainly tie them to the Jewish holidays. The academic calendar is set and published each year by the Ministry of Education in a special circular sent on behalf of its director general. The deputy director and director of senior education personnel is responsible for this at the ministry. The circular is usually provided to the two teachers' unions (Histadrut HaMorim and Irgun HaMorim) for comment. The number of vacation days is also derived from this practice.

In 2017, concerned parents petitioned the High Court of Justice, arguing that school holidays were determined arbitrarily. As a result, the Knesset's Education Committee established a new subcommittee to look into the number of school days. The subcommittee was headed by MK Oded Forer. After three meetings, the subcommittee issued several recommendations, including one to sync the school calendar with the Hebrew calendar. The Education Committee agreed that the recommendations should be implemented, but as of 2022, the Ministry of Education has yet to comment on the committee's conclusions, other than presenting a program for "Holiday School," a school framework that operates during the holidays.
*For the existing proposals to change the school holidays, see attachment.

Our solution
We propose legislation to set the school year in all of Israel's secular and state religious schools (Mamlachti and Mamlachti-Dati) to start on the 1st of Elul and end on the 15th of Tamuz (for high schools, we propose to start the year on the 1st of Elul and end
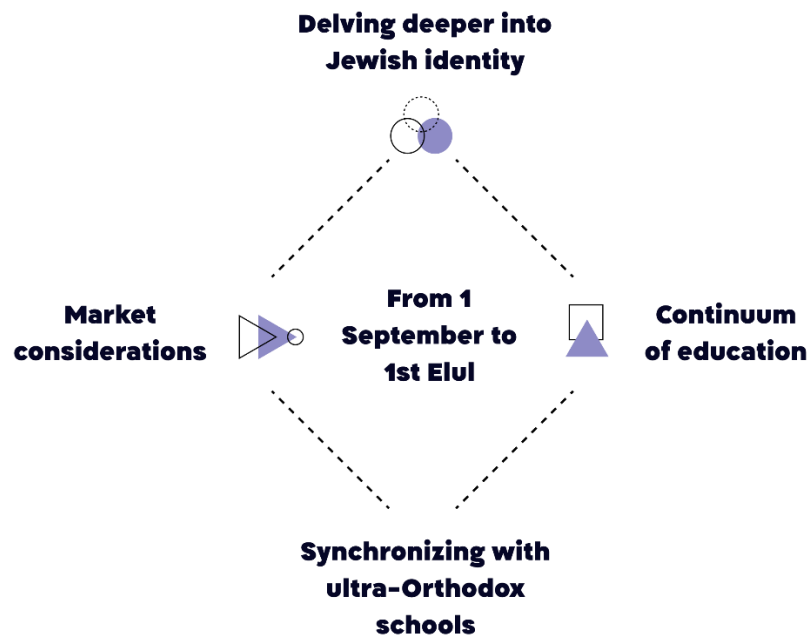
it on the 5th of Tamuz). Aligning the school year with the Jewish calendar and shortening the summer holidays to six weeks will help strengthen the Jewish identity of Israel's school children and teens and maintain a continuum of studies at the start of the school year. This move will also carry economic benefits as it will shorten the summer holidays and better align other school holidays with the parents' work schedule. In addition to changing the school year's start and end dates, we propose adding long weekends spread throughout the year, much like bank holidays in the United Kingdom.

To counterbalance the shortening of the summer holidays, we propose adopting a model similar to the one used in the United Kingdom. Namely, we propose having four or five long weekends spread out over the school year. The long weekends will allow religious families to go on holiday with their children and enjoy more leisure and culture throughout

the year. Furthermore, shortening the summer holidays and ensuring schools stay open for a full month at the start of the year will help the economy.

We know this is a significant change that will take time to implement, but we believe its importance lies not only in the social and economic benefits it will bring, but in the attempt to strengthen the children's Jewish identity.

Arguments in favor of starting the school year on the 1st of Elul

Delving deeper into Jewish identity

Market considerations

From 1 September to 1st Elul

Continuum of education

Synchronizing with ultra-Orthodox schools

1. Strengthening pupils' Jewish identities

Starting the school year on the 1st of Elul will help the students of Israel's secular and religious state schools understand the meaning of the holidays they see celebrated in their homes and in public spaces. This will help lay a solid foundation for the development of their personal identities. Convening the schoolyear in Elul will enable teaching staff to better introduce the children to the holidays and prepare them for them—something they have been wanting to do ever since Israel has gained its independence. The Israeli education system invests many resources in strengthening the students' identity, and this solution is key to this effort's success. Syncing the school year with the Hebrew calendar is a natural, reasonable and practical solution that carries benefits beyond strengthening the identity of the students. It is not enough to gather the children and serve them apples and honey if they do not understand the

meaning of the holiday. Adding cultural depth to existing educational practices is necessary to encourage our children to become thinking, involved citizens who demand to know the rationale behind seemingly obvious actions. We will touch on the identity discourse surrounding the holidays in another section, but the general principle is that this discourse is not coercive. Rather, it allows room for different families to adopt different practices while encouraging people to delve into the meaning of these practices for the individual and for the collective. As aforesaid, delving deeper into this issue reveals that the decision to start the school year in the state school system on September 1st has the same reasoning behind it as our proposal—to enable more substantial learning about the holidays. Israel's state school system became operational in the academic year of 1953–1954, which broadly aligned with the year 5714 on the Jewish calendar. That school year began on October 4, right after Sukkot. Israel's founders, headed by Ben-Gurion, wished to disseminate Zionist culture through the Jewish holidays and through the school system. To do so, they moved the start of the school year to September 1st to allow more time to teach the children about the holidays. Indeed, in 1954, the 1st of September was on the 3rd of Elul, very close to the date we are proposing now.

2. Maintaining a continuum of education
Much has been said about the educational benefits of syncing the school year with the Hebrew calendar. Situations like the ones we have seen in the 2021–2022 school year—when the Tishrei holidays begin mere days after the start of the school year—disrupt the continuum of education. The importance of maintaining a continuum of education became particularly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when incredible creative efforts were made by teaching staff to keep holding classes during lockdown.

