

# A necessary conversation

By Gina Ross and Reg Wilson

**AS BOB** Dylan wrote, “The Times They Are a-Changin’,” and the subject of *Judaism 3.0* by Gol Kalev is about ‘times they are changin’ for the survival of Judaism.

Kalev’s rich and ambitious book provides a comprehensive framework for the different parts of the Jewish people to connect to Judaism and for the world to connect with the Jews.

Kalev defines Zionism as the national expression of the Jewish nation-religion. He looks at it as more than just a movement for the establishment, development, and protection of a Jewish nation. It is the anchor of contemporary Judaism.

Kalev is not only optimistic. He also wants to seed both the international and the Jewish collective consciousness with a new way to approach Judaism, Israel, and the Jewish people.

Kalev’s book is as much descriptive as it is prescriptive, stating today’s facts but also inviting us to a vision that gives these facts a much-needed value. He offers the Jews a canvas upon which each group can paint its brush strokes in its colors yet still form a coherent painting. He does not worry whether the painting is entirely harmonious or not, as long as it provides an identity that encompasses the whole.

Reaching across Jewish history, Kalev divides it into three unique cultural glues that served to bind Jews together: Judaism 1.0 to Judaism 3.0, the organizing principles appropriate for each period.

Kalev’s gift is his noticing the transformation of rabbinical Judaism – Judaism 2.0 – into Zionism. Judaism 3.0 is already a reality. He demonstrates this through his analysis of trends in Israel and North American Jewry.

From 1,000 BC to 100 BC, the organizing principle of Judaism 1.0 was Biblical Judaism, associated with the Temple, the sacrificial rituals, and the centrality of Jerusalem and the Land of Israel.

With the destruction of these symbols and the Jews dispersing throughout the Diaspora, the rabbis ingeniously transformed Biblical Judaism – Judaism 1.0, to rabbinical Judaism 2.0. Synagogues replaced the

Temple, prayers replaced the sacrifices, Jewish ghetto life replaced life in Judea, the oral Torah was canonized, Halacha set the laws of Jewish life, and the yearning to return to Zion became the cornerstone of Judaism. Rabbinical Judaism created a new glue, allowing Judaism to preserve the traditions for the next 1,900 years.

Kalev believes that Zionism, the national aspect of the Jewish nation-religion, has become the organizing principle that binds together Judaism today. We are now in Judaism 3.0, he argues, a new lens through which the world perceives and threatens Jews and their homeland, and the Jews can perceive themselves.

For Kalev, the threat is constant against the Jewish people, and so it is the survival of Judaism that is at stake now. For him, Zionism – and Israel as its tangible manifestation – is the present answer that binds Judaism together.

It is a necessity, not a luxury. Yet Kalev manages to radiate optimism, hope and even buoyancy when speaking of Zionism, although the subject is rife with international and Jewish controversy.

He presents the redeeming value of Zionism – Israel as the Jewish Nation-State – and its rescuing of Judaism and the Jews. For him, Zionism is the redeeming of the Jew in the eyes of the world. It can be of service to humanity through its creativity, inventions, drive for *tikkun olam*, extraordinary intelligence to diminish terrorism, military acumen, and development of defensive weapons that diminish the need for destructive ones.

The transformation from Judaism 1.0 to 2.0 took centuries. Similarly, Kalev expects we will likely in the future look back and see that the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel was the catalyst for the shift from Judaism 2.0 to Judaism 3.0, even though the transformation of Judaism occurred afterwards.

He enumerates the obstacles behind the reluctance to accept these changes, and the complexity of the conflicting interest groups tussling with this evolving change.

In page after page, he makes a compel-

ling case that without this transformation from Judaism 2.0 to Judaism 3.0, Judaism is likely to simply evaporate outside of Israel. We sometimes forget the graveyard of languages and cultures that evaporated over 2,000 years, whereby no tribal and linguistic identities have survived since Biblical times. Why did they not have the ability or tools to adapt to new times and circumstances?

Kalev’s case is that rabbinical Judaism, which historically kept Judaism thriving, is an insufficient glue given secularization, and this evaporation of identity is the existential crisis facing Jews worldwide. Kalev claims that such an approach to Jewish history is not unique, but he does see contemporary Judaism in Israel and America as two distinct communities.

He makes a passionate case that Zionism is already the powerful glue to bind this diverse and independent-minded Jewish population.

With Israel, the yearning for return no longer resonates with the new generation. The Holocaust is increasingly a historical footnote for young Jews. Judaism faces rising secularism of American Jews and sinking synagogue attendance.

Judaism 2.0, the rabbinical Judaism glue for nearly 1,900 years, no longer holds things together. American Judaism is on the path to what Kalev elegantly calls evaporation.

Indeed, American Jewish identity has shifted from Jews who are American to Americans who are Jewish, a natural progression in America’s safety net for Jewish life. Yet the majority of American Jews do not want to evaporate – even as their efforts to reverse this trend fail.

To not evaporate, according to Kalev, American Jews need Zionism, where Israel is a confident national powerhouse, a center for technology, military, arts and culture, and the soul of the Jewish people’s religion.

