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**Gusti Yehoshua Braverman**

# Negating the Diaspora at our peril

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, head of the Reform Judaism movement in North America, recently called on Diaspora Jews to protest Israeli discrimination against women and the non-Orthodox. Speaking at the recent General Assembly of Jewish Federations of North America, Rabbi Jacobs also called on Diaspora Jewry to open the discussion of Israel to a wider range of opinions. Some people consider Jacobs' remarks to be courageous. Others see them as impertinent and arrogant – yet more “proof” of the Reform movement's indifference to Zionism, especially in the United States.

Only someone who has close contact with Diaspora Jewry in general, and with liberal Reform Jewry in particular, understands that Rabbi Jacobs is speaking out of concern and a sense of responsibility to ensure the connection between Israel and liberal Jewry of North America. Our lives are entwined with the lives of Diaspora Jews in the United States. We seek their support in times of crisis, as well as their lobbying of the American administration on our behalf. We benefit from their money, particularly in strengthening public services that the government is abandoning. Reform donors help medical, cultural and welfare institutions. In times of peace and war (such as the present time) – they support every Israeli citizen, regardless of religious or political worldview.

Rabbi Jacobs' remarks express concern for the unraveling relationship between world Jewry (particularly American Jewry) and the State of Israel – a matter that should be of concern to all of us. Rabbi Jacobs sees that the Reform community in the United States is no longer giving blind and unquestioning support to Israel. On the

contrary, its questions are only growing in number. Not only has Israel ceased to be a source of pride for them, in many cases it is causing discomfort. When you are a Jew living in America and are exposed mainly to criticism of the State of Israel in matters of religion and state, the doubts gnaw away at you.

It is difficult for me, as an Israeli, to see the one-sidedness, the ignorance and the double standard in the media coverage of Israel and its actions. At the same time, these reactions do not change at all the reality in which we are living, and about which Rabbi Jacobs warns: Israel's domestic conduct and the destructive relationship it maintains between religion and state.

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The discrimination among religious streams in the country (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform) has no parallel anywhere in the world: the fact that I have no guarantee that my tax money which is distributed among clerics will be transferred, at least in part, to the Reform congregation to which I belong; the fact that the only rabbi who can preside as the rabbi of a locality – whose salary is paid from my tax money – is an Orthodox rabbi, who for the most part will want to keep me out of the public space; the fact that my children, when they marry, will not be able to have

their nuptials performed by a Reform rabbi – male or female – and be recognized by the state as married. (Absurdly, the State of Israel prefers to recognize the signature of a Christian municipal official on a marriage certificate than that of a Reform rabbi.) These are but a few examples.

At the same General Assembly in Baltimore where Rabbi Jacobs spoke, journalism and political science Prof. Peter Beinart argued that since liberal Jewry in North America supports human rights, this public will not support Israel as long as Israel is perceived as being a human rights violator.

The State of Israel cannot close its ears to what Rabbi Jacobs and Peter Beinart are saying. On the eve of the Knesset elec-

tion in Israel, the time has come for us to use the vote we are given to express our position on the issues that will determine our fate and our relations with Diaspora Jewry. This is a necessary stage in the realization of the very core of the Zionist vision, as we believe in it and as we find it expressed in the words of our national anthem: “Our hope is not yet lost – To be a free nation in our land.”

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