3. Market considerations
The main problem is the significant difference between the total number of school holidays and the number of vacation days allotted to parents in a given year. In July 2021, The Knesset Research and Information Center published a comprehensive review that showed a significant difference between the total lengths of school holidays and work holidays in Israel. For example, in the 2021–2022 school year, the children got a total of 93 days off school: 41 days during Jewish holidays, and 53 more days in the summer. In contrast, the average number of paid vacation days workers get in Israel is 20.2. This disparity has far-reaching consequences for the Israeli economy, as many parents must find solutions on days when they have to work and their children are not in school. A survey conducted by the Bank of Israel in 2020 has shown that this disparity affects 28% of Israeli households with children aged 3–11. The National Economic Council estimates that every additional school day when parents can go to work will generate between 130 and 250 million shekels. Shortening the summer holidays and adding four or five additional rest days spread out over the year will allow the parents more flexibility and enable them to better align their vacation days with those of their children. Moreover, the long weekends can help boost tourism by allowing families to travel in months when there are currently no school holidays (e.g. January and February). This will have an effect on prices and on the Israeli leisure culture in general.

4. Syncing with the ultra-Orthodox school system

One in five pupils in Israel attends an ultra-Orthodox school. Ultra-Orthodox schools for boys (primary schools, middle schools and high schools which are exempt from teaching the core curriculum for cultural reasons) currently open on the 1st of Elul to stay in sync with the Jewish calendar. The difference between the school systems perpetuates old separatist practices. Moving the start of the school year may have the added benefit of conveying a unifying message to the ultra-Orthodox community, a dominant faction in Israeli society.

**See the end of this document for the full list of school holidays. The list demonstrates the effects of the proposed synchronization on Israelis affiliated with other religions.

The challenges of implementing this proposal—and the opportunity it provides

The teachers' unions - Histadrut HaMorim and Irgun HaMorim—are very influential, and their voices carry a lot of weight when it comes to any attempt to change the school calendar. According to the unions, the school holidays are stipulated in collective bargaining agreements as part of the teachers' salary and employment conditions, and therefore changing the holidays violates the teachers' rights. Teachers have the power to strike, and the Ministry of Education does not want to clash with the people in charge of teaching Israel's children. The result is paralysis. In August 2019, shortly before the pandemic, the negotiations for a renewed collective bargaining agreement stipulating the teachers' salaries were postponed. In 2022, the negotiations reopened. This may provide a window of opportunity to change the situation.

The Spousal Registry and Domestic Partnerships (Yeduim BaTzibur)

"Even though these prohibit and these permit,
these disqualify and these allow,
Beit Shammai did not refrain from marrying women from Beit Hillel,
nor did Beit Hillel from Beit Shammai."
Mishnah Yevamot 1:4

The problem

Marriage in Israel is governed by the Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction (Marriage and Divorce) Act, 1953. Section 1 of this law states that "matters of marriage and divorce between Jews in Israel, being nationals or residents of the State, shall be under the exclusive jurisdiction of the rabbinical courts," and Section 2 states that "marriages and divorces of Jews shall be performed in Israel in accordance with Jewish religious law." We should note at this point that according to Halakha, marriage and divorce are

interdependent, meaning that the particulars of a couple's marriage affect the divorce procedure.

The stipulation that marriage in Israel is governed exclusively by Orthodox Jewish law means many couples are excluded from this system. Some people are disqualified from getting married according to Halakha ("psulei hitun"), while others simply do not want their marriage or wedding to comply with Jewish Halakha, and so seek alternative paths. In any event, both of these groups are harmed because their relationships and partnerships are not formally recognized by Israeli law.

The following chart provides an overview of the issue:

Marriage in Israel

Disqualified from marriage ("Psulei Hitun")

Both partners are Jewish and permitted to marry according to Halakha

no legal recognition in Israel — **Same-sex couples**

The Spousal Covenant for Persons with No Religious Affiliation, law passed in 2010 — **Non-Jewish and non-religious couples**

no legal recognition in Israel — **Mixed couples where one partner is not Jewish**

no legal recognition in Israel — **A Cohen and a divorced woman**

Partners want to marry according to Halakha

Partners do not want to marry according to Halakha

Halakhic marriage+
Halakhic divorce
Governed by The Rabbinical
Courts Jurisdiction (Marriage
and Divorce) Act, 1953

No legal recognition in Israel
But there are alternatives:
– Domestic partnership
("Yeduim BaTzibur")
– Civil marriage abroad

While this map illustrates the scope of the problem, it is difficult to talk about exact numbers because not all the data has been made public. There are between 400,000 and 500,000 people registered as having "no religious affiliation" living in Israel today. These people have no way to get married in Israel because, according to Halakha, they are not Jewish. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2021, 94% of couples in Israel were married. The remainder, 106,000 couples, were living together without being married. A study conducted by Panim: The Association of Israeli Judaism Organizations shows the numbers differently. This study has found that at least 2,434 private Jewish wedding ceremonies (meaning the marriages were not registered with the Rabbinate)

were held in Israel that year. A closer look at these weddings reveals that 33% of the couples were repatriates from former Soviet countries, and one of the partners was not Jewish. 8% were same-sex couples, and an additional 4% were not allowed to get married according Halakha for miscellaneous reasons.

On the one hand, we have the problem of those who wish to marry and have their marriage formalized in Israel but are not permitted to do so according to Halakha. A situation where so many citizens are unable to register as married couples is anti-statist and undemocratic. On the other hand, those who oppose changing the situation raise concerns about the state's Jewishness and argue that any children born of marriages unrecognized by Halakha would be considered illegitimate by Jewish law ("mamzerim"). They are also worried about the unity of the Jewish people—and this is perhaps their gravest concern.

> **A situation where the state does not recognize the spousal relationships between hundreds of thousands of its citizens is anti-statist and untenable.**

This difficult problem goes beyond the numbers and the couples' inability to get married. The fact that their relationship is not formally recognized creates many difficulties for couples, both in everyday situations and in times of crisis. For instance, couples who are not officially married cannot take a mortgage together if they want to buy an apartment or a house. Or let us consider another example. If a man's "unofficial" wife is hospitalized and he wishes to visit her, he will have a hard time doing so because he is not formally recognized as her husband. Moreover, hospital staff will not be able to share medical information with him, and he will have no say in any medical decisions if she cannot make decisions for herself. Should his wife die, he will become a complete stranger to her as far as the law is concerned.

Some of these issues have been resolved by laws like the Spousal Covenant (Brit HaZugiyut), which grants formal recognition to relationships where neither partner has a religious affiliation. Over the years, many Supreme Court rulings have made "unofficial" partnerships into a flagship issue, with many couples, including same-sex couples, gaining de facto recognition and rights.