It can change the landscape within the Jewish mind and culture, and turn Judaism from a predominantly burdensome chore associated with the past to a genuine asset,

relevant to contemporary American Jewish life. Furthermore, the American Jewish community's "Israelization" happened culturally, as American Jews take pride in all Jewish achievements, including Israelis, from products to entertainment.

Kalev points out that for American Jews, Zionism and the existence of Israel are becoming the most relevant aspect of Judaism, whether they like it or not. Zionism, from Israel's astonishing success to its lightning rod controversies, is the meeting point of the American Jew with his Judaism. Transformation in America to Judaism 3.0 is an existential necessity and a growing reality, more relevant each day as the US struggles with the CRT educational revolution, which marginalizes the Jews.

While not mentioned in the book, the controversy around Whoopi Goldberg's claim that the Holocaust was not motivated by race was indicative of a growing dangerous misunderstanding that antisemitism is not really racism, people of color cannot be racist or antisemitic, and Jews are white, thus racists. Contemporaneously, distorted CRT (Critical race theory) concepts teach that Jews are more guilty than American Whites because they chose to join an oppressive power structure. Progressive American Jews will find themselves having to reassess the hierarchical identity in the US if American progressives keep marginalizing them from social justice movements, whether they are pro-Israel or anti-Israel.

For Kalev, it is inevitable that both Jewish critics and supporters now connect to Israel, not primarily through its religious beliefs but through Zionist activities. Over the lifetime of the State of Israel, the organizing principle has gradually shifted from a 'religious' identity based on Torah and rituals to a socio-political identity based on Zionist activities. Zionism provides the unity of Judaism that Herzl dreamed about: "a tight connection between the most modern elements of Judaism with the most conservative."

These changes reflect the economic and scientific miracle that describes Israel today, which American Jews can relate to. Israel's global brand of leading innovation in many areas and its DNA of rapid change and nimble adaptation are keys to thriving and representing creativity and innovation in the future. Zionist Israel is a model of resilience – surviving wars, propaganda,

UN and BDS attacks, discrimination and antisemitism – and can become the anchor of Judaism, where Zionism goes well beyond making aliyah.

Kalev also proposes that Israel, home to people living their different faiths and rich heritages freely (contrary to the malicious attacks against it of apartheid) can be a model of diversity and pluralism, inspiring Europe in its dealings with its immigration influx. In the meantime, Israelis have radically different perspectives from American Jews on Judaism, the Jewish state, and Zionism. After 70 years of tumultuous experiences, Zionism in the 21st century has overcome many of its initial challenges in Israel. It now incorporates and strengthens rabbinic Judaism 2.0 and allows for groups to preserve the bonds they need. Judaism 3.0 does not threaten or diminish the role of Judaism 2.0.

Kalev beautifully describes the significant shifts that have occurred, and explains why Zionism is emerging as the organizing principle for Judaism: the initially overtly secular Zionism is no longer associated with secularism, nor only with the European immigrants, nor as a threat to the religious community. It no longer rejects the Jewish religion but is intertwined.

The divisive lines between seculars, haredim and the national-religious are softening; there is growing acceptance of Zionism by the haredim, and a broadening of religious conscience from exclusively haredi to a broader representation of religious views. Anti-haredi prejudice by secular Israelis is eroding as more haredim enter the army and the workforce. While it is all a work-in-progress, the shift to Judaism 3.0 has momentum on its side.

Kalev views Zionism now as the primary way in which Jews connect to their Judaism, and how the outside world perceives the Jews.

The world has always been confused about the Jews. Are they a nation, a people, a religion, or an ethnicity? Antisemitism has focused on each one at different times. In Europe, discrimination, pogroms and the Holocaust were committed against the Jewish nation/people (even without a homeland), not only against Judaism. Zionism unites all the elements together – a people, religion, and nation – and regrettably, has also presented the Europeans a tangible conduit to oppose Judaism and the Jewish people.

While individual antisemitism is now considered immoral in polite society, Israel-bashing has turned into a fashion, a code of conduct, under the guise of preoccupation for social justice.

Europe has shifted from Judaism 2.0 bashing to Judaism 3.0 bashing. European antisemitism still attacks individual Jews and religious Judaism, but the lethal assault is on Judaism 3.0 through its support of BDS, hostile NGOs, UN resolutions against Israel and the Jewish state being portrayed as apartheid and Nazi-like. Clarifying that anti-Zionism Judaism 3.0 is just plain old murderous antisemitism (which Europe prides itself to be against) gives Israel and the Jewish Diaspora more precise tools to fight for their human rights, including their physical, emotional, and religious safety.

The book was launched in Jerusalem on March 7. Kalev's contribution is a major one for the Jewish people and a world for whom antisemitism indicates a severe malaise in the culture where it rises. It warrants a serious exploration and discussion at the heart of the perpetuation of Judaism into the next century. Embracing Zionism 3.0 as possibly the organizing principle for the future of Judaism and a better world is worth a sincere and deep conversation. This is Kalev's hope. ■



**Judaism 3.0: Judaism's Transformation to Zionism**  
Gol Kalev  
Mazo Publishers, 2022  
366 pages; \$28.95