



1997

Behavioral and Phenomenological Judaism

Elihu Katz

University of Pennsylvania, ekatz@asc.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation (OVERRIDE)

Katz, E. (1997). Behavioral and phenomenological Judaism. In C. Liebman & E. Katz (Eds.), *The Jewishness of Israelis* (pp. 71-83). Albany, NY: SUNY. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/244

Postprint Version.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/244
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Behavioral and Phenomenological Judaism

Disciplines

Communication | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Comments

Postprint Version.

Behavioral and Phenomenological Jewishness
ELIHU KATZ

Sociological surveys on sensitive issues cause their readers-enlightened ones as well-to ask, “Is this us?” and “Is this me?” “How do its findings compare with my own image of everybody else and of where I stand in relation to the rest?” The Guttman Report on “Observances and Beliefs” did exactly that. It evoked interest in every quarter-probably more than any previous empirical study of Israeli society-and challenged its readers to compare their images of the Jewishness of Israelis and of themselves against the findings obtained from a representative national sample. Confronted with such evidence, not everybody immediately suspends disbelief or abandons his/her prejudgments in favor of the evidence of the study. This is as it should be. Many people were surprised by the study's findings, others disputed its interpretations, while still others raised questions about its methodology. This book gives them voice; it also offers an opportunity to the authors of the report to respond.

This chapter, then, is an effort by one of the study's authors to contribute to a dialogue with its commentators and critics, friendly and unfriendly, understanding and misunderstanding. It expands and presents again elements of the study-going beyond specific findings-so as to make clear where contemplation of our findings has led us, what we have profited from our critics, and thus where we agree and disagree with them.¹ It also restates the design of the study, and several of its findings, in order to address certain questions that have arisen in the press and in public discussion.

In the course of responding to queries and criticisms, this chapter can also give insight into the attention, even the passion, that the study aroused. It will reveal, I believe, that some of the questions addressed to the study, and some of the unease that accompanies them, are not strictly about the study itself but are philosophical and personal questions about Judaism and Jewishness. Thus our study reawakened gnawing problems such as: Who is a Jew? Are ethnicity and religion disconnectable in Jewish identity? Is Judaism a religion of performance or belief, or both? What is a secular Jew? If one can be a nonreligious Jew, why is Jewishness incompatible with assuming another religion? Is Zionism-or living in Israel- a religious commandment? Is Judaism open to change? Is there room for selectivity in observance or should such “inconsistency” be condemned? Some of these questions were actually put to our sample of respondents, but, manifestly, public opinion need not be accepted as a normative guide.

The survey caused readers to ask themselves why they perform certain religious practices when they are avowed secularists, just as it caused persons who consider themselves observant to ask why they selectively perform some behaviors and not others. In short, the study aroused dissonance at a personal level, which is well portrayed in the angry outburst of a distinguished colleague, who said, “How dare you call me religious when all I do is not eat pork?” To which I replied, “We don't call you anything. You may define yourself as you please. All we have done is to note that, for some reason, you are observing an explicit commandment of the Torah.” The professor thought for a while, plagued by the malaise of dissonance that we had brought upon him. “Okay,” he muttered with annoyance, “from now on, I'm going to eat pork!”

WHAT THE STUDY DOES: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The Guttman Institute was commissioned by the Avi Chai Foundation to map the extent of religious observance among Israeli Jews. The emphasis was on observance—that is, performance. We also examined some of the

reasons for observing or not observing with respect to certain specific observances such as *kosher* food, but observance itself was its focus. Along with observance, we also surveyed various kinds of religious belief.

How was this done? To put the matter succinctly, one might say that we (1) “sampled” religious observances, that is, with the help of expert scholars, we chose a set of typical ritual behaviors that are prescribed or proscribed by the religious tradition and (2) asked a representative sample of adult Israeli Jews whether and to what extent they observed each of these behaviors and with what frequency. In addition, we (3) asked respondents to characterize themselves as “strictly observant,” “observant to a great extent,” “somewhat observant,” and “not observant at all.”