At the moment, the number of couples unrecognized by the state remains very high. While Israel does recognize civil marriages registered abroad, and many couples use this as a solution to their problem, this solution is not for everyone. First, not everyone can cover the cost of getting married abroad; and second, for some couples and in some cases (e.g., during the pandemic), flying abroad is impossible. More importantly, this solution goes against the principles of statism.

Our solution

If we wish to uphold the principles of marital status in Israel, we have to approach this problem with the understanding that change must be gradual and with the aim of reducing the violation of civil liberties until the issue is fully resolved in the future.

To that end, we propose a process that avoids a direct confrontation with Jewish Halakhic principles, while still significantly increasing the number of couples able to gain formal recognition for their partnerships in Israel.
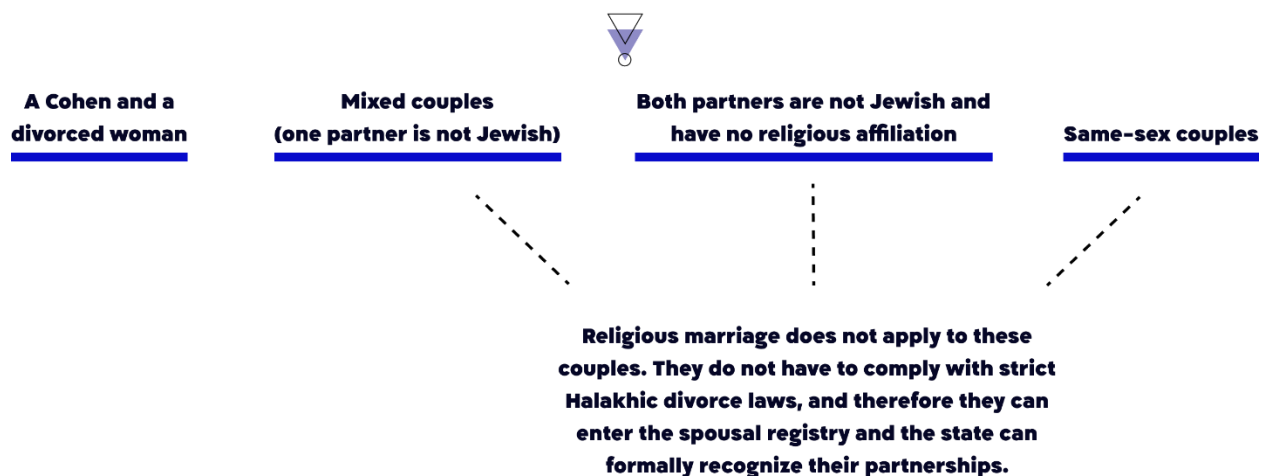
We wish to replace the term "persons disqualified from marriage" ("psulei hitun") with "persons to whom religious marriage does not apply," thus allowing more Israeli couples to have their relationships formally recognized by the state without transgressing the institution of marriage as defined by Jewish religious law.

According to the plan we are proposing, the following couples will be able to register in the Spousal Registry and get formally recognized by the state:

(1) Couples in which one partner is not recognized as Jewish by the Rabbinate;

(2) Same-sex couples.

This provides a solution for two very large swaths of the population disqualified from marrying in Israel (see table above). What these two types of couples have in common is that religious marriage laws do not apply to them, which means that in their case, a divorce does not carry consequences according to Halakha. This is true even according to those who argue that some civil partners still have to comply with the strict Halakhic divorce requirements ("get lechumra") if they dissolve the relationship.

Psulei Hitun: people not permitted to marry

A Cohen and a divorced woman	Mixed couples (one partner is not Jewish)	Both partners are not Jewish and have no religious affiliation	Same-sex couples

Religious marriage does not apply to these couples. They do not have to comply with strict Halakhic divorce laws, and therefore they can enter the spousal registry and the state can formally recognize their partnerships.

As shown by aforementioned data, this solution helps a very large share of the couples who currently cannot get married in Israel. Increasing the number of couples

and families who can get formal recognition in Israel would hugely benefit many couples who desire formal recognition from the state. With the solution we propose, we can achieve this benefit without clashing with Halakhic principles because Halakha does not and has never viewed such formal unions as marriages.

Unlike previously proposed civil marriage bills, this proposal does not undermine Halakhic authority or create an alternative path for civil marriage in Israel. This is because this type of registration does not constitute a marriage in accordance with Halakha—it is a purely bureaucratic act that carries no religious significance. This way, we do not undermine the decision that marriage between Jews in Israel can only be formalized in accordance with Halakha, but we still allow many Israeli couples the normative recognition they need, in Israel and overseas. We acknowledge that this solution does not meet the needs of all couples. For instance, a Cohen and a divorced woman are still not permitted to marry, and, of course, Jewish couples who do not want a religious marriage are not covered by our proposal. However, under the current social circumstances, this proposal is the most feasible.

This proposal upholds the principle of reducing conflict and opens a path for consensus for many couples, even in the absence of a consensus on the bigger picture and an alternative path to civil marriage in Israel.

Concrete implementation

a. The Spousal Registry Act

We propose amending the Act of Spousal Covenant for Persons without Religious Affiliation and renaming it The Spousal Registry Act. The amended law will state that two adults who wish register as partners for the purpose of becoming a familial unit, can do so if religious marriage does not apply to them. The particulars of the law and the registration will be similar to the original Spousal Covenant Act. The difference is that the new law will cover more couples.

For the first time in Israel, we propose a law that validates the relationships of couples to whom religious marriage does not apply, granting them the same rights and obligations as married couples, but without marriage.

- This is a centrist proposal that achieves two goals at once. It preserves Israel's Jewishness and respects Jewish law, while dramatically increasing the number of couples and families who can get formal recognition in Israel.
- In the bill to amend the Spousal Covenant Act, we recommend naming the normative act "Spousal Registration" (replacing the term "Spousal Covenant," so as not to evoke any association with marriage.
- We propose that the Spousal Registry be administered by the State, and that the State be the party responsible for it. The same is true already for Spousal Covenant. The particulars of the Spousal Registry and the details of the registration will be similar to those of the Spousal Covenant for persons with no religious affiliation, with the exception that more couples will be eligible to register.

- The Spousal Registry track will run parallel to religious marriage and divorce. The two tracks will never touch, and the authority of the Rabbinical Courts will remain unchallenged.
- This will be the first time same-sex partnerships are formally, legally recognized by the State of Israel.

b. Standardizing domestic partnership status (Yeduim BaTzibur)

Seeing as Israel has no law permitting civil marriage, many couples whose relationships resemble those of married couples, but who are not legally married, can be considered "domestic partners" ("Yeduim BaTzibur," literally meaning "known to the public"). These couples' rights are mandated by court rulings.

