# LIFE IN THE CENTER

A New Israeli paradigm

The One Hundred Initiative is a politically independent civil society organization that seeks to address the crises facing Israeli politics and society by advancing a comprehensive centrist agenda that meets the needs of our present moment. The initiative is a partnership between senior figures from Israel's tech industry, business sector, public sector and third sector, and it seeks to be a home for fresh ideas, policies and leadership that will shape a new Israeli paradigm.

The One Hundred Initiative's Manor Center is a research, policy and impact organization working to enhance social cohesion and government efficiency. Manor develops centrist policy proposals and ideas, working to effect change in government, civil society, media and the legal system.

Authors: Polly Bronstein, Tehila Friedman, Dr. Reut Fingher-Dasberg, Dr. Michal Tabibian Mizrahi, Ari Shavit, Rotem Oreg, Eden Mendlovic, Amichai Danino, Leeon Boujo.

# 1. Why Did This Document Need Writing and How Should it be Read?

Israel is a successful and flourishing state, with unparalleled achievements that inspire people from around the world. But it is also facing enormous domestic and international challenges. We are trapped in a social and political crisis that is impacting its resilience and its ability to maintain the promise of a future for the Zionist project. At the time of writing, Israel is gearing up for a fifth (!) round of elections in three and a half years – less than one full term.

The Israeli political system is in such a profound, self-inflicted crisis that has turned away from addressing the reality of daily life in the country and the unprecedented challenges facing us. Instead, our elected representatives engage in internal squabbles and struggle to see the good of the country. The social cohesion crisis and the lack of a functioning government place our personal security at risk, along with our ability to offer a collective solution to our security, economic, planning and infrastructure challenges. The conflict between the rival political camps creates a political impasse and leaves a gaping hole in the center of Israeli public life. Now is the time to set our internal divisions and personal interests to one side, and to work together for the benefit of the state and its citizens.

The ideological right and left are unable to provide solutions to the crisis currently engulfing Israel (and much of the world). They represent tired paradigms, overly simplistic and selective, and ill-equipped for the scale and complexity of the challenges facing us. This is in part because they fail to address the deep and bitter divisions over the fundamental purpose of democracy. We are being held to ransom by political extremes that on the one side are unwilling to accept any restrictions on the principle of "majority rule" and that are constantly delegitimizing and undermining institutions designed to act as a counterweight to the power of the majority, and on the other side are unwilling to accept the principle of safeguarding the national identity as a legitimate democratic interest.

We believe that a political center with a clear ideological and strategic structure can act as the catalyst to propel Israel out of the crisis, as a pragmatic paradigm able to accept the complexities and contradictions that define Israeli society and politics. The center accepts the tensions rooted in ideology and identity as a natural and even important part of national and public life and is dedicated to identifying practical solutions to the bedrock issues affecting the state.

This document seeks to propose an ideological paradigm that is able to address the deep rift in the middle of the political map, and to provide a definitive and contemporary Israeli ethos that is able to appeal to the broadest possible cross-section of Israeli society.

To ensure the final document is as engaging and easy to read as possible, we have chosen to avoid the use of references and footnotes, so this is our opportunity to cite the sources we consulted in the various chapters: Professor William James, Dr. Micah Goodman, professors Yedidia Stern, Yuli Tamir and Meir Buzaglo, and Elad Nahshon.

## 2. The Change Government – "For Better…"

The most recent Israeli government caught everyone by surprise: At the highest peak of a seemingly intractable political crisis, people from right and left, Arabs and Jews, came together to prevent a fifth successive round of elections and to pass a state budget. In its single year in power, this government registered a string of noteworthy achievements: restoring quiet to Israel's south and regaining a deterrent over Hamas, a reduction of 40 percent in crime in the Arab community, 8.2 percent economic growth, reduction of unemployment to 2.8 percent, increasing the net income for working families and raising soldiers' salaries by 50 percent, expansion of equality legislation for people with disabilities, opening the kashrut industry to competition and much more besides.

For the first time in the history of the State of Israel, an Arab party formed part of the governing coalition.

Sweeping reforms on bread-and-butter issues including the economy, agriculture, religion and state, Arab society and transportation were brought to the table and discussed extensively, seeking bold change to the longstanding status quo. Foreign relations, first and foremost with the United States, also paved the way to a succession of diplomatic achievements.

Despite these successes and others, the government only ever received acclaim and legitimacy from half of the Israeli public. Relations between the opposition and coalition were toxic, and the opposition engaged in an aggressive campaign of delegitimacy against the government and its prime minister, who led it despite his party receiving only seven mandates in the Knesset elections and violating a commitment not to sit with the Arab parties in government. Matters of consensus that were critical for the security of the state, such as the Citizenship Law, US visa waiver and rights of combat soldiers in the IDF were sacrificed on the altar of delegitimization.

The members of the coalition came under extraordinary pressure from within their community- and identity-affiliatedbase, which upset the stability of the coalition. As soon as the budget was passed – an unequivocal and critical mission – the coalition began its deafening collapse, driven by several of its members. The political horseplay returned to center stage and disagreements led by increasingly extreme positions became the order of the day once more, taking the place of the consensus-building attempts to find common ground that typified the first few months of the government.

### 3. The Change Government – "…and for Worse"

The so-called "coalition of change" created an eclectic and disjointed government. The change government was an assortment of parties with different and often contradictory interests that came together without cogent ideological foundations or a coherent common narrative or credo. Despite tackling bread-and-butter issues, advancing public reforms and identifying solutions to the burning problems facing Israel, it was unable to effectively counter the accusations leveled at it by Netanyahu's bloc that the only thing that kept them together was "anyone but Bibi." The change government failed to invest sufficient efforts in promoting a single, unifying

Israeli story. It was unable to make its case to those in the general public who hadn't voted for it, that it was leading a new Israeli paradigm, one that was much greater than the prevailing exclusionary mood.