In these terms, the overall task of the study was to map the patterns, or profiles, of religious observance against the demographic groupings of which the population sample is composed, and the self-definitions of observance. This method allows the analyst to compare the patterns of observance of, say, different age groups or groups of different ethnic origin. By the same token, specific patterns of religious behavior can be assigned to each of the self-definitions of religiosity to explore what “strictly observant” or “not at all observant” look like in behavioral terms.

In appraising the implementation of the study design, the following points are noteworthy:

1. An unusually large sample of the population was drawn in order to permit in-depth analysis of subgroup behavior by age, ethnic origin, educational level, and self-definition by religiosity.

2. We are satisfied that the sample population is a good representation of the overall population both in demographic terms and in terms of less concrete categories, such as *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox). Six percent of our sample defined themselves as *haredi*, compared with the guesstimate that 10 percent of Israeli Jews may be *haredim*. Since this population is often uncooperative to interviewers, the study may be deemed particularly successful in this regard.

3. As for religious self-definition, several alternative measures were employed. One of these was a seven-point scale along which respondents could locate themselves on a continuum of religiosity (*dati*) from “very religious” to “antireligious.” These measures are so highly intercorrelated, that we chose the four-point scale of observance (“strictly” to “not at all”) mentioned earlier. We preferred this measure to the others because it is closest to the characterizations one overhears in everyday conversation.

4. Many of the specific questions about observance and belief employ precisely the same language used in other Guttman Institute surveys (and in a set of smaller-scale surveys conducted at Bar-Ilan University) in order to identify changes that have occurred over time.

WHAT THE STUDY SAYS (AND DOES NOT SAY): RESEARCH FINDINGS

From the report—the highlights of which appear as Chapter 1 in this volume—I want to single out several essential findings to illustrate what the study does and does not say. I will also show how these findings underpin our interpretations.

1. When respondents were asked to characterize the extent of their observance of Jewish religious tradition in the everyday language of conversation, 14 percent said they observed “strictly,” 24 percent said “mostly,” 41 percent said “somewhat”, and 21 percent said “not at all.” It is noteworthy that these percentages are not substantially different from Guttman Institute studies over many years. This is striking in view of the major demographic changes that have taken place, particularly in the achievement of near-parity in the population of Jewish adults between those who trace their origin to Europe and the West and those who derive from the Eastern countries. Indeed, cross-tabulation of self-defined religiosity with ethnic origin shows that the stability

in the distribution of religious observance can be traced to demographic change itself! It is *because* of the greater religiosity of the Eastern communities that nearly 40 percent of all Israeli Jews continue to characterize themselves as “strictly” and “mostly” observant. Only about 20 percent of Ashkenazim place themselves in these two categories compared with about 60 percent of Sephardim. (No wonder the critics of the study-almost all Ashkenazim journalists and academics-often fail to recognize what we see.)² About 70 percent of the “mostly observant” are Sephardim, while most of the “not at all observant” are educated Ashkenazim.

2. There are some signs of change. The second generation of Eastern Jews (born in Israel, father born abroad) is less observant than its parents. No such change is evident between the two generations of Western origin. Strikingly, the overall distribution of observance is not much affected by age, even if respondents think of themselves as less religious than their parents and less religious than they themselves used to be. As if in self-criticism, one third of respondents say they would like to be more observant than they are now, compared with only 5 percent who say they would prefer to be less observant. Half of the “not at all” observant wish their children to be somewhat observant.