Although the domestic partnership status is near-formal and grants couples most of the rights married couples have, domestic partners still face several difficulties that married couples do not.

1. Because domestic partnerships are not formally recognized by Israeli law, couples are considered domestic partners if the factual circumstances of their life and relationship meet certain criteria. This is why couples who want the rights of domestic partners must provide detailed proof that their relationship and shared life meets the requirements. To do so, they must divulge intimate details about their lives. Moreover, this proof must be provided many times, as the process has to be repeated separately for every relevant party.
2. Domestic partners prove their eligibility for each right separately, as each right is granted by a specific law, governed by different authorities, and requires different forms and proof. To obtain these rights, couples have to go through administrative processes with many different authorities and organizations. Recognition by one administrative authority does not compel recognition by other administrative authorities.

To create a simple and convenient way for couples who cannot marry through the Rabbinate to get recognized by all the relevant institutions and authorities and exercise all their rights (national insurance rights, civil rights, inheritance rights, etc.), we propose that couples fill out a new standard notarized form and sign an accompanying voluntary agreement that outlines their mutual obligations and the terms of their separation, should they dissolve their relationship. The wording of the agreement can be chosen by the couple. The form can then be used with all national institutions, with alterations reflecting specific requirements. We wish to stress that not signing this type of agreement should be viewed as a declaration by the couple that they do not wish to be considered domestic partners, and as a consequence, the rights and obligations of domestic partners cannot apply to them.

Symbols and Ceremonies

"A person, no matter how small his value, is more important than a principle, no matter how sacred."

Jacqueline Kahanoff

The problem

Symbols accompany us from the day we are born. They play a significant role in shaping the lives and images of Israeli individuals, molding the meaning of their day-to-day. In Israel's public sphere, symbols and ceremonies play vital roles in shaping the collective narrative and perpetuating statism. Symbols and ceremonies establish traditions and make connections: between our past and present, between our present and future, and between different participants sharing the space.

The ceremonies themselves have three key components: (1) form and content; (2) the target audience, which is as important as what happens on stage; and (3) participation and relatability—the more relatable the content, the more people pay attention and behave appropriately.

Nowadays, with the crises of trust and social cohesion permeating our society, national ceremonies are often dragged into the political discourse, which reduces the effectiveness of at least one of the ceremonies' components. Thus, for instance, public days of celebration and national days of mourning have often been removed from the domain of the state and forced into divisive and exclusionary political frameworks. Normativity has been replaced with criticism and political correctness, both of which impede the ability to establish a collective tradition.

For example, the national significance of Jerusalem Day has been dwindling in recent years. If we look at the ceremony's key components, we will discover that the identity of the people taking part in the annual flag march is associated with only one side of the political map because of the sensitive nature of this issue. The ceremony's target audience no longer includes all Israeli citizens. Instead, it seems to target only a certain part of the public. Lastly, only one side of the political map relates to the content and participates in the ceremony.

Another important case study is Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day. Years after the terrible murder, many ascribe a very narrow political meaning to the rally. Attempts to have speakers from both ends of the political spectrum at the rally have failed, and the identity of the participants remains more-or-less homogenous. Moreover, the Religious Zionism movement started the tradition of marking the death of the biblical Rachel ("Rachel Imenu," "Our Mother Rachel") on the same day as Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day (the 12th of Heshvan), and the religious significance of this day overshadows its meaning as a national day of remembrance. This causes further division, affecting the political affiliation of the ceremonies' target audience, participants, and the public's ability to connect with

the content. Those who do not agree with Rabin's political path feel they have no place in the tradition of honoring his memory. Major political figures choose not to attend the state ceremonies, reaffirming their politicized nature. Messages about tolerance, listening, the dangers of sedition and the safeguarding of democracy are pushed farther and farther from discourse and from public awareness.

We believe that to reinforce the state's Jewish identity and to uphold statist values, the state must get involved and imbue these well-known ceremonies with a new, statist meaning without redefining them or changing the main rationale behind them. To this end, the state must work hand in hand with non-political parties and listen to the voices of its diverse body of citizens. We wish to find creative, attentive and statism-aligned ways to return the State of Israel to its rightful place in ceremonies and national days that have gradually been dissociated from it.

Our solution

These proposals aim to use symbols and ceremonies to bring statist values back into the spotlight.

1. The official website of The National Symbols Project: over the 74 years of Israel's existence as an independent state, it has accumulated many symbols—some formally recognized, some validated by the power of traditions and customs. Alongside its official symbols, like the Menorah, the national anthem, and the Israeli flag, there are publically accepted symbols like the national flower and the national bird. However, there is currently no official online resource where people can view all the symbols and learn more about their meaning. This is a waste of potential and an opportunity to create a statist language that covers nature, man and culture. We propose creating a new online platform that will achieve two interconnected goals:

    o Establish a shared national language that recognizes the power of symbols and encourages learners to discover their meaning through educational content.

    o Engage the public by calling for artists to propose evocative and thoughtful interpretations for existing symbols, thus encouraging individuals to relate to the symbols of their country and culture. By creating this online resource, the government would prove its willingness to claim sovereignty over the state's identity.

    o This proposal is inspired by a similar project in Singapore. To learn more, visit https://www.sg/1959/about-the-national-symbols.

2. Written announcements issued by the state on national days of celebration and mourning: The practice of issuing an "order of the day" has long been used by the IDF and the Ministry of Education. We propose expanding this idea to engage the general public. Nowadays, messages travel quickly on social and traditional media. Although freedom of expression is a blessing, it comes with concerning side effects in the form of populism, a cheapening of discourse, and devaluation of the written word. The announcements we propose are a way to address these concerns by respectfully and accurately conveying unifying

messages. Issued on behalf of the Minister of Culture, the announcements will be published by the traditional press (through the government's advertising agency) and posted on social media and on a dedicated website. The announcements will be designed and posted as uneditable files. These messages will establish a "statist culture," expressing the meaning of each holiday or national day and communicating it to the public.