The change government did have a compelling story to tell – the ability to cooperate on specific areas of consensus even in the face of disagreement on the bigger picture. A story of pragmatism, social solidarity and togetherness as a value in its own right, about "both/and," attempts to bring right, left and center together in pursuit of shared goals. The government gradually began to introduce this story more and more, but was unable to obtain full buy-in for it among its members and to project it outward to the wider Israeli public, for three main reasons:

(1) This story was almost entirely stopped in its tracks by the opposition, which shaped an alternative narrative based on delegitimizing the involvement of Arab citizens in an Israeli governing coalition;

(2) The story lacked depth, breadth and long-term vision – it was perceived as an ad-hoc response to an existing political situation, at the heart of which stood Netanyahu;

(3) The change government also suffered from a perception of being an "Ashkenazi" government in which Mizrachi Jewish discourse was non-existent and which had no Mizrachi "stakeholder" – no party leader or individual who wielded veto power and for whom Mizrachi issues and Israel's periphery were red lines. Another large part of Israeli society, the ultra-Orthodox community, was not represented in or by the government. The government was unable to speak the language of traditional, observant and Mizrachi Jews, despite the prime minister himself being religious, and many of his ministers likewise.

Had the government and those leading it been aware and keen to address the issue, they could have compensated for the lack of Mizrachi and ultra-Orthodox representation by expending serious efforts on Israel's social periphery. To take a few examples, they could have scheduled more regular visits to development towns, invested in traditional and Mizrachi geography, culture and identity, engaging with a positive portrayal of

Mizrachi discourse, promoting people in the government with familiarity with the Mizrachi community and those working to advance social causes in Israel. Similarly, appointing professional figures to oversee the response and support for the ultra-Orthodox community.

Doing so would perhaps have reduced, even slightly, the rage of large parts of the public toward this government and introduced a sense that the change government was actively seeking to heal the rifts in Israeli society. This might have been one way to tackle the delegitimization operation being pushed by the opposition against the government.

## 4. The Process is No Less Important than the Product

Think about the members of the change government for a moment. When they established the government, to prevent fifth elections and pass a state budget, they committed to focusing on the bread-and-butter issues, on reconciliation and unity. In the first cabinet meeting he chaired, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said: "For this move to succeed, we must demonstrate ideological restraint and caution. We will focus on bread-and-butter issues; roads, public transportation, education, healthcare, the economy and national security, and by doing so we will maintain the stability of the government."

The members of the government assumed that an ability to get things done, a solid track record and results, speaking in a collective voice and reinforcing the national security position of the State of Israel would ultimately speak for themselves. It was not enough.

They discovered that the process is no less important than the product. Alongside the process, the members of the change government should have shaped a broader and more deliberate narrative around the existence of the government, setting out its legitimacy and providing a counterweight to the elitist image that stuck to it. The slogans were positive and even stirring, but

there was a space behind them that needed to be filled with a clear, inclusive and coherent broad-tent narrative that would swell its ranks. While the government was trying to explain and firmly establish the place of the Arab representatives in government, many in the Jewish community saw themselves being pushed aside. Social issues, some of which intersect with Israel's relationship with its socioeconomic and cultural periphery, may have found their way to the in-tray of the government and the Knesset, but they did not become a linchpin of the story the government was seeking to tell.

There is no substitute for a process. The change government and the political center in Israel need an ideological worldview with a Zionist compass: Jewish-statesmanlike-democratic, underpinned by shared core definitions, principles, values and practices, combining a positive ideological platform with a practical approach and creative solutions to fundamental concerns. It is not enough to say what doesn't work. It is incumbent upon the center to lay out a clear and unequivocal vision for what does work, and how to proceed in order to achieve it.

## 5. In Other Words: We Need a Clear Agenda, Described Using the Language of Today

Israel needs a broad, stable government, underpinned by clearly defined principles and possessing a shared narrative and ethos that is inclusive of every aspect of Israeli society, and one that enjoys public legitimacy. "Stable" – each of its constituent members are committed to the government and its success, with no space for extortion from individuals or parties; "underpinned by clearly defined principles" – the agreements between the different elements must be finalized at the coalition negotiation stage and will be binding; "possessing a shared narrative and ethos that is inclusive of every aspect of Israeli society" – the government will create and advance a new all-Israeli paradigm with the commitment of all those who sign up to it and their promise to make decisions and advance policy in its spirit; "enjoys public legitimacy" – each member of it declares before the elections that such a government is their preferred choice or that they would be willing to join such a government.

To ensure a clear and structured agenda, of a government in lockstep that strikes the right tone and employs the applicable terminology for the Israeli discourse and uses this to create practical solutions, we have to reach agreement on the language, the shared narrative, a cohesive program and message discipline among the different factions within the government in terms of both the process and the product. In the following chapters, we will introduce a few of the terms that could serve as the basis for an inclusive Israeli narrative.

## 6. Right and left – enough already

In the face of rapid changes in society, the right and the left both cling to outdated ideologies that are no longer fit for purpose. They refuse to accept that they too hold contradictory viewpoints, and worse still – they won't accept that their ideologies are no longer relevant.

This decision to pursue dogmatic principles may serve the outer edges of the political map and be exceptionally effective at generating headlines in the media – but it is untethered from our daily lives. These ideologies offer partial solutions while ignoring the challenges that lie outside their comfort zones.

These rival camps go by many names: right vs left, "only Bibi" vs "anyone but Bibi", religious vs statist, conservative vs liberal, red vs blue. The bottom line of this binary division remains the same: a dichotomy is unable to embrace the full complexity necessary to find solutions to the changes Israel is facing, and a dichotomy by definition demands that people choose a side and fight their neighbors and family members.

The center is the ideological space capable of bringing together different visions under one roof. The center is where policy can be drawn up, new ground broken, surprising connections forged and creative solutions found – vital if our country is to emerge from its current social, ideological and political quagmire.