3. The Jewishness of Israelis, behaviorally speaking, can be sketched as follows: (a) about 25 percent of the population carefully follow the rule governed life of Judaism on a daily basis; in American terms, they are Orthodox Jews; (b) twice this number-that is, 50-60 percent of respondents-observe the dietary rules (*kashrut*); (c) this is also the proportion (50-60%) who do something special to mark the Sabbath eve lighting candles, reciting the *kiddush*, serving a festive family meal; (d) 70 percent fast on Yom Kippur, 75 percent light the *Hanukkah* candles, 90 percent participate in a Passover *seder*; (e) the Jewish rites of passage are performed by almost everybody (80-90%): circumcision of males, *bar mitzvah*, religious marriage ceremony, religious ceremonies of death and remembrance; (f) almost everybody has a *mezuzah* on his/her door. In other words, there is near-universal observance of the life-cycle ceremonies and of the holidays of Passover, Yom Kippur, and *Hanukkah*. Well over half mark the Sabbath eve in a traditional manner and observe the dietary laws. Note that in this ethnography, the Sabbath has shriveled to home rituals on Friday night, and that other major Jewish holidays have been eclipsed.

4. Many different practices and ceremonies were included in our sample of observances. Only 7 percent of the respondents told us they performed none of these. This is far lower than the percentage who characterized themselves as not observant “at all.”

INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

Based on these findings, and on others to be reported later, we came to the conclusion that “Israeli society has a strong traditional bent, and, as far as religious practice is concerned... there is a continuum from the 'strictly observant' to the 'nonobservant' rather than a great divide between a religious minority and a secular majority.” Throughout, we reasoned, our analysis was based on practice, and from the point of view of practice, it would be incorrect to speak of polarization. From the point of view of self-description as well, it can hardly be said that people who distribute themselves (14%-24%-41 %-21%) over the range from “strictly” to “not at all observant” are polarized. That does not mean that there are no marked differences among the groups or that the two ends of the continuum feel comfortable with each other. What it does mean is that behaviorally speaking, at least, it is incorrect to imagine a religious minority doing “everything” and a secular majority doing “nothing.” It is more accurate to say that a minority of about 15-20 percent are ideologically and behaviorally Orthodox, about 20 percent a self-defined secular minority (only very few of whom observe “nothing”), while two thirds of the population fall in-between.

WHAT THE STUDY MEANS: RESPONSE TO THE CRITICS

Many found this conclusion irritating. Some misunderstood its behavioral emphasis.

Some felt they knew better and looked for flaws in the research: the questions were biased, the sampling was inadequate, and so on. For example, some said that the wording was biased; using words like *tradition* or *mitzvot* (“commandments”) positioned respondents as loyal or strayed Jews who dutifully supplied the responses “expected.” While such arguments deserve attention, the fact is that these concepts are not much in evidence in the questionnaire that, on the whole, asks respondents whether or not, and how frequently, they observe one or another ritual or ceremonial behavior.

When we do use the word *mitzvah*-*here* and there in the questionnaire and much more in the report-we feel altogether justified in doing so. Without concerning ourselves with their historic origin, their functions, or their meanings, the practices we studied are part of a corpus of ritual behavior that is anchored in a rulebook called *halakha* (code of rabbinic law) and named *mitzvot*. Even if some have appropriated the word *mitzva* from this context and narrowed it to denote only universal good deeds, such as visiting the sick, that does not change the fact that the language, classically, *uses* the name *mitzva* for eating *matzot* on Passover or circumcising one's male child, *a fortiori* when the appropriate blessing is pronounced.

Going a step further, our nastiest critic asked, in effect, “how can anybody in his/her right mind answer “never” to the question 'do you refrain from driving on the Sabbath' when he/she would have to drive continuously for 25 hours each Sabbath in order to answer 'never'.” This was proof positive, said the satirist, that the questions are meant to produce the results that were paid for by the foundation that sponsored the study. Had our critic read the respondents' *replies*-not just the questions put to them-he would have learned that 56 percent of respondents replied that they “never” refrain from driving in automobiles on the Sabbath! They understood the question perfectly, even if our critic refused to.

