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13550 - מירון איזקסון						

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# Jewish majority alone doesn't make a Jewish state

Paradoxically, many of those who emphasize the vital need for maintaining the Jewish character of the state don't mean much more than maintaining a demographic majority. On the other hand, many of those who somehow seem less troubled by demographic aspects are the ones hoping for a state with significant Jewish characteristics, which will, to the greatest extent possible, bring together traditional Jewish heritage and the prevailing reality and culture in this country. Obviously, the formula that binds us by law and that is based on the intentions of the state's founders calls for "Jewish and democratic." I would like to focus here on the Jewish aspect.

Let us assume that Israel is guaranteed a substantial Jewish majority for years to come. The borders will be recognized ones, allowing every religious and political minority to benefit from equal rights on a personal level. The country's overall nature, binding its citizens, will be a Jewish one. There are those for whom a situation in which

prevailing customs are foreign to Jewish tradition will not matter. Some will say that Jews living in this country is enough to make it Jewish. This attitude should not be dismissed, but it is based on the assumption that the Jews in this country will continue to place their Jewish tradition at the center of their lives. However, what will be the significance of Jewish customs followed here if after many years they will be disconnected from our origins? Won't our identification as the Jewish people living in their land become artificial? To what extent will a Jewish majority speaking Hebrew be able to preserve the great historical Jewish tradition simply by living here?

Therefore, anyone seeking a compromise with our neighbors while striving to maintain a Jewish majority here must also contend with the issue of the Jewish essence and content of the country. It's not enough to state that the democratic component of our identity will be impacted by our heritage. It won't do to say that just by virtue of living here, Jews embody the ulti-

mate Jewish life. We don't wish to be similar to those generations who "suddenly" discovered their identity. It is precisely up to the supporters of peace and compromise to emphasize their commitment to Jewish heritage.

**To what extent will a Jewish majority speaking Hebrew be able to preserve the great historical Jewish tradition simply by living here?**

This can take on many forms, such as enhanced reliance on older Hebrew law, wherever possible, or a new and serious relation to the character of the Sabbath, especially with regard to cessation of commerce and business. It can also mean composing a new, comprehensive school curriculum expanding the teaching of our heritage; basing demands for social

justice on Jewish values and customs, such as the treatment of employees, the needy, the elderly and the weaker segments of society; striving for peace based on Jewish values with their view of every human as a creature of God; respecting others based on Jewish values that reject libel and gossip.

It's true that a large Jewish population in its own country inevitably "creates" its Jewish identity. However, one cannot ignore the risk that without a clear commitment to our historical identity we could end up in a situation whereby our identity is merely artificial. By a comprehensive and practical grappling with the nature of our identity, we can strengthen our striving for peace with willingness to compromise, without finding ourselves in a situation in which the demographic majority is a cover for hollowness. Just as there are some who only relate to one part of the term "Jewish and democratic," one should also take care not to let the Jewish majority in the state replace its Jewish content.