The center offers pragmatism and a hybrid identity not out of weakness or surrender, but out of a realization that life is dynamic and complicated, and that the state can and

must grasp multiple values simultaneously, even if they occasionally contradict each other.

The circumstances change, the needs are many and diverse, the challenges complex, and therefore there is a constant need to stop and think about what is right now, what is right for who and what can be achieved, without getting bogged down in dogma that almost inevitably results in a lose-lose situation. The ideological compass that points to the center will always be the Zionist compass that rests on three values: Jewish-statesmanlike-democratic.

The center is not one fixed point on the spectrum, it is not a hostage to passing trends through which it is required to justify its existence. It is free to hold a range of values without any one of them bending the others to its will, and when it takes one decision inspired by one of thoes values, it can balance it out with another decision that is guided by another of those values.

## 7. "You're Boring Us"

This is only one of the accusations levelled at us when we say, "we're centrists." The Israeli center is perceived through many different lenses and stereotypes, all of which boil down to "superficial" and "wishy-washy".

In the best-case scenario, it is portrayed as a kind of midpoint between right and left, a compromise with no independent identity that exists only as a relative counterweight to the "serious ideologies." In the worst case, the Israeli center is seen as hollow, with no firm positions or ideological spine, attempting to be all things to all people and ultimately serving as little more than a "useful idiot."

This document attempts to set out the ideological and practical case for centrism and our belief that a binding narrative for the Israeli center was the missing piece in the puzzle for the success of the change government.

We also seek to persuade, because the political arena is not supposed to be of the kind that hosts gladiatorial combat for the entertainment of a riled-up crowd, or a zero-sum

contest with a winner and a loser. Policies of "screw the left" or tweets about "owning the right" are not political victories. Finding solutions, reaching agreements and making progress on issues of public interest are political victories. We are claiming that conflicts over identity are a natural part of political

life, but they are a means and not an end. A genuine and values-led identity does not form through underhanded political games, but rather in a stable, inclusive and accepting public sphere.

Last but not least, we will also make the case that there are few forces in Zionist politics with the longevity of centrism, that most of the leaders and ruling parties in Israel's history were guided by pragmatism and moderation, and that there has always been huge demand for centrist parties in Israel, with new parties sweeping millions of Israelis into their orbit and strong representation of centrist positions within right- and left-wing movements.

## 8. So What is the Center? Main Street or Middle Way? Or Perhaps the Way of Hillel the Elder? It All Depends Who You Ask.

Our claim is that there is a longstanding tradition over many years of an ideological center, and furthermore – that this position has demonstrated remarkable ideological consistency from its early days and through to the politics of the present day.

The center offers a balanced hybrid "both/and" solution. It is clear to everyone that this is not a perfect solution. It is always pushing us to examine our values, to see where we hold firm and where we can cede ground. The Greek philosopher Aristotle described the virtues as the "golden mean" between two extremes: courage, for example, was the golden mean between cowardice (a deficiency of courage) and recklessness (an excess of courage). Maimonides also adopted this approach, outlining it as the moral guide to ethical conduct.

The overarching rule of halakhic rulings in the sources of our forefathers is "these and those are the words of the living God, but the Law follows Beit Hillel". Put simply,

there is a recognition that on the ideological level, there are conflicting and contradictory values that are both worthy and both contain truth. On the practical level, when one is constrained to act – it should be done in accordance with the circumstances and shifting needs. That practical judgment does not eliminate recognition of the ideological complexity and the need to hold both "these and those."

There is no need to go all the way back to Aristotle, the Mishnah and Maimonides. Even in contemporary daily situations in which we are called upon to apply our values, we pursue moderation and balance: we live in a society that encourages diligence (and rejects laziness) but not overly so (we are wary of people who define themselves as perfectionists); we raise our children to be generous (and not stingy) yet teach them to stand up for themselves (and not allow themselves to be taken advantage of).

We value reciprocity in our interpersonal relationships too: a relationship based on endless demands without reciprocation is doomed to failure, while relationships based entirely on the needs of the other party are equally unhealthy.

A healthy lifestyle is a balanced one, not given to extremes – whether in diet, work, sport and hobbies or relationships. Finding a balance between our values does not equal giving up on them, or seeking always the exact midpoint between them, merely a recognition of the need for them to live side by side. Every time we are called upon to render an ethical judgment – between what is right, what is accepted, and what is desired – we find ourselves rejecting dogmatic and extreme positions and encourage moderation and balance.

## 9. So Who is Being Insincere Here?

In that case, we are forced to ponder why it is that on matters of policy and identity we rush to adopt dogmatic and inflexible answers, rejecting the opposing position entirely? Why is it that in the social and political spheres, we approach nuance, balance and "both/and" answers as evasive at best, or insincerity at worst?

The answer would appear to be obvious: it is choosing a dogmatic approach to politics and rejecting nuanced positions and "both/and" solutions out of hand that is insincere!

There is no reason for us not to take the same approach and apply the same methods to our politics that we apply to every other aspect of our lives.

## 10. What is the Center? A Brief Primer of Political Philosophy

The methodological cornerstone of the center – which posits that the world is complex and full of contradictions between competing values yet draws meaning and pride from this complexity – also determines its normative political philosophy.

The center is first and foremost a national-liberal ideology: It sees the state and the people as fundamental and meaningful building blocks in the daily lives of the individual and of the international order, but from a position in which the individual and their rights are at the heart of the system. The "national" element is a state that serves as a source of pride, solidarity and belonging, but is never destructive and under no circumstances nationalistic. The liberalism it offers celebrates an individual's freedom to live a life of their choosing but is not in thrall to cosmopolitanism or universalism at the expense of a loss of national or community identity.

Second, the center believes in fellowship: freedom within social obligation. Simultaneously promoting the cause of a free market and not seeking equality of outcome, the center sees its role as providing the greatest opportunity for social and economic mobility in the cause of equality of opportunity. Free competition must also be fair competition.