Others, who had no quarrel with the empirical findings, felt that our interpretation was wrong, arguing that observance itself is not an adequate indicator of religiosity. Whether or not this critique should be addressed to the authors of the Guttman Report-rather than to the rabbis and philosophers of Judaism- remains to be considered. For the moment, however, I want to spell out the several different ways in which this objection was formulated and to bring other aspects of the study to bear on the discussion. Briefly, these critiques say that the conclusions of the study are unwarranted because (a) Judaism is a *system* of practices, not the random selection of individual choices reported in the study; (b) Jewish practice requires *intent*, not just rote performance; (c) practice without *faith* in the divine is empty and Jewishly unacceptable; (d) practices must be accompanied by acceptance of the *halakha* as the source of authority for their performance; (e) observances are central to the life of a truly religious Jew, whereas observance in the style reported here does not seem central to the lives of their practitioners. Each of these arguments wishes to reinstate the idea that there is, indeed, a religious minority and a secular majority, and to 'disqualify' the observances of those who define themselves as less than “strictly” observant. We will consider each of these objections in turn, agreeing in part with some and altogether disagreeing with others.

1. *Judaism is a system of practices, not the random selection of individual choices reported in the study.* True, Judaism is an elaborate system of practices, governing every aspect of life. It is also true that, apart from the “strictly” observant and some part of the “mostly” observant (perhaps one third of the population), the others—especially the modal (41%) group of the “somewhat” observant-are highly selective in the practices they observe.

Of course, one may rule, *a priori*, that those who do less than “everything” (which would include just about everybody, including the “strictly” observant) do not qualify as practitioners of Judaism. Or, one may decide to exclude the observances of those who violate certain cardinal rules.³ For example, perhaps eating *kosher* food

should not “count” as a religious observance if that person also operates an automobile on the Sabbath. These questions are obviously not for the authors of this study to decide.

But we would not consider our job well done if we simply mapped the distribution of each of the observances separately. We looked for *patterns* of practice to characterize the respondents. And, while selectivity is rampant, what we found is that observances are not randomly selected. There is no free-for-all. There is, rather, (a) high consensus on what practices are and are not observed and (b) an underlying order that marks the path from more to less observant. This is a popular order, of course, that may or may not be articulated anywhere-not in the minds of the people and certainly not in the rule books. Thus, as already indicated, there is a high consensus in the population over the importance of religious performance of rites of passage, over how to observe the Sabbath, which holidays are more important, and so on. Moreover, we discern patterns in the process of declining observance: the observance that is “first to go”—that is, the first deviation from strict orthodoxy—is the injunction against activating electricity on the Sabbath, followed by Sabbath travel, followed by doing work on the Sabbath, separating meat and dairy dishes, reciting the Sabbath blessing over the wine, lighting Sabbath candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, participating in a Passover *seder*. These practices form a “scale” such that one can predict—with high certainty—that a person who lights candles on the Sabbath eve, for example, will also fast on Yom Kippur, but one cannot predict in the opposite direction, that is, a person who fasts on Yom Kippur may or may not light Sabbath candles. “Last to go” is attendance at a Passover *seder*.

2. *Jewish practice requires intent, not just rote performance.* Those who raise this objection imply that they *know* that behavior without explicit motivation is unacceptable in Judaism, and what the study reports as observance is “surely” devoid of such conscious intent. At best, they say, it is folklore and at worst ritualistic (not ritual) performance that has long since become disconnected from its source. Stated this way, the objection is incorrect. These critics would be surprised to learn that observances are typically accompanied by pronouncement of the blessing that incorporates intent. Thus, of the approximately 60 percent who light candles regularly on Friday evening, fully 51 percent light the candles and say, “Blessed are thou Lord, our God, King of the universe who has sanctified us with His blessings and commanded us to light the Sabbath candle.”

