Exclusion and inclusion of various groups in ancient and contemporary Jewish society via ritual

Dr. Sagit Mor

This lecture focuses on the exclusion and inclusion of various groups by way of ritual. I begin with a discussion of the characteristics of ritual vis-à-vis myth and ideology, and show how these tools were used in ancient Jewish culture. I then look at similar processes in contemporary Israeli society. I examine the exclusion and inclusion of various groups in society via the formation of rituals central to the culture; I also discuss the ways in which individual eligibility to participate in such rituals is determined. This enables us to come to tentative conclusions as to the cultural and educational forces competing among themselves for the right to form and create identity in contemporary society.

Myth, as we know, operates on the individual as well as on the societal level. Scholars note that myth is an organization- and process-based phenomenon, by which psychological and mental qualities are couched in defined literary images. The mythic space absorbs and organizes input and creates a structure whose main qualities are internal logic and coherence. By combining subjective and objective forms of knowledge, myth endows the phenomenon with which it is involved with epistemological validity in the eyes of the creator and receiver of the myth. Therefore myth can be seen as creating real qualities bearing cognitive and existential reality. The reality which creates the myth, which becomes representative, enables other people to be involved, and thus expresses the group's world view.

Ritual is the framework within which one is convinced of the truth of the mythic reality and its signs. In ritual the experienced world and the imagined world conflate, and via the working of a common system of symbols, create a new, unified world. An ideological message expressed in symbols conflates with the way it is expressed; it then operates simultaneously on a variety of human channels—cognitive and sensual. Via its constant repetition, ritual serves as an especially effective tool for constructing a society's world view, and for convincing the individual of the truth of that world view. Myths relating to cosmic phenomena and order, among them the social-political order, are clarified and certified anew by means of rituals.

[Quote from Clifford Gertz]

These qualities give to rituals an especially meaningful role at times of personal or societal crisis. During such periods the individual experiences loss of orientation and inability to understand the surrounding world and its order. In such cultural situations new ideologies are often created; the latter utilize rituals in order to draw a new map enabling the individual to orient himself in the new world. At this stage ritual establishes the new, rehabilitated social order. Ritual certifies the new order externally, by redrawing the boundaries of the community, and internally, by establishing new social hierarchies and appointing leaders authorized to define the community's world view; the latter is achieved by assigning an objective status to subjective conceptualizations. The creators

of ritual make use of familiar, traditional symbols, but connect them to the new political authority. This establishes a sense of cultural continuity while simultaneously defining the new ethos.

The main rituals of Jewish culture are found in the Berachot Tractate of the Mishnah and Talmud. These rituals accompany the individual throughout his daily life—from early morning (blessing of the dawn, Shma Israel, Shaharit); during his daily activities (the Amida prayer, recited three times a day, blessings over food, recited after eating); till bedtime (the Shma recited when retiring to bed). The tractate includes other texts and rituals (*berachot*) which accompany the individual as he faces various phenomena in his surroundings, as well as states of extreme joy (weddings, for example) or sorrow (death, personal tragedies).

Although some of these rituals date back to ancient times—the biblical period and the Second Temple period—they were, for the most part, shaped after the destruction of the Second Temple, during the first and second centuries C.E. The texts recited in these rituals reflect the Sages' theological, ontological and psychological interpretations of the new religious and political reality, i.e. the destruction of the temple by the Romans, and the sense that God had distanced himself from the world and from his people. In contrast to the explicit text recited during the ritual, the *halakhot* which mandate how the ritual is carried out tell the story of the formation of the religious-political-social order.

By mandating what shall be said, who shall conduct the ritual, who is or is not allowed to participate, the *halakhot* reflect changes in leadership and authority: the transition from oligarchy (monarchy and—toward the end of the Second Temple period—priesthood) to a leadership of Sages, whose authority is drawn from their reading and re-interpretation of the Torah. The combination of the explicit text recited during the ritual, and instructions for carrying out the ritual, creates a new definition of Jewish identity and establishes a new social-religious consciousness. In the course of creating this founding myth, the Sages excluded world views of certain groups active during the Second Temple period and immediately afterward (the Saducees, Judean Desert groups, Christians), as well as alternative leadership elites, i.e. the priesthood. The tractate grants significance to the Sages' version of qualities and values of Jewish culture and justifies their own role as leaders authorized to interpret and form Jewish culture.