Third, the center sees the state as responsible for protecting the individual from a broad range of threats. The left, as a rule, gazes upon the globalized world with hopeful eyes – a place full of opportunity, with the state there to support individuals in making the most of it.The traditional right, on the other hand, sees the global arena as a dangerous place – and extrapolates from this that the role of the state is to protect its citizens from it.

The center adopts the protective stance of the right – but does not restrict itself purely to defending life, liberty and property, but also individual welfare, which is often threatened and at risk from globalization, technoloy, rising corporate power and climate change,

and it recognizes that the international community is the only arena in which to confront these threats.

## 11. Pragmatism

Having spoken about political philosophy, now let's get down to the nuts and bolts. Israel is made up of conflicting factions and groups. In recent years, we have been forced to choose between a "conservative" or "liberal" approach on almost every area of public policy.

The conservative determination to preserve the past in the face of a changing present and the progressive insistence on perpetual change in pursuit of a simplistic utopia both miss the mark. In pursuing ideological progress, they abandon the ongoing effort to improve the lives of those who live in this country – and create fertile ground for extremist discourse. We propose another lens through which to examine the leadership of the state: pragmatism.

So, what is pragmatism? First and foremost, the pragmatic approach prioritizes practical outcomes. It rejects abstract theories that dissipate upon contact with the real world and keeps its feet firmly on the ground.

The pragmatist believes in the power of individual thought to read its surroundings, to listen to what is really there in all its complexity – and to use that to solve problems. While the idealist lives in the realm of political theory and expends all their efforts on jealously guarding a rigid dogma, the pragmatist movs into the realm of practice, where ideology is important as a launchpad and not as a red line.

Make no mistake. Pragmatism is an ideological lodestar. But it is one that does not seek to eliminate the individual, the real-world conditions and, above all, the diversity of identities, traditions and virtues that form our society.

The pragmatic statesman holds their ideology and their values close but recognizes that reality is nuanced and full of contradictory values. They are aware that their truth may be flawed, and support thought and inquiry as precursors to action. A pragmatic statesman asks themselves what is right for that moment in time, engages with the situation as experienced by the individual citizen and frees up space for solutions that offer tangible and direct benefits to individual lives.

## 12. Mansour Abbas

Let's talk for a moment about Mansour Abbas. He is unquestionably the most intriguing figure in the change government. Abbas took one of the most revolutionary steps in recent Israeli political history – leading the first Arab party in history into a governing coalition. And not just any Arab party – an Islamist Arab party.

That is no mean feat. Abbas is a religious man of conservative values and firm principles that he has held throughout his political journey. As a conservative Muslim Arab, his decision to join a Zionist and largely liberal government does not cancel or change his political positions (nor those of his partners in government). We believe that Abbas demonstrated a grounded and practical approach in pursuit of a professional and objective political goal.

The groundbreaking ideological approach modeled by Abbas is rooted in pragmatism as ideology. In his view, it was right to put to one side the Arab leadership's traditional engagement in the big questions of national identity, to break away from the liberal discourse on rights that placed issues of political equality and identity at its core in favor of a social discourse based on the desire to strengthen communities within Arab society and to focus on addressing the burning social issues of the day, including rampant crime rates in the Arab sector, the housing crisis, inadequate infrastructure in local councils, employment of women and more. This is an approach that seeks to build a consensus around small steps rather than engaging in heated and ultimately ineffective arguments over big questions of identity. Abbas laid the pragmatic groundwork for the partnership which enabled him to join an unapologetically Zionist government while at the same time advancing the causes and opportunities that mattered to his voters in the

Arab community. This groundwork is also what enabled the centrist, right-wing and left-wing parties to cooperate with him.

This principle is the right one to steer a country as complex as Israel through the external and internal threats it faces. There is something comforting and realistic about this principle – it accepts the contradictions and prevents paralysis even where there are fundamental disagreements.

## 13. The Zionist Compass: A Jewish–Democratic Alliance

"A Jewish and democratic state" – this is how the State of Israel is officially described in Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation and Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, passed into law in 1994 and 1992 respectively. "Jewish-democratic" – that is how the center describes the character of the state. It is no coincidence that we wrote it the way we did – with a hyphen, without an "and". One of the most important principles for us in the center is an emphasis on the State of Israel as a Jewish-democratic state, and to uphold the balance between both sides of the equation: neither more democratic than Jewish, nor more Jewish than democratic. The goal of the center is to forge a values-driven strategic partnership between the forces that support the vision of a Jewish-democratic state.

Except this idea has fallen victim to an increasing tendency on the political left and right in Israel in recent years to dilute this commitment. The right is amping up the nationalism and conceding, diluting and steamrolling the democratic values in the interest of a political pact with the ultra-Orthodox and national-religious camp. The Zionist left is playing up the humanist, civic-democratic values and ceding ground on its national identity in the interest of a political pact with the Arab parties. And so the central ethos that has guided the country from the first days of the Zionist movement – that unique balance between an unwavering commitment to democratic values and its proud status as the sole nation-state of the Jewish people, with unique Jewish-Zionist characteristics – is being weakened and beginning to buckle, and with it goes our ability to confront trends of increasing nationalist extremism, internal security threats, post-

nationalism and post-Zionism, neoliberalism, corruption and the erosion of the authority of our democratic institutions.

So, what can we offer? A centrist identity, of moderate Israeli Zionists who believe in upholding and managing the inherent tension between Israel's democratic and Jewish identities, without seeking to settle it in favor of one over the other. This bloc can and should join forces and connect with moderate representatives within the Arab and ultra-Orthodox communities, but it stands as a camp of its own – cooperation should always remain cooperation and never dependence.

