

What Russian immigrants can teach us about Jewish identity

by Matthew M. Hausman



Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely was criticized a few months ago for opining that American Jews live “comfortable” lives and don’t know what it’s like to live under constant threat of attack, though she also acknowledged the continuing bond between them and their Israeli cousins.

While mainstream liberals took offense, they could not dispute the substance of her comments. It seems progressive Jews are always offended when moderate, conservative, or right-wing Israelis (i.e., much of the Israeli electorate) have the temerity to chastise those whose politics threaten Israel’s safety, security, and continuity as a Jewish state. It’s easy

to criticize Israel from the comfort of North America for those who define religious and ethnic identity not by Jewish values and history, but by allegiance to a political worldview that devalues both.

Though Hotovely's words were taken somewhat out of context, the truth is many American Jews are indeed naïve – especially those who believe Israel should conform to a political vision that characterizes her as an occupier, demeans the Jewish spirit, and belittles traditional Judaism. To the extent her words offended those who support an agenda that undermines Israel and empowers her enemies, they were words that needed to be spoken and should be repeated often. No longer should the mainstream blindly vouch for the religious and cultural integrity of the Jewish left, or of nontraditional clergy who find common cause with BDS advocates and Islamist front organizations.

Much of the non-Orthodox establishment seems to care more about secular political values than traditional Jewish ones, and its support for Israel is often apologetic or conditioned on her presumed acceptance of liberal ideals. Too often, progressive organizations provide forums for left-wing ideologues and unbalanced critics who disparage the Jewish State and traditional Judaism, while denying equal time to pro-Israel advocates and political conservatives. This dynamic frequently plays out in colleges and universities where liberal campus leaders often show greater concern about the hypothetical risk of Islamophobia than the very real incidence of progressive anti-Semitism, and frequently condemn Israeli policies while ignoring Islamist rejectionism.

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