An example:

A clear example is the Shma prayer. This ritual is to be carried out by every Jew on waking up in the morning, as part of the Shaharit prayer, and as the last thing done before going to sleep, when lying in bed. Although the Shma was recited during the Temple period, the ritual was not obligatory for everyone in any place. The Berachot Tractate opens with a re-formation of this ritual, morning and evening. According to the first.

Mishna, Berakhot 1:1: ***(Text no.1)***

> From what time they recite the Shema in the evning?
> From the hour when the priests enter to eat their portion,
> untill the end of the first watch—the words of Rabbi Eliezer; But the Sages

> say: until midnight; Raban Gamliel says: until the rise of dawn.
>
> Once his sons returned from a banquet hall [after midnight] and said to him: “We did not [yet] recite the Shma”. He said to them: “If the dawn has not yet risen, you are obligated to recite [the Shema].”
> And [this applies] not only [in] this [case]. Rather, [as regards] all [comandments] which Sages said [may be performed] “untill midnight”, the obligation [to perform them persist] until the rise of dawn [. . .]
> If so why did Sages say [that these actions may be performed only] “untill midnight”?
> In order to protect man from sin

The *mishnah* does not declare that the Shma must be recited, but rather takes this duty for granted. This is why it opens with a procedural issue, i.e. At what time should the evening Shma be recited? The absence of a discussion of the legitimacy of the Shma and its blessings can be understood as a strategic means to legitimacy. The Sages use earlier traditions so as to give a feeling of continuity, thereby creating the sense that the form of the liturgical ritual and the individual’s obligation to recite it is not new to Jewish culture. This sense is strengthened by assigning the time of the renewed ritual according to the constraints of the Temple priesthood. Setting the time of the ritual at the priests’ hour of dining creates a sophisticated link between the new ritual and earlier Temple rituals, and rituals permitted outside the Temple. This complicated link simultaneously establishes the authority of the new ritual—its source is the Temple—and grants authority to liturgical rituals held outside the Temple. The new element—the obligation of reciting the Shma no matter where one is—is thus made to seem “natural,” as if it has “always” been done that way.

This conclusion is strengthened by a comparison of the halakhic formulation in the *mishnah* with parallel texts in Talmudic literature. In the latter, the time of recitiation of the Shma is a function of other customs, unconnected with the Temple, such as a dinner in a private home. The exclusion of such considerations from the *mishnah* denotes an intentional effort on the part of the editor, Rabbi Judah Hanassi, to downplay them. He similarly excludes other conceptualizations, and thus emphasizes the new ritual’s link to the Temple.

Similarly, the second *mishnah* of the tractate mandates the hour of reciting of the morning Shma ***(Text no.2)***. Herein the time of the ritual is compared with customs pertaining to the awakening of monarchs. Even if we assume that “The practice of royalty” is not based on genuine historical material, i.e. on customs of Jewish kings and their households, but rather on customs of the nobility (which are part of the consciousness of the Sages and their contemporaries), the choice of such an expression creates an unconscious link to the monarchy, thereby presenting it as a source of inspiration for the Sages’ authority.

As I’ve already noted, the role of a founding myth in an ideological context is to justify a new social-political order. Additional *halakhot* in the Berachot Tractate justify the Sages’

authority and place it above that of other elites, especially the priests. The Sages' authority is suited to difficult times; at the end of the Tractate we learn that "it is time to act for the Lord, for thy law has been broken," ***(Text no.3)*** while the main purpose of the activity is expressed at the beginning of the Tractate: "to prevent us from commiting a sin."

The *mishnoth* of Berachot Tractate establish authority in additional ways. One means is the creation of a link between the new rituals and the Temple. This connection subsumes the concept that just as inspiration is transferred from the Temple ritual to individual ritual, the authority to preserve or create liturgical rituals is transferred from those who serve the Temple (the priests) to those who serve the Torah (the Sages). This concept parallels that found in the opening of another tractate of the Mishnah: the Avoth Tractate ***(text no. 4)***. The latter describes the reception and passing down of the Torah from Mount Sinai (by Moses) up till the beginning of the Second Temple period. In the course of the process of handing down the Torah, the priests are excluded; their place is taken by ancient figures who represent the forefathers of the Sages—the prophets of the first Temple period, as well as members of the Great Assembly (Knesset) of the early Second Temple period. The founding myth is built "naturally." The Sages' authority is presented as the continuation of a natural historical process, seemingly necessary and clear. The Sages' authority is certified in other places in the tractate.