3. An icon for each national day: symbols are compact visual packages that have the power to forge connections between history and culture. This is the reason so much attention has been paid to Israeli postage stamps and currency. The criticism and heated debates that surrounded bill designs in Israel show how important it is for communities to see themselves in these symbols. This is doubly true these days. Visual icons and symbols are, and always have been, central to our culture. In addition to the official website for the state's symbols, we propose an educational project to disseminate knowledge about the symbols and icons of Israel's holidays and special days. Our aim is to make the symbols and icons instantly recognizable by everyone and associate them with the values of the relevant holiday.

   - The symbol project will allow schools to delve deeper into the practices and customs behind the holidays and express the diverse traditions surrounding each special day.
   - The project will take the form of a competition between all pupils in Israel's formal and informal education systems. Pupils will be invited to propose symbols as they learn the deeper meaning of each special day and the traditions and customs that surround it.
   - The aim of this project is to make the cultural wealth of Israel's diverse communities more accessible to the public and to encourage the public to be more open to learning about them. The program will teach people about themselves and about their peers. It will enable them to find their own stories in the Israeli public sphere.
   - Recently, much criticism has been levied against the decision to remove the humanities from the list of mandatory matriculation subjects. This criticism stems from concerns that these subjects are losing their appeal in the eyes of high school students. At a time like this, encouraging schools to delve deeper into holidays and their cultural legacy would be a step toward restoring the balance and a clear statement for the Ministry of Education to make.

Transportation Services on Shabbat

"Here is a well-known fact that has me puzzled
If someone's born unlucky in these parts
They don't say, "oy, what a shlimazl"
They say, "my friend, looks like you've missed the bus"

And so it seems that luck
is not a camel, nor a truck

Of all the things it could have been, I reason thus:
it would appear that fortune is a bus"

Nathan Alterman

The problem

Although there are various solutions and proposals in the sphere of public transportation in general and on the topic of public transportation on Shabbat in particular (including some independent local initiatives), none of them consider the political complexity of having to meet the needs of Israel's diverse population. The lack of adequate public transportation on Shabbat is the general problem, but at the root of it is a slightly different issue. Despite the public's strong support for transportation solutions on Shabbat, the government seems unable to formulate a policy proposal that would reduce the resistance of the opposing minority—the ultra-Orthodox community.

Background

The practices and traditions surrounding Shabbat pose fundamental questions about Jewishness and the state for Israel. This matter is unique because it concerns not only religious practices, but also a cornerstone of Jewish identity and the shape of our national weekly rest day. Different Jewish communities have different ways of marking the Shabbat. Religious, ultra-Orthodox, secular, and traditional Jewish communities and families each have their own traditions and customs.

Shabbat-related legislation covers three broad topics: (1) employing or hiring Jewish workers on Shabbat: this is covered in the Hours of Work and Rest Law, which prohibits employers from making Jews work on Shabbat unless this is necessary for security reasons or for preventing disruptions to essential public services, as determined by the minister responsible for hours of work and rest; (2) opening and closing businesses on Shabbat: this is governed by the Municipality Ordinance, which states municipalities have the authority to pass municipal bylaws that order businesses to open or close; and (3) (public) transportation on Shabbat: this is governed by the Transportation Ordinance and the Transportation Regulations.

These matters are governed by different authorities at different levels of the system. The prohibition on employing Jewish workers on Shabbat is a civil rights matter and the responsibility of a national authority, whereas the prohibition against opening businesses

on Shabbat is under the purview of local authorities, and they are the ones who enforce it. However, the Minister of Interior has to approve all bylaws related to this issue, so the state government has the final say.

The broad issue of Shabbat includes another topic: how public spaces change on Shabbat. This topic is not covered in legislation. Rather, it results from various practices. In all Jewish localities (except Haifa and Eilat), public transportation does not run on Shabbat. In religious and ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, some streets are pedestrianized on Shabbat. The question of whether businesses can open on Shabbat applies to more than privately-owned establishments. It includes museums, community centers, and the leisure and culture sectors.

Although this is a complex topic in regulatory terms, the issue of public transportation on Shabbat is relatively distinct. However, it is tightly bound with a much broader policy issue: Israel's overarching transportation policy. In recent years, Israel has been facing a severe transportation crisis, with daily commutes getting significantly longer for everyone—whether they use public transportation or private vehicles. To address this problem, Israeli governments have tried promoting several major regulatory changes, the main one being the decision to decentralize the (currently extremely centralized) public transportation sector by establishing local metropolitan authorities. Despite being supported by both the Ministry of Finance and transportation experts, the reform failed. One of the reasons for the failure was resistance from ultra-Orthodox members of Knesset, who feared that the Gush Dan Metropolitan Authority would run public transportation on Shabbat in Bnei Brak, a city with an overwhelming ultra-Orthodox majority. It follows that the topic of public transportation on Shabbat affects decision-making processes on broader transportation policies.

Our solution

We propose to adopt the principles of subsidiarity and vertical decentralization, which state that public policy issues should be the responsibility of the smallest and most local democratic authority available.

When it comes to state–religion relations and Israel's Jewish identity, we believe decisions should be made by local authorities as much as possible. Our reasoning for this is that the local authority is the smallest democratically-elected unit of government. It is based on local political arrangements, it represents different communities and reflects the urban space where local populations reside. However, because transportation also has national and regional aspects, there are broader issues that must be discussed on a national level.

We therefore believe that decisions concerning public transportation on Shabbat should be made on three levels: local, regional/metropolitan, and national. Authorities on each level should decide how to approach public transportation on Shabbat within their jurisdiction.

A local authority should decide the frequency and routes of public transportation within its jurisdiction in accordance with the needs and wants of the local communities; a metropolitan/regional authority should make similar decisions concerning intercity transportation. Authorities should allow minorities (including geographic and religious minorities, as well as others) to exercise their right to oppose and influence any decision concerning public transportation on Shabbat in their area. This includes buses, light rail and underground services running or stopping near people's places of residence.

Decisions made on the national level will include intercity routes and railway operations. We propose switching public transportation services to "Shabbat mode" during Shabbat, meaning services will run at reduced capacity, and some routes will be changed. We also propose that authorities be obligated by law to be considerate toward the residents of neighborhoods and towns where the vast majority of the population opposes public transportation on Shabbat in their area. Here too, local or metropolitan/regional authorities will have the right to oppose public transportation services passing through their jurisdictions or stopping there on Shabbat.

Tish'a Be'Av

"Is there anything more terrible than an entire nation losing its liberty, its ability to develop its selfhood, its culture, its tradition, its ideals?"