If we convert it into political practice, we believe there is a value in establishing a government based on moderate and Zionist parties. Zionist – seeking to preserve Israel as a Jewish-democratic state, without prioritizing one over the other, and moderate – able to accept other viewpoints without seeking to delegitimize them. It is right and true that such a coalition should include moderate non-Zionist parties (Arab, ultra-Orthodox or otherwise), so long as the government is not dependent upon them for its existence.

The values we are laying out throughout this document are all important and meaningful, as long as they are based on a strong and stable Jewish-democratic platform. Based on – not replacing. Because without this principle, without this Zionist platform, the State of Israel's continued existence will be in danger.

## 14. The "Shrinking the Conflict" Principle

In many aspects that impact us all, such as religion and state, security or social and economic rifts, we propose first and foremost to shrink the conflict, rather than attempt to seek a comprehensive solution. This approach is based on the realist's principle that partial and temporary solutions are also valuable, granting time to enlist public support even if there is no ideological agreement for the whole picture, but only for the specific concrete steps that are taken.

We borrowed the expression "shrinking the conflict" from Micah Goodman's book on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "Catch 67", and expanded it to apply to all the intractable

conflicts we find ourselves caught up in. It is our belief that often the road to a solution must travel through gradual processes. That is why most of our proposals do not necessarily seek to resolve the whole problem, but rather to minimize the existing tensions.

Goodman's example from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has given rise to one of the more intriguing initiatives of recent years – "Shrinking the Conflict". How can we take the underlying principle of this initiative and apply it in new directions?

According to Shrinking the Conflict, the central question and the first one that must be addressed is how to shrink the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a milestone to the ultimate goal – resolving the conflict – even if we are currently unable to say what form that resolution might take. That is, the initiative seeks to obtain agreements on various steps in the process, such as building a transportation network for the Palestinians with bridges and tunnels to minimize roadblocks and barriers and limit the constant reminders of occupation that Palestinians face whenever they travel from one city to the next. These are practical steps that neither the left nor the right ever entertained or introduced. The right, because it is overwhelmed with fear of any investment or territorial concession of any kind. The left, because it sees such moves as steps toward normalizing or finalizing the occupation. The result is paralysis that has a significant impact on individual lives.

We feel the same way on other issues. Take, for example, the religious divide in Israel. The existence of Israel as a Jewish state is the desire and the consensus of the majority of its citizens. But what it means to be a "Jewish state" and what form this should take – that remains one of the most bitterly contested dividing lines within Israeli society. It is a rift that extends far beyond questions of religion and state, or questions of Jewish law and individual liberty.

In an absurd and disappointing turn of events, the Judaism that could have served as a unifying force within the Jewish community in Israel, is instead the exact opposite, one of the greatest causes of anger and division. "The end of the Jewish state" was one of the most effective battle cries of the opposition during the "Change Government", and

differences of opinion on matters pertaining to the Jewish character of the state are among the more common causes of government collapse. Differences of opinion on questions regarding the nature of the Jewish state are among the most destructive to the ability of Israeli society to continue to function as a unified entity. As a consequence, the state is unwilling to take any decisions whatsoever on such matters.

On this subject, we propose applying the principle of shrinking the existing conflicts, taking it one step at a time, without engaging in constant running battles over the eventual vision of the Jewish character of the state, on which there is no agreement.

## 15. "Both/And"

Every individual, every society and every state holds numerous values concurrently, and these inevitably come into conflict or even contradict one another. The value of equality can sometimes contradict the value of liberty. Purity of arms – the value that soldiers should make use of their weapons only to fulfil their mission and solely to the extent required, doing their utmost to avoid civilian casualties – can come into conflict with the value of individual safety. Jewish values can contradict democratic values. In our daily lives, we make judgment calls between conflicting values on an almost daily basis (for example, lying to avoid hurting another person). None of which means we no longer hold that value – only that in a specific circumstance we ruled in favor of a different value.

In the life of the state, where different groups with a wide and divergent range of core values live together under one social contract, the ability to hold on to different values even in the face of tension becomes even more vital. When we examine Israeli political issues, whether on religion and state, society and the economy or peace and security, we must first consider the tension and the conflict between the different values and treat the issue with the sensitivity it demands.

We believe that Israel must adopt an ethical approach of "both/and," rather than conflicts of "either/or." We believe that Israel should hold many different values, even

when they contradict each other, and not enable any one value to become subservient to another. Here is why the "both/and" approach is the preferable one for Israel:

1. Israeli demographics are not conducive to subservience. No one group or camp in Israel has the majority to force its values on others. Any attempt at a zero-sum game is a pointless endeavor in which everyone loses and paralysis is prolonged. In the battle between conservativism and liberalism, democracy and Judaism, east and west, modernism and tradition, democracy as majority rule and democracy as individual liberty – the only way to a successful resolution is to agree on "both/and", and then to find solutions that are successful while respecting the values of both sides.

2. Israel has different population groups, each of which wants to see its core values reflected in the public discourse and the Israeli narrative. The religious want a public sphere that is kosher for Passover while the secular want the freedom to eat what they choose. The ultra-Orthodox want to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath and the secular want to be able to travel by public transport. The left wants an end to the occupation and a disengagement from the occupied territories while the right wants to uphold national security through control over the territory. There are Arab citizens who want to identify as Palestinians and there are Jews who want all the Arabs to prove loyalty to the country and identify as Israelis. More and more conflicting values and every group rightly asks that the concessions not be at their expense. Every part of Israeli society has the right to be represented in the state's core ethos, every group wishes to contribute its values to our shaerd story. "Both/and" recognizes our differences and celebrates them. It sees the contradictions as a source for a meaningful and authentic national existence and is not afraid to seek a balance between these values.

3. As Nobel Prize winning physicist Niels Bohr, "the opposite of a small truth is a falsehood, but the opposite of a profound truth may very well be another profound truth." The need to

juggle between different values within the "both/and" approach and not to concede one or the other is also a recognition that different groups in Israel hold different virtues, and that these too are of value to us. We need the conservative and liberal perspectives the same way we need both traditionally "female" and traditionally "male" virtues. It makes us more complete, more nuanced and wiser – together.