But if this is not acceptable—because the blessing may also be rote—let us see what the respondents themselves say about why they perform the *mitzvot*. While the emphasis of the study was behavioral, as has been stated repeatedly, we did ask for “reasons” at several points. Thus the predominant reasons for observance of dietary laws are to “continue tradition” and “because that’s what Jews do.”⁴ These may be considered wrong reasons by critics who refused to perceive a connection between sociology and theology, but one cannot say that observance is without intent. And, as Hanna Zemer emphasized in her remarks at the Van Leer symposium, observing for the sake of Jewish continuity is not trivial. Moreover, even the most observant (those who defined themselves as “strictly observant” and “mostly observant”) include identification with the Jewish people as an important reason. Thus, Jewish identification as a reason for observance was given by 90 percent of the “strictly” and “mostly” groups, by 70 percent of the “somewhat observant,” and by 35 percent of the “not at all observant.” This is not the issue that splits the “strictly observant” from the others, although we shall soon see what does.⁵

“Just folklore,” continue the critics, or “civil religion,” alluding to the cooptation of religious ritual by secular nationalism. But before rejecting the continuity of Jewish peoplehood as a motive for traditional observance, let us ask ourselves whether we can be certain that our pious ancestors would have answered otherwise if they were asked about motivation. Perhaps reference to the concept “Jewish people” incorporates the normative injunctions of Jewish Law or the Jewish God, and perhaps it has always been so.

Others raise the question whether Jewish behavior in the Jewish State can be considered voluntary at all. Indeed, goes this argument, it is difficult to find meat that is not *hasher*, and which hospital would let a newborn

male child go uncircumcised? Anticipating such objections, the study delves deeper into these areas, basing its conclusions not on whether respondents eat *kosher* meat, for example, but on whether they have separate dining utensils for meat and dairy dishes; not just on whether a male child is circumcised but whether he is ritually circumcised and whether he/she has had a *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony.

3. *Practice without faith is empty and unacceptable.* Another set of critics disagree with the conclusion that observance, however selective, is widespread by insisting that observance is hollow unless it is accompanied by belief in the divine. Their argument is not about the dedication that is supposed to accompany practice (as in the discussion of intent) but about the normative expectation that Jewish behavior is supposed to be accompanied by specifically Jewish beliefs in divinity.

Here, even more than before, the assumption that Jewish Israelis are nonbelievers is incorrect. A very large proportion of Israelis believe in God and that the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. Half believe that *mitzvot* are God's command and that there is divine reward for performing *mitzvot*, although only one quarter agree that one is punished for nonadherence.

There are major differences in the beliefs of those who are more and less observant. Thus, over 60 percent of Israelis “believe completely” that there is a God, but that includes only 20 percent of the self-proclaimed nonobservant. In other words, as one would expect, there is a correlation between believing and observing, when subjectively defined.

Again, we should note that Jewish experience—certainly modern experience—supplies us with examples of Jewish persons who believe but do not observe and others who observe without believing. Both of these syndromes are present in the study. Thus, 20 percent of those who call themselves nonobservant believe in God; 10 percent of the “mostly observant” (3% of the “strictly”) do not.

4. *Practices must be accompanied by acceptance of the halakha as the source of authority for their performance.*

The system of Jewish observance is anchored in the code of rabbinic law known as *halakha*. It is the normative source of authority from which all observances—except for certain folkloristic customs—derive.

Do observers recognize the authority of the *halakha*? For a majority, the answer is obviously in the negative. We have already seen that, when asked why they observe practices such as dietary laws, the predominant reasons tend to be sociological or instrumental or sentimental in nature: this is what Jews do, this is the way it was done at my home, it is more hygienic. Even though the “strictly observant” are also more likely to give these sociological answers than those who observe, the “right” answer—because it is a commandment—is given almost exclusively by the “strictly” and “mostly” observant. Thus 86 percent of the “strictly observant” say they observe *Kashrut* because it is a commandment from the Torah compared with only 7 percent of those who keep the dietary laws among *the* “nonobservant.” This coincides with responses of the four replies to the more general question, “To what extent do you believe or not believe that the Torah and *mitzvot* are God's command: 93 percent, 75 percent, 36 percent, and 6 percent, respectively, “believe completely.”