Haim Arlosoroff

The problem

In today's national mindset, the meaning of Tish'a Be'Av is mostly religious. The vast majority of non-religious Israelis who attended secular schools do not acknowledge this day or recognize its meaning. The main reason for this that Tish'a Be'Av occurs during the summer holidays and gets no mention in the school curricula. Another reason is that Tish'a Be'Av is mostly notable for its restrictions (e.g., certain businesses having to close), which overshadow the discussion of its identity-building significance and deeper meaning.

However, Tish'a Be'Av marks a formative event in the history of the Jewish people. Forgetting it means forgetting our past. To clarify, by "our past" we mean more than the destruction of the First and Second Temples; the past we are referring to holds important lessons about the loss of liberty, about multiculturalism, and about accepting those who are different from us. Tish'a Be'Av is about more than baseless hatred (Sin'at Chinam), as the public tends to view it. It is a day that enables us to look at the multiple crises interspersed throughout Jewish history and remember the lessons we can learn from them.

Our solution

We believe that despite the restrictions this day imposes, we must bring the identity issues at the core of Tish'a Be'Av back into the public sphere. It is a formative step on

the path toward healing Israeli society and bringing its different factions closer to harmony. It is a step toward balance—a step begging to be taken. In this case, we wish to shift the balance. We aim to do this not by addressing barriers, (seeing as these are virtually nonexistent), but by bringing to the forefront the deep values at the heart of existing practices. Our goal is to strengthen and clarify our country's Jewish identity, in all its diverse aspects.

How do we get people interested in Tish'a Be'Av?	→	We transform it into a day of Israeli culture!	→	How do we do that?	→	We use cultural institutions	→	So what's the plan?

The plan

We propose to focus on two possible areas/tracks:

- The historical aspect
- "Breaking down the walls" and overcoming tribal barriers in Israel

The historical aspect

- Recruiting the Israel Nature and Parks Authority to offer family-friendly guided tours of heritage sites

This idea is practical and can be implemented quickly because the Nature and Parks Authority is controlled by the government and bound by Israeli law. The Nature and Parks Authority is in charge of Israel's major heritage sites. Tours of these sites can help the public discover the lesser known aspects of Israeli heritage, which would help spark discussions about our shared past. These tours could touch on different aspects of Jewish history and include stories about the destruction of the Temples and the Jewish people's years'-long path toward recovery. They can also include fascinating talks by historians, plays, and immersive experiences inspired by these events.

We should note here that the collaboration with the Nature and Parks Authority would be especially beneficial because Tish'a Be'Av occurs during the summer holidays, when outdoor activities are possible. While the school system cannot be an active participant in the effort to teach young people about the day's significance, the holidays are a time when parents are on the lookout for family-friendly activities. These types of activities can be very attractive for families, even if they are held after dark and marketed as "night tours" or "night hikes". Importantly, these activities must be free or subsidized to be accessible to the general public.

- Emphasizing modern history – inspired by crisis points and recovery periods in the history of the Jewish people

We recommend this framing because our history is more relatable to the Israeli public. If we start from the history, people can reach the conclusions about contemporary issues on their own. We propose holding various events that revolve around our historical path of ruin and recovery: outdoor guided tours, museum tours, lectures, roundtable discussions, writing workshops and Q&As with authors. The day's theme is downfall and ruin in history. A similar event has been organized once before by the Zalman Shazar Center in Jerusalem. We propose expanding this model to all of Israel, with the necessary adaptations.

"Breaking down the walls" and overcoming tribal barriers in Israel

- Calls for culture venues to open on Tish'a Be'Av and hold themed days of public self-reflection revolving about a different theme each year

Currently, some private organizations already hold discussions and other cultural events on the eve of Tish'a Be'Av. However, the existing events lack a unifying theme that ties them together.

We propose that the Ministry of Culture and Sport issue a call for museums and public cultural venues to organize special events inspired by the messages of Tish'a Be'Av. The events can revolve around a different theme each year. For example, the theme for Tish'a Be'Av 5783 (2023) can be "geographic periphery." The call can be sent out to museums and other venues, inviting them to organize activities that would spotlight the problems, raise solutions and start discussions around the chosen topic. Other themes can be the Aliyot (major waves of Jewish immigration to Israel), Israel and the diaspora, the wars of Israel, social polarization, etc.

The aim of these events is to start a collective process of critical self-reflection. Having the whole country engaged with one theme will create a unifying sense of commitment to social and state issues at the top of the pubic agenda. Such a move can mobilize the public and encourage people to think about fundamental issues under a single overarching annual theme. The public can engage with this theme through workshops, roundtable discussions, exhibitions, films, etc.

- The Social Open Houses project: redefining Tish'a Be'Av as a day when we take down the social barriers we build around ourselves

To express our vision of Tish'a Be'Av as a day for breaking down barriers between us and other people instead of offending those who are different from us, we propose a national project in which people open their homes and hold tours and roundtable discussions. Many cities hold Open Houses festivals to celebrate

architecture. We propose an Open Houses festival that focuses on the houses' residents: their culture, their stories. This is an opportunity for opening up dialogue and bringing people closer together.

This project is about getting to know one another a little differently through people's stories. We believe this project can help us fight stigmatization and stereotyping, and the format can be suitable for engaging a wide audience.

Potential partners
- Zalman Shazar Center
- The Nature and Parks Authority
- Yad Ben Zvi
- Public Museums

Issues Related to Burial Laws and Practices

"Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome."
Itzhak Ozimov (Isaac Asimov)

The problem
The issue of human burial in Israel is one of the most complex topics we have had to tackle. In line with its longstanding Jewish tradition of honoring the deceased, Israel is one of the only countries in the world to offer burial services for free. Despite the importance of this value, the way burial services are handled in Israel seems to indicate that the state has abdicated all responsibility on this topic. The sphere of burial services has been given over to dozens if not hundreds of private religious organizations that operate unsupervised, with no standardization or coordination. Most notably, they are under no requirement to demonstrate their commitment or accountability toward the Israeli citizen. Moreover, solutions for persons who are not formally recognized as Jewish according to Halakhic laws are limited and often nonexistent. The burial companies' conduct in such cases creates alienation instead of unity.

These organizations factor into people's lives at a highly sensitive time—after they have lost a loved one. The families of the deceased often find themselves helpless, unable to understand what they need to do or what is happening. In these crucial moments, they find themselves at the mercy of a religious establishment they did not choose and whose authority they do not recognize. Often, this religious establishment does not speak the same language as they do, and when their rights are violated, they do not know where to go for help. There is no better example of statelessness than the burial system in Israel. The interaction with the religious establishment on matters concerning burial is a point of friction for 95% of Israeli families.