We are not trying to find a compromise between social groups, rather to find a balance between conflicting values. Our approach says that it is precisely striking a balance between two important values that enables us to maintain both values without ceding either one. It facilitates cognitive flexibility, understanding and acceptance, and most of all, a way out of the paralysis and battles enforced by the existing dichotomy. Our approach discourages looking for "who is right" or "what is right" in terms of values, but rather to recognize that every value and every decision also has a consequence.

## 16. Continuum Reasoning

How do we reach a conclusion through a "both/and" approach? We escape the binary "either/or" approach and begin to travel along the solution continuum.

When you examine deep-rooted issues in Israeli society with ideological conflicts at their core, instead of examining them through the lens of "this or that?" we ask, "to what extent?". When you ask, "to what extent?" the whole perspective shifts.

For example, instead of asking "should abortions be legal?" we would ask "at what stage and in which circumstances and who should get to decide?". Instead of asking, "should freelancers receive COVID-19 grants?" we would ask "to what extent should COVID-19 grants be given?". Instead of asking "should the judiciary be able to exert judicial oversight of the Knesset?" we would ask "on which matters, under which circumstances and through which process would the judiciary be able to apply judicial oversight?". The answer may range from "not at all" all the way to "fully," but the mere act of framing the question using continuum reasoning changes the tone of the debate.

Only through the perspective of a quantitative continuum can we identify creative solutions that take into account any existing tensions and balance them against each other, not through yes/no questions that leave space for one value alone. It is important to note that what we are talking about is not ethical relativism. Not all values carry equal weight and not every virtue is admissible. There are red lines and there are actions and ideas that should be beyond the pale. However, generally speaking, the debates that are taking place in Israeli society tend to engage in legitimate virtues. Even if these are opposing.

The discourse surrounding refugees coming to Israel in the wake of the war in Ukraine is a good example of where continuum reasoning could be applied. There are split opinions within the public sphere. On the one hand, it is incumbent upon us to maintain the Jewish majority in the State of Israel. Concerns that opening the floodgates without any form of restriction would ultimately harm the Jewish character of the State of Israel are rooted in an existing and understandable ethos. On the other hand, our Jewish and individual conscience expects us to act with a modicum of humanity, even from a Jewish perspective that compels us not to forget that "we too were once foreigners," and to keep in mind our own history as a Jewish people. The answer can be found in how we frame the question. Instead of asking "should we?" we should ask "how many" refugees? And "for how long?" That way, we will emerge with a clear and relevant answer that addresses our moral and ethical imperatives while still acting in our national interest.

## 17. Another Continuum: Masortim

We all know what a secular, religious or ultra-Orthodox man looks like. Secular – a man without a skullcap; national-religious – a man with a knitted skullcap; ultra-Orthodox – a man wearing a black skullcap and, in some cases, a fedora or shtreimel too. There is something very distinct and categorical within these groups: Secular. National-religious. Ultra-Orthodox.

And how would we depict someone who is *shomer masoret?*

There is another group in Israel, far less dichotomous, far less discussed, far harder to pin down and define – and for all that – one of the largest groups within Israeli society. *Masortim*.

Thirty-five percent of the Jewish population in Israel defines itself as *masorti* ("traditional") or *shomer masoret* ("upholders of tradition"). This is not to be confused with Conservative Judaism, which is also referred to as Masorti Judaism outside of North America. This is the second-largest demographic after secular Jews, and three times larger than the ultra-Orthodox and national-religious communities. Despite its size, little is known about this group, its beliefs and its lifestyle. It is not even recognized as a distinct group within Judaism, with budget allocations or a distinct social contract of the kind enjoyed by other Jewish groups.

The *masorti* worldview runs along a continuum, seeing Israeli Jewish society as a continuum of interlocking and coexisting identities, rather than distinct tribes with gatekeepers to keep them apart. It therefore contains something far more flexible, although similarly amorphous.

*Shomrei masoret* do as their name suggests, prizing the miracle of Jewish tradition above all. The typical *shomer masoret* sees themselves primarily in terms of loyalty. The history and heritage lie at the heart of their worldview. These foundations are not a cage that restricts their movement, but rather a permissive and liberating space. They are in constant dialogue with past, present and future.

It could be argued that the dominant institution in the life of the *masorti* Jew is that of the family. That is where it begins and where it ends. The continuum of time defines their lives. Within this context, the *masorti* existence offers a model of flexibility and open-mindedness to values of time and family, especially on questions of religion and secularism.

However, in much the same way as the political and ideological center is often perceived, so secular, national-religious and ultra-Orthodox Judaism look down upon the *masortim* as lacking in intellectual depth or heft. This is a fundamental mistake.

The thought process advanced by the *masortim* has many years of history behind it, and it offers wealth, plenty and a relaxed and flexible existence within the many ideological conflicts that rage around it.

It is the opposite of a rigid ideology. It reacts to reality and does not attempt to bend it to its will. While the dichotomous ideological perspective seeks to trap reality into a coherent ideological narrative, which often creates conflict, *masorti* Judaism recognizes the slippery nature of reality and therefore seeks to engage with it in different ways and at different times.

In our contemporary society, there is great value to the political center in recognizing the power of their message as a leading value and way of thinking. Faced with numerous political challenges and in a world of excess and extremes, *masortim* offer us a way to examine each and every one of these debates through the lens of traditions of the past with the flexibility of the present.

## 18. Where Has the State Gone?

We have all felt the gradual disappearance of the state, as it has created a vacuum and leaving the job to private bodies or alternative solutions. This is happening across the board, on marriage, burial, personal security around the country, illegal arms, a lack of binding legal definitions on rights of LGBT people and more. The common denominator in all of these areas is their political sensitivity: all social or political hot potatoes.

