

stream of opinion pieces, essays, and speeches on the Arab question and related political issues flowed from his felicitous pen; he also helped to found a political party, the *Ichud* (Unity), to promote the vision of dialogical politics, and engaged in heated debates with the Zionist leadership. His voice was respected but, nonetheless, not heeded. Both prior to the birth of the State of Israel and afterward, he thus found himself, in his own words, in the “loyal opposition.” He was not isolated, for he had an attentive constituency, as was wit-

nessed by the torchlight procession of hundreds of students of the Hebrew University, Arabs and Jews, who on the occasion of his 83rd birthday in 1963, marched through the streets of Jerusalem to Buber’s home and there sang to him, in Arabic and Hebrew, “Happy Birthday.” Today, I venture to say, there would be thousands and not hundreds to celebrate Israel’s prophet of dialogue. Alas, they would still constitute a minority — but an encouraging sign that a “greater realism” may yet inspire Israeli politics. 

**C**onfronting theological terror, spiritual shock, and growing panic about the survival of Judaism as they watched the Temple burn, the rabbis of 2,000 years ago courageously built a new framework by which to delineate the boundaries of what constitutes normative Jewish behavior. By default, they created the framework for any discussion of Jewish loyalty up until the Enlightenment. They achieved this by transforming the core biblical binaries of *tamay/tahor* (pure/impure) to those that focused on *asur/mutar* (permitted/forbidden). This new paradigm secured the strength and vitality of Judaism for almost two millennia.

Today, though, we are confronting profound challenges to the theological and behavioral assumptions of Rabbinic Judaism — not to mention the authority upon which it is based. Rather than abandon the Jews who today have abandoned a Judaism that no longer engages or inspires loyalty in them, we need to ask: What now? Can we articulate a new paradigm that is both consonant with our past and inspiring of a vibrant Jewish future — one that guides and unites most of us?

From our particular vantage point — that of traditionally observant, highly educated, passionately committed liberal Jews who are teaching and reaching “unaffiliated” or “disaffected” Jews on opposite coasts — we have become keenly aware of a phenomenon that may point to a powerful, if not highly problematic in its own right, new paradigm. This paradigm is created from the tension between tradition and innovation, objectivity and subjectivity, and the communal and the individual. It may be

best encapsulated by the binaries of *keva/kavannah* (what to do vs. why do it, fixed vs. fluid, pre-arranged vs. intentionally created). Today, we hear a call for *all* our Jewish endeavors to be suffused with *kavannah*, in the sense of engaging people through Jewish experiences that are “personally meaningful.”

If this renewed emphasis on *kavannah* is what might delineate that which invites us into Jewish life today, *keva* is the other pole, one that might delineate what places us at the periphery and beyond. The boundaries in this new paradigm are demarcated by a commitment to commitment itself and to the needs of, and our need for, others. Our demands for meaning and the value we place on our intentions must be matched by equally deep commitments to regular and shared Jewish engagement. We must devote ourselves to building communities focused on creative Jewish expression, where connections among Jews can be nurtured, and through which our bonds to one another can ensure the unfolding of Judaism into centuries ahead. We must be prepared to not only speak a new language of Jewish experience, but to hear the ancient and eternal call to Jewish responsibility.

Exploring new paradigms that might serve us today is critical; if not, we may lose the opportunity to renew Judaism and the Jewish people, and, in so doing, betray not just our history, but our destiny as well.

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