Such big, convoluted challenges require a system-wide reform. We propose establishing a national burial authority to enforce uniform standards on all the organizations operating in this field, thus creating organizational order, emphasizing the

value of service orientation and putting the state back in charge of the situation. This conclusion is supported by The State Comptroller's 2020 Annual Audit Report, which included a recommendation for a new Burial Services Law. The law proposed in the report aimed to cover all the components of Israel's burial service system. We should stress that we are not proponents of centralization in this field. Rather, we wish to put the state back in its rightful place as the highest authority on burial in Israel.

However, until this happens, we would like to focus on several steps that can be taken now to transform points of friction into opportunities for dialogue. We will touch on four issues:

1. Multiplicity of organizations
2. No preliminary information available to families of the deceased
3. No civil burial options in the Jerusalem area
4. Standardizing the burial of non-Jewish soldiers

Until a more comprehensive solution is in place, addressing these specific issues would be incredibly helpful to many people who encounter difficulties when seeking burial services.

Current challenges and proposed solutions –

Challenge 1: multiplicity of organizations
The normative framework for burial services in Israel is based on the following laws and regulations:

1. The Right to Alternative Civil Burial Act, 1996, and the Right to Alternative Civil Burial Regulations (Licensing Corporations for Burial Matters and Determining Burial Procedures), 1998. Together, the act and the regulations govern civil burial services in Israel.
2. National Insurance Regulations (Burial Fees), 1976. These regulations determine the burial fees paid for by national insurance.
3. The Jewish Religious Services Regulations (Burial Companies), 1966, according to which, burials must be conducted by licensed organizations only.

There are six government authorities that govern various aspects of the burial services offered in Israel:

1. The head of the Burial Directorate at The Ministry of Religious Services;
2. The Ministry of Finance, which sets the budget for developing cemeteries;
3. The Ministry of Interior, in charge of the National Outline Plan for Cemeteries (via The Israel Planning Administration), the registry of deceased persons, and death certificates;
4. The Israel Land Authority, in charge of allocating land for developing cemeteries;
5. The National Insurance Institute, which pays burial fees to the burial companies;
6. The district health bureaus, which operate under the Ministry of Health and grant burial licenses.

To make the system even more complex, there are roughly 600 burial companies currently active in Israel (including Hevrot Kadisha burial companies, religious councils

and municipal corporations). These companies run ~1,200 cemeteries. Each burial service company is licensed by the Ministry of Religious Services and is required to renew its license every few years. The State Comptroller mapped this convoluted, disorganized system very well in a chart included in the 2020 audit report:

Such a large number of bodies involved means the burial sector is chaotic and confusing to navigate, with differences in policy between organizations often causing friction. Moreover, some organizations end up with overlapping responsibilities while some responsibilities are not taken up by anyone as a result of conflicting interpretations and ambiguous wordings in the legislation. The result is administrative deficiencies, wasted resources, regulatory inefficiency and very slow response times. Furthermore, the large number of actors and the absence of state leadership mean there is currently no single burial standard in Israel. A person who has just lost a loved one and needs to arrange the burial as quickly as possible has no flow chart to guide them through the process, as creating such a flowchart would be impossible with the convoluted system we have in place today. What is the method for human burial in Israel? Which practices are used in Israel, and which are not? Each organization has its own standards and practices. For instance, the organization in charge of burial in Beit El bears no similarity to the one in charge of burial in Tel Aviv or in Netivot.

Our solution

We propose a uniform national procedure for burial and for processing the deceased. This mainly entails ensuring that all the organizations and authorities in charge of burial in Israel comply with a single standard. The first step toward this standardization is creating a single burial procedure that all relevant organizations must follow as they support a deceased's family. The most efficient way to handle the standardization process is to have an overarching authority responsible for burial services. Acting on behalf of the Ministry of Religious Services, this authority should devise clear procedures that all organizations must follow to obtain or renew their licenses.

Challenge 2: no information available to families who have just lost a loved one

A second problem resulting directly from burial being handled by so many organizations is poor quality of service. With so many actors and no standardization, the burial process is complex, slow and very hard to navigate. This issue is too broad to cover in this document, but the main problem is the absence of an overarching authority. We therefore wish to propose one practical step that, if implemented, can help alleviate the difficulties families currently face when seeking burial services for their loved ones.

When a person dies, their family has to take care of the burial very quickly. In this disorienting and difficult moment, the deceased's family has no official document or overarching organization to guide them through such simple-yet-complicated questions as: which expenses does the family have to cover? Which expenses are organizations not allowed to ask the family to cover? What are the family's rights? What are the procedures for the burial and the Shiv'a (the Jewish mourning period)? Should a son help

carry his father coffin? What does the family need to know? Who should they contact? What are the customs revolving around burial in Israeli soil? These questions have no formal answers, with families often discovering vital information in the middle of the funeral or even after, during the Shiv'a.

Our solution

We propose standardizing the burial rules and making them more accessible by creating an official document or a simple app or website. This resource can then be shared with families by hospital staff, police and other personnel they interact with after losing a loved one. Various burial companies have their own websites, but there is no one official resource presenting all the relevant information in an accessible manner. This resource will include everything a family needs to know in the first few days after losing a loved one. Having such a guide will help give families some clarity in difficult times. It is necessary to take this step in addition to the standardization process proposed in the previous section.

A single official document or website can
- Help standardize burial services and synchronize the companies.
- Help the families of deceased persons prepare for what they need to do in the first few days—a time when families have to make critical decisions about how and where their loved one will be buried.
- Help transform a point of friction where many families feel helpless and frustrated into a moment of Jewish cohesion, when families can feel supported and embraced by their people. A moment like this could create meaning and strengthen Israeli identity.

We recommend that the resource contain one uniform explanation of all the procedures—everything the family has to do and everything the burial companies have to do. This should include answers to the following questions:
1. Which expenses does the family have to cover? Which expenses are organizations not allowed to ask the family to cover?
2. What are the family's rights?
3. What are the procedures for the burial and the Shiv'a?
4. Which professional emotional support services (e.g., counseling and psychotherapy) can the family access?
5. What does the family need to know? Who should they contact?

When a person dies, this resource can be shared with families by hospital staff, care homes, Magen David Adom personnel or the police.

*** Please note that the IDF has its own procedures for families dealing with loss, and we can learn much from them and adapt them for civilian use.