What does the state do when it is afraid of the political costs of intervention?
That's right – disappears.

And what happens when it disappears? In those places where the state is no longer significantly involved, islands of individual sovereignty pop up in its stead; autonomy or anarchy, struggle and lack of enforcement. Alternatively, the judiciary steps into the vacuum, taking a stand in accordance with its own values and obviously comes in for heavy criticism as a result, with a subsequent decline in public trust and standing.

Consider the lamentable situation on the roads in southern Israel. Think about the Lag BaOmer disaster at Mt Meron in 2021, where 45 men and boys were trampled to death at a site known to be unable to accommodate the number of visitors, or the Tzafit Stream disaster in 2018, where 10 teenage students were swept away as a result of flash flooding while on a desert hike organized by their pre-military academy, despite specific weather warnings in place at the time. Think about the number of unregulated weapons in circulation. Think about the absurdity of marriage in Cyprus, surrogacy in Thailand and illegal construction in Shfar'am and in Eli. In every one of those instances, the state abandoned its duties over many years, and we are all paying the price.

On this point, we are not calling for full state intervention in citizen's personal lives, and we support civil liberties and the right of each individual to live a life of their choosing – yet at the same time, we know that our lives intersect with any number of public spaces in which policymakers with differing ideologies set the tone, and the state is called upon to determine the rules of engagement between them.

The questions we must ask ourselves on any issue we encounter are: To what extent is the state involved and is this appropriate? How much responsibility does the state have in this area? How can the state devolve its responsibilities to local governments and communities? How can it enable community life on the one hand, without abandoning the individual on the other? And if the state is not present – who takes its place in charge?

For example, the fact that many couples in Israel have no legal pathway to get married is not only unjust, but also anti-statist and even anti-democratic. It creates a vacuum. The fact there is no formally standardized solution for couples wishing to be officially recognized in the State of Israel creates chaos and impacts on individual liberties.

At the same time, highlighting the state's disappearance should not be read as an endorsement of a complete centralization of power. Rather, the state should determine a clear answer on every area of policy in which it leaves a vacuum to the question: Who is responsible? And what are the rules they must adhere to?

# 19. Let's Talk About the Elephant in the Room

Or in other words, how did *mamlachtiyut* – broadly "statism" – become such a reviled term in Israel? *Mamlachtiyut* as a term is closely identified with Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. It was his way of addressing the challenges facing the nascent State of Israel, set against a backdrop of bitter disagreements and infighting among the various Zionist groups. The Jewish people has always been associated with feuding, but building a national home required unity, agreement and political consensus in the national interest. His appeal for statism called on all citizens and parts of society to place the broad national interest above narrow sectoral interests and beliefs. Many of the state institutions that must place it at the top of their agenda were founded in this cause.

It was far more than a simple theory. With the founding of the state, statism became the ideology that forced movements, political parties and organizations to concede their positions and power in the interests of a sovereign state. Statism forced the power bases in society to recognize the state's monopoly on the legal use of force and its status as the sole source of political and judicial legitimacy.

In the name of statism, rival Jewish militias were disbanded and the Israel Defense Forces was established in their place. In the name of statism, the various parties came together to sign the Declaration of Independence. In the name of statism, Begin held back from starting a civil war in the wake of the Altalena Affair. In the name of statism, Israel's Basic Laws were drafted that set out the status of the governing institutions.

Statism was the rallying cry that built and nurtured loyalty, identity, engagement and responsibility of the citizens toward the state and toward each other. In the name of statism, a system of symbols and ceremonies was established to create a direct bond between the state and its citizens that was not dependent on ideologically aligned movements.

Inevitably, the common good statist principle came in for criticism over the years. There were those who saw it as a censorious and exclusionary device, one that would bring

everyone in line with the ruling hegemony. It was also identified with the "melting pot" policy – silencing diverse voices and imposing cultural uniformity without achieving cultural uniformity; a policy that advanced the image of the "New Jew" as seen through the eyes of the central government, ignoring the diverse stories and backgrounds of successive waves of immigration. This too became part of the statist story.

There is a debate to be had over statism; to what extent it was implemented and what price was paid for it. Yet any honest assessment must also examine its contribution and consider the contribution that an updated and modernized version of it may have to offer to present-day Israel.

## 20. The Solution: Statism 2.0

Israel finds itself trapped in one of its greatest political crises in its short history. To emerge from this crisis and successfully face down the challenges of the day, we must – much like Ben-Gurion – prioritize the national interest over individual sectors. On the other hand, we must not ignore the individual need for community belonging, in such a way that will enable us to work together through a sense of shared purpose. Working for the common good in this way means taking a broad view of its significance on all public life. Advancing the positions of a specific group through delegitimization, demonization, incitement or intimidation of another group is by definition a violation of the principle of the common good.

This is the mission facing statism. It is a challenging mission that understands the need for some kind of balance. It is, in effect, statism 2.0: a new version that, on the one hand, declares a preference for the state over the party, sector or individual, while on the other hand recognizing the divisions and differences between the different groups; aware of the fact that each group has a different vision for the State of Israel and accepts that difference and that diversity as a positive, empowering and productive factor. It therefore creates frameworks that preserve the state-centric emphasis while leaving space for the local and communal level.

Statism 2.0 also cannot afford to only address what is being done, but also how. It is not only an ethos and a shared story that everyone buys into, it is also about setting out the rules of the game and regularizing our shared public life, in which every group should feel that the rules are fair, and that the shared Israeli narrative also includes them.

When certain groups in Israeli society feel that their voice is not being heard in the corridors of power, or that a mainstream Israeli ethos is forming in which they are not represented, the old-style statism fails twice – reducing the span of the common good and preventing fairness.

It goes without saying that the common good is not measured in the total number of votes or something that hinders the ability to act decisively. Decisions must be made, and many of them will not meet the needs of the whole public – and yet approaching decisions through a renewed statist prism allows us to understand that it is not just a question of what, but also how. How decisions are taken, who is sitting round the table when they are being taken, and what are the factors being taken into consideration at the time.