Acceptance of the code of law as the source of authority for observance does, indeed, divide (but not polarize) the population. Among the “strictly” and “mostly” observant, almost all overwhelmingly say yes, among the “not at all” almost all say no. The “somewhat” observant are full of doubt.⁶

Nonacceptance of this authority also explains the selective character of observance among the majority. More than half doubt the divinity of the *halakha*—indeed, we know that most do not feel guilty about their failure to perform one or another of the mandated practices, and this is true even of those who would like to be “more” observant.⁷ The very idea of picking and choosing is unacceptable to Orthodox Judaism but is widespread among Jewish Israelis. When we asked respondents to assess the importance of several reasons typically offered

for nonobservance, “selective observance is sufficient” was accorded second place in a list of four reasons and particularly characterized those who are, indeed, “mostly” and “somewhat” observant.⁸

It appears, then, that what distinguishes the “strictly observant” is not only the extent of their observance but their loyalty to the source of authority that governs the practice and holds the practices together. The “not at all observant”—even though they do participate in certain observances—I tend to reject the idea that observance is a mandated requirement; indeed, they associate religion with morality and ethics rather than with observance. Those who define themselves as less than strictly observant more than half the population—are aware of their selective behavior, but rather than resort to the ideological “ethical people don't need *mitzvot*,” they simply agree that “partial observance is sufficient,” and, pragmatically that “it is difficult to observe the *mitzvot*.” Not do they sound apologetic. It is true, then, that the two extreme groups are at polar extremes by the acceptance and rejection of the need for authority to govern their behavior, but the rest of the population appears to reject both doctrines. The majority do not explain their observances as mandated by authority nor do they argue that observance is detachable from Jewishness.

5. The data also offer support to those critics who argue that many of *the observances reported in the study are not central to the lives of their practitioners*. It seems reasonable to assume that observance was central to most Jews in the past; indeed, the *halakha* is a virtual agenda for lifelong behavior, on an hour-by-hour basis. That is not so today—at least not for the 60 percent who are neither “strictly” or “mostly” observant by their self-definition. We asked about the centrality of the Sabbath, for example, because the Sabbath rituals—the prescriptions and proscriptions—are so emblematic of the richness and complexity of Jewish tradition. Questions such as “How important is it to you to observe *mitzvot* as a guiding principle of your life?” or “How important is it to you to observe the Sabbath in a traditional way as a guiding principle of your life?” are answered affirmatively by 97%-85%-35%-5%. About 25-30 percent of the population experience the Sabbath as “very” central, while the majority—in spite of their widespread, albeit selective, Sabbath observances—do not share this experience. They do not negate the experience—it is meaningful for most—but they do not affirm its centrality in the same way as what might properly be called the most “religious.”

CONCLUSION

In summary, most criticism of the Guttman Report charges that the study has decontextualized ostensibly religious observance and reported only behavioral performance. This is true. The authors undertook to report on patterns of behavior. The study is a portrait of the extent to which a representative sample of Israeli Jews adhere to a sample of religious practices (*mitzvot*) ordained by the *kalakha*.

Critics say, in effect, that these practices should not be characterized as religious nor even “observant” because their performance—so the critics assume—is unsystematic, without intent, devoid of belief, unaccepting of the legitimacy of *kalakha* authority, and marginal to the lives of many of their practitioners.

To this we replied, first of all, that these questions are more properly addressed to Judaism than to the Guttman Institute. Somebody else—not us—should decide what “counts” and what does not, what is blasphemous and what is religious. We are not qualified to say whether partial performance is better than none, whether the ‘people’ have any say in what will be defined as traditional or religious, whether there are “right” and wrong” reasons for traditional behavior—or, indeed, any reasons at all.