Challenge 3: no civil burial options in the Jerusalem area

The fact that burial is handled as a purely religious proceeding in Israel creates many problems for those who are not considered Jewish according to Halakhic law as well as

for those who do not desire a religious burial. There are very few options for such people. There are only 33 civil cemeteries in Israel, with 16 of them only serving the residents of their own localities, 14 serving their localities and nearby towns, and 3 more serving everyone regardless of their place of residence. These three are in Be'er Sheva, Giv'at Brenner, and Emek Hefer.

This reality is very challenging for many. One place with no civil burial options located at a reasonable distance is Jerusalem. The State Comptroller even dedicated an entire chapter of the 2020 audit report to this topic. Jerusalem does not have a single civil cemetery. Cemeteries in nearby localities do serve Jerusalem locals. The result is an absurd situation. If a family wants to hold a civil burial ceremony for a loved one who lived in Jerusalem, they must bury them in one of the three cemeteries that serve the whole country: in Be'er Sheva, Giv'at Brenner, or Emek Hefer. This situation and the rigidity regarding places of burial strengthens people's sense that they are being discriminated against and that people's right to be buried in accordance with their beliefs is being violated.

Our solution

We recommend expanding the areas serviced by existing civil cemeteries, especially in the Jerusalem area. This step will reduce the coercion experienced by those who wish to exercise the right to a civil burial—a right the Ministry of Religious Services is tasked with protecting.

Ma'ale Adumim has a civil cemetery run by the local municipal corporation. This cemetery serves only the people of Ma'ale Adumim and a few other localities (Kfar Adumim, Kedar, Nofei Prat, Alon, Almon, Geva Binyamin, and Mitzpe Yeriho). We propose allowing Jerusalem residents to be buried there as well.

Should a more significant step to expand civil burial options be possible or desirable, we propose that the Ministry for Religious Services declare all civil cemeteries regional. This way, non-locals can be buried there too. Such a declaration could significantly increase the quality and accessibility of Israel's burial services, allowing families more choice.

Challenge 4: standardizing the burial of non-Jewish soldiers in military cemeteries

The last challenge we wish to address is the issue of burying gentile soldiers in military cemeteries, including soldiers whose Jewishness is in question or those who had been in the midst of Giyur (the process of converting to Judaism). Military cemeteries are under the purview of the Ministry of Defense.

This issue has been discussed many times before. Israel's first Chief Military Rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, was the first to raise it. It was again brought to the public's attention after Rabbi Israel Weiss stepped into the role. Weiss had to address the problem in the wake of the Aliyah from the former USSR in the early 1990s, which significantly increased the number of soldiers whose Jewishness was in question.

After consulting with Rabbis Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Mordechai Eliyahu, and Ovadia Yosef zt"l, Rabbi Weiss proposed to designate burial plots at the center of each military cemetery for non-Jewish fallen soldiers. The next proposal was made by Rabbi Rafi Peretz, who said a gentile soldier should be buried 4 cubits away from Jewish soldiers in the same cemetery.

This plan proved impossible to implement, and in 2017 it was decided to bury gentile soldiers 2 meters away from the last grave in a row of Jewish fallen soldiers. This decision was met with a backlash, which led to a new plan, according to which non-Jewish fallen soldiers were to be buried 20 cm deeper than the other soldiers in the same row, with additional partitions made of metal or blocks of other material fitted around their coffins. This plan remains unchallenged, and we support it.

However, each new Chief Military Rabbi may change the policy depending on the Halakhic-Rabbinical movement he is affiliated with. This causes instability and frequent policy changes.

Our solution
We recommend finding a permanent solution accepted by all. To do so, we recommend consulting all relevant parties (the Ministry of Defense, the Military Rabbinate, local rabbis, etc.) and making the most recent plan the official permanent regulation by having the IDF's high command issue an order stating that non-Jewish soldiers are to be buried alongside Jewish soldiers but 20 cm deeper and with additional partitions around their coffins. This will prevent the frequent disputes around religion and the state, reducing the public antagonism the topic evokes. These are the steps we propose:
- Gather all the stakeholders and get them to agree on a permanent solution. Reexamine the existing regulations and decide whether this is the solution most respectful toward non-Jewish soldiers.
- Standardize the agreed-upon solution and prevent future changes by having high command issue an order.

Difficulties in implementation
The procedure we wish to make permanent is already implemented today. Reopening the discussion around it and asking to make it permanent may cause friction and further polarization, which goes against the benefit we wish to achieve.

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In conclusion of this chapter, we wish to stress once again the need to establish a national burial authority and implement a deep structural change to how burial services are provided in Israel. We hold that this is necessary to resolve the problems with the current system. This change will require long-term planning and a comprehensive reform. This reform will address the big questions around burial density, economic issues, service quality, and the general organizational structure of the burial service complex. However, we also believe that the smaller-scale solutions we proposed will benefit as

many groups as possible within Israel's population. These changes are necessary in the interim, before a full reform is implemented.

Non-Jewish Holidays Observed During the 2021–2022 School Year

Religion	Days	Date	Comments
Muslim holidays			
Prophet Muhammad's birthday	1	October 19, 2021	(subject to change)*
Eid al-Fitr	3	April 30, 2022–May 2, 2022	(subject to change)*
Eid al-Adha	4	July 7, 2022–July 10, 2022	(subject to change)*
Muharram	1	July 30, 2022	(subject to change)*
Druze holidays			
Eid al-Adha	4	July 7, 2022–July 10, 2022	(subject to change)*
Holiday of the Prophet al-Khader	1	January 25, 2022	
Holiday of the Prophet Shu'ayb	4	May 25, 2022–May 28, 2022	
Holiday of the Prophet Sabalan	1	September 10, 2022	
Christian holidays (Catholic and Protestant)			
Christmas	2	Dec 25, 2022–Dec 26, 2022	
New Year's Day	1	January 1, 2022	
Epiphany	1	January 6, 2022	
Good Friday	1	April 2, 2022	
Easter	2	April 4, 2022–April 5, 2022	
Ascension Day	1	May 13, 2022	
Pentecost	2	May 23, 2022–May 24, 2022	
Christian holidays (Orthodox)			
Christmas	2	Jan 7, 2022–Jan 8, 2022	
New Year's Day	1	January 14, 2022	
Epiphany	1	January 19, 2022	
Good Friday	1	April 30, 2022	
Ascension Day	1	June 10, 2022	
Pentecost	2	June 20, 2022–June 21, 2022	