## 21. How Do we Build Statism 2.0? Using the 50:30:20 Principle

Having set out the two components of the New Statism as a marshalling story (what?) and as policy and practice (how?), we now propose adopting the following approach to determining policy, responsibility, budgeting andlegislation: Maintaining the core of responsibility and authority at the national-state level (50%), while delegating responsibilities and authority to local councils or sectors (30%) and to communities and individuals (20%)

We believe this represents a positive balance between the state, the tribe and the community. Every state-led action and every area of public life will have key national institutions at their core (50%), but at the same time there will also be recognition of the values and needs of different groups and identities. This statist approach is the right way to shape 21st century Israeli life.

For example, we can take the educational programs in schools. We propose drafting a core educational program that provides every student in Israel with not only the basic educational knowledge and skills but will also equip them with shared common-good civic values based on a national core (50 percent of the academic program should be identical for all groups). We propose giving each sector within the education system 30 percent of the budget to prepare and deliver an educational program that reflects the unique characteristics of their sector, and that 20 percent of the budget and classtime will be handed over to the parents, the community, who will decide on their educational priorities.

## 22. And How Else? A Shared Story with Shared Rules of the Game

Another tool to reinforce the statist principle is a new discourse, the kind that does not get weighed down in endless controversial issues but rather seeks to answer the question: how can the issue be managed?

When the game is complicated and has so many participants, the rules must be clear and consistent. The lack of rules of the game to set out how Israeli democracy works is one of the main reasons for the ongoing and deteriorating crisis of trust between the people and the government, between one authority and another, and perhaps worst of all – between one individual and their neighbor.

The absence of rules of the game creates a lack of consensus on the basic rules that guide our conduct within the state. The lack of trust is only growing, and our divided society is unable to act as a unified force. Weighty questions of democracy, such as how much power the Supreme Court should wield, become present in political disputes, dominate the public agenda and become an inseparable part of the identity of a political camp. For example, while voices on the right of the political map seek to restrict the power of the court as much as possible, the left sees it as the last bulwark of civil liberties.

In this debate, as in so many others, the answer lies in establishing clear rules of the game. Not ground rules that create a "winner takes all" situation, but rather a challenge

that requires continuum reasoning. Rules of the game minimize tribal, populist and impulsive discourse, allowing us to focus on questions that ensure a fair game.

As long as the State of Israel fails to establish these rules, it will find itself being continually dragged into populist rhetoric and media panic, and the only ones who benefit are those who gain their political capital by exploiting these divisions.

It is time to replace this with active, focused and transparent work in the form of a detailed legislative package to attack this problem on three fronts – providing a framework for action, a language and definitions, and that will anchor in legislation certain core principles that will create a fair balance between the governing authorities.

## 23. Scales

So how do we set out rules of the game? Think about a competition between two core ideas, two values, and about the need to balance them on a set of scales – placing them one next to the other, take a bit off one of them, add a bit to the other one, adjusting the weight without impacting the core significance. Not as a matter of compromise, but as a matter of creating a balance between them. Scales are, in essence, a tool that enables them to coexist side by side.

The need for that balancing act recurs time and again in our methods. And the same is true of the recurring and increasing tension between the government branches. A holistic and inclusive balance that strengthens the different branches (judicial, legislative and executive) while balancing their power over the other branches.

Without this balance, each branch grows to become a source of resentment among people who see it as stripping away the influence of another branch without having the appropriate authority to do so. The media circus gleefully amplifies the rift, but public trust declines. Our democracy is weakened, and we all lose. In the current environment, Israeli politics is called upon to engage with these issues above all others. Only finely calibrated scales will enable us to change the prevailing reality and confront the pressing challenges facing the State of Israel.

## 24. Cohesion and Governance: The Shared Challenge

So, what do the rules of the game and the *masortim* have to do with each other? What binds Mansour Abbas and the State of Israel as a Jewish-democratic state? How does all this come together into a contemporary Israeli paradigm that we can all unite around? Before we start to draft our story and our solutions, we will first outline the problems: "cohesion" and "governance." These two words get to the heart of the crisis plaguing Israeli society at present, and it is by engaging with them that we will find the solutions. The 23 chapters set out in this document were formulated and drafted with the critical importance of cohesion and governance in mind – and out of a desire to build them and a belief that the center is able to do so.

The social cohesion crisis is defined by the absence of a baseline Israeli consensus that prevents the various constituent parts of Israeli society from working together to face the social and national challenges facing us. The governance crisis lies in the disparity between the size and complexity of the challenges, and the ability of the state's institutions and governing figures to tackle them successfully.

Cohesion and governance are intrinsically linked to each other. When the government is unable to stand strong in the face of present and future challenges, the state loses its place and its power – and faith in it is eroded. And when trust is eroded, each tribe hides behind the walls of its own principles, the common good loses its place and we are left unable to tackle the burning issues of the day, to accept necessary reforms and to plan the future of the state.

## 25. Afterword or partial recap

There is no end to this document as such. It is our hope that it will continue to expand, with new chapters being added to the doctrine of the Israeli center. It is also our hope that the present chapters are not left to gather dust on a library shelf, without practical application or action.

But if we were to take a moment to recap the document thus far, we can settle on a few key points to keep in mind.

Bringing about the necessary change and tackling the significant crises that have arisen within Israeli society – a lack of social cohesion and effective governance – requires a two-pronged approach: one is to build a shared narrative and the other lies in pragmatic, carefully considered, moderate policies designed to build a strategic partnership rooted in centrist principles – including "both/and", "continuum reasoning" and "appropriate rules of the game" – among Zionists in Israel, and seeking to expand this partnership to all parts of Israeli society, to elevate the State of Israel's standing as a Jewish-statist-democratic state.