Nevertheless, the study also explored self-definitions of religiosity and, to a limited extent, some of the reasons for observance and nonobservance. On the basis of these data one can conclude that (a) observance, while partial and selective, is not random, individual, and unsystematic; there is a pattern of practice that describes the (religious) behavior of Jewish Israelis; (b) these observances are not without intent; they may lack “proper” intent but they are motivated by a conscious commitment to the continuity of the Jewish people; (c)

moreover, those who observe them are not without belief; religious faith is widespread and there is a high correlation between ritual performance and belief; (d) the most observant groups (25-30%) and the rest differ at the level of acceptance of the authority that dictates practice; and a majority of those who practice are apparently aware of their “deviations” and are unperturbed by them, even if many would opt to be “more religious” than they are at present; and (e) the most observant groups also differ from the rest in the central place accorded to these practices in their lives.

Behaviorally speaking—and, perhaps, even from a Jewish philosophical perspective—certain traditional practices are widespread in Israel and extend far beyond the group that defines itself as “strictly observant.” Phenomenologically speaking, the picture is more complex. Observance is selective (but patterned), voluntary (but not without a sense of obligation), and is accompanied by belief in God and in the divinity of the Torah. That it deviates from the system of which these practices are a part, from the centrality of these practices in personal life, and from the mandate of *halakha* is also evident.

Nevertheless, myths of the origin of the religious civilization that is Judaism still have force, as is evident in the beliefs of present-day Israeli Jews. Ironically, more recent history seems to be more easily forgotten. After all, the Zionist revolution was not only supposed to be political—the return of a dispersed people to its homeland—but cultural, as well. And, indeed, the Jewish State has tried cultural experiments, such as efforts to disconnect with the Diaspora and reconnect with a primordial Canaanism or efforts to create a sunbanned socialism based on kibbutz agriculture, urban industry, and so on. These efforts, and others, emphasized discontinuity with the religious tradition. If the Guttman Report has a major message, it is that such experiments have yielded to an expressed commitment to traditional Jewish continuity.

That the expression of this continuity is experienced as voluntary and selective is therefore, paradoxically, also an expression of discontinuity with the traditional authority of the *halakha*. Israeli Jews reject the idea of religious imposition—whether of codified authority, or contemporary rabbis, or religious lobbyists. The report makes this amply clear.

NOTES

1. These ideas represent the thinking of all three authors—Dr. Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn, and myself—but their formulation here is my sole responsibility. Dr. Levy has also had occasion to elaborate on the study in an address to the faculty and students of the Jerusalem branch of the Jewish Theological Seminary at Neve Granot and at a seminar of the Education Branch of the Israel Defense Forces.

2. The study suggests that in spite of its professed pluralism, the educated nonobservant Ashkenazim group has the least day-to-day contact with others who are religiously unlike themselves.

3. The tradition is reluctant to be lenient even with respect to the lesser practices and thus resists justification of *mitzvot* in terms of relative importance.

4. Reasons of hygiene are almost as popular because the nonobservant give them greater weight.

5. It is worth noting that this distribution of replies to the general question, “Is identification with the Jewish people an important factor for you in observing Jewish tradition,” coincides, almost exactly, with citing “home tradition” or “that’s what Jews do” as reasons for eating *kosher* food.

6. The “somewhat” observant “believe completely” (36%), “believe with doubt” (43%) or “don’t believe at all” (22%). Compare the nonobservant, 71 percent of whom “don’t believe at all.”

7. Among the “somewhat” observant, about two-thirds “seldom” or “never” feel uncomfortable doing something that violates the Sabbath.

8. The reason judged most important—in which even the “not at all observant” concurred—is “people lack proper education”; it is the reason cited by two-thirds of the population. Only the “not at all observant” gave

equal weight to “ethical people don't need *mitzvot*,” and of course the “strictly observant” judged this the least important reason. From this perspective, the group that is “not at all observant” stands out most sharply from the other three—who are not so very different from each other.