The intensive discussion of time rather than place (e.g. "Where is the Shma to be recited?") serves to introduce one of the central religious characteristics of the Sages' founding myth. The presence of the sacred, again, does not depend on carrying out a religious ritual in a specific place (the Temple), but on carrying out the ritual at the same time and in the same way. The *mishnah* thereby strengthens the importance of the role of time, as opposed to place, as a conditional framework for carrying out the ritual.

The Rituals of Berachot Tractate: A Means of Defining the Community

By its nature the Berachot Tractate does not deal with existential-economic issues which enable participation in the community. Instead, the Tractate emphasizes the religious significance of this participation, and in several places defines the borders of the community, its ethos, and eligibility for belonging to the community. The last chapter of Berachot may be seen in the light of its rejection of theological concepts other than those of the Sages. ***(Text no.5)*** The chapter opens with blessings for the miracles done for Israel and of the rejection of idolatry. These two blessings define the components of belonging to the Jewish people. The first is ethnic ("miracles done to Israel") and the second is religious (idolatry); these two blessings may be viewed as concentric—not overlapping—circles. Therefore, the clear, positive statement in Berachot has a negative side: we learn who is "outside the pale" of the Jewish people. The chapter opens with blessings aimed against one to whom, apparently, the component defining the Jew religiously does not apply.

According to the blessings in this chapter, God "did the first deed"; the Deity is the source both of good and of evil. The chapter ends with a list of the offenses which were

introduced into Temple worship, and with the claim that because other groups defied the Torah's commandments, the Torah itself must be reinterpreted. In the background of all these blessings is a debate with the world views of various groupings from the Temple period: with the Judean Desert sects which claimed that the world is open to the control of two authorities; and with the Saducees, who rejected the idea of reincarnation.

The practice presented in the last chapter of the tractate thus gives a new meaning to its beginning. I claim that the decision to open the chapter with a blessing on a place from which idolatry was ejected can be read not only as an explicit definition of those beliefs and ideas which are beyond the pale of the Jewish community (the area in which the ethnic circle and the Jewish-religious circle overlap), but can also be read as an implicit expression of those beliefs and ideas which the Sages seek to remove from the version of Judaism which they aim to promote. In other words, they intend to eject from the religious circle those who are ethnically Jewish, but whose religious beliefs differ from their own.

Another aspect of liturgical rituals as defining the borders of the community is reflected in questions of eligibility to take an active part in the ritual, since only one who is permitted to be a partner in the ritual act is accepted as a member of the religious collective.

One example is found in the instructions for the public Amida prayer ***(Text no. 6)***. leader of prayer who says Thank you! Thank you! must be silenced by the community because his in repetition of his thanks he is acknowledging the existence of two powers: an evil principle and a good principle.
This *mishnah* defines the responsibility and role of the community leader. Herein is seen the importance of the public figure's use of the prayer's idiom which expresses the Sages' view of reality. A deviation from this idiom demands that the community silence the leader, and even expel him from his leadership position. Silencing plays a social role by pressuring the individual to accept the community's stand (i.e. the Sages' stand) on questions of faith and ideas. An erstwhile public figure who continues to hold to his unacceptable beliefs will probably not continue to attend the synagogue or to be part of the community.

In this section of my talk we've seen how the formation of ritual plays a central role in the inclusion of certain groups and their world views in society, and in the exclusion of competing groups and world views. Now we'll take a look at modern practice.

<u>Memorial ceremonies in the State of Israel – modern examples of the exclusion and inclusion of world views and social groups</u>

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, four special days have been added to the national calendar: Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day for the Fallen in Israel's Wars [including victims of terrorist attacks], Independence Day, Memorial Day for [slain prime minister] Itzhak Rabin. The decisions of when to mark each of these, as well as

their technical and symbolic content, were and are accompanied by vigorous public debate. During the years since these days were added to the calendar, the observances connected with each of these days have been changing. These changes reflect the demands of various groups for expression of their views as to the content of the day, i.e. demands to be numbered among those forming the ethos of Israeli society. We shall now take a look at each of the three memorial days.

1) Holocaust Rembrance Day

This day became part of the national calendar by Knesset enactment in the late 1950s, a decade after the establishment of the State, following vigorous public debate as to when to place it in the calendar. Many argued for Tish'a B'Av, aiming to create a conscious link between the Holocaust and other terrible deeds of destruction and exile visited upon the Jews during their history: the destruction of the First and Second Temples, and the final failure of Bar Kochba's revolt, all of which are associated with the ninth day of the month of Av. The Holocaust is thus seen as another expression of that repeated cycle of destruction and redemption which is Jewish history. Those who objected, demanded that the Holocaust be removed from traditional Jewish historiography whose source was the Diaspora, and assigned a unique status. This view was adopted, and Holocaust Rembrance Day is marked on 27 Nisan, the day on which the Warsaw Ghetto uprising began (April 19, 1943).

The date assigned to Holocaust Remembrance Day strengthened the main content of remembrance during those early years of the State. This resulted from the harsh judgment which the veteran Israeli-Zionist elite, those who fought actively for a Jewish state, visited upon European Diaspora Jews: the latter were seen as "sheep dragged to the slaughter." Therefore the Israeli Jewish community at first saw fit to memorialize the only factor with which it felt able to identify: revolts against the Nazis, and especially the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The ghetto fighters were identified with the fighters of Masada, the defenders of Tel-Hai and the soldiers of Israel's War of Independence. Thus the large majority of Holocaust survivors were excluded from ceremonies with which they were not able to identify, and sensed that their memories were being silenced and the ways in which they had survived the war were being de-legitimized.

A "sea-change" in attitude toward the survivors began with the Eichmann trial in the early 1960s and continued during and after the Six Day War and Yom Kippur War. Anxiety caused by a sense of existential danger shook the self-confidence of Israeli society as a whole and narrowed the gap in consciousness between Israeli and Diaspora Jewry. There was a decrease in hostility toward the Diaspora and the Jewish past, as well as a decrease in the centrality of the soldier as a Zionist role model. This led to an emphasis on the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust and increased interest in the daily life in the ghettos and concentration camps. A different kind of heroism began to be celebrated: not military, but that involved in surviving and maintaining one's humanity under impossible conditions. Survivors were invited to bear witness, and their testimony was welcomed in school, community and national ceremonies.

During the last decade we've been witnessing an additional change. Alternative ceremonies to those sponsored by the government and schools are being developed. The participants are members of the third generation of survivor families; artists who live, or have lived, in Germany, and share their complicated experiences of meeting with representatives of second and third post-War generations in Germany; intellectuals whose parents or grandparents hail from the Islamic lands of North Africa and Asia. The latter demand a place for their identity with and belonging to the Jewish collective. They appropriate the heritage of the Holocaust, even though they are not direct descendants of communities which were destroyed in the Holocaust. In these alternative observances the focus is not mainly on memorializing, but rather on coping with the memory of the Holocaust in the light of current issues, both theological and social, e.g. the nature of Israeli society, including its relationship to its minority groups.

2) Memorial Day for the Fallen in Israel's Wars

The decision of when to mark this day also reflects ideological determinations as to its content. Memorial Day for the Fallen is marked on the day before the official Independence Day celebrations. The decision to mark the two days adjacently (different from the practice in many other countries, where the two days are often widely separated in time) serves to emphasize the price paid for Israel's independence, which includes the willingness of her sons and daughters to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country. However, the closeness of the two days has made it difficult for many people to whole-heartedly rejoice on Independence Day, even for those who have not suffered personal bereavement.

For many years public controversy also surrounded the suggestion of including in official Memorial Day ceremonies those civilians who were killed in acts of terrorism. The decision was finally taken in the aftermath of the bloody terror attacks in the mid-1990s and of the Second Intifada, (which broke out in 2002). The inclusion of victims of attacks on buses, coffee-houses, restaurants and other public spaces reflects the blurring of boundaries between home-front and battle-front which these atrocities created. The victims are thus seen as people who died for their country, perhaps as a result of their very decision to live in Israel.

It's also noteworthy that the 2006 Memorial Day ceremonies included, for the first time, memorialization of Jews murdered in anti-semitic acts in places other than Israel. This reflects a sense of unity between Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jewry. It also expresses the view that anti-Zionism is a form of anti-semitism. This tendency, however, deserves further study, since it also draws attention to controversies between Israeli and Diaspora Jewry as to the centrality of Israel in Jewish identity, and vis-à-vis the contemporary significance of Zionism.

We've seen how this day serves as a flashpoint in struggles between various groups demanding recognition by the State of Israel and inclusion in the Zionist endeavor. We'll now see how the shaping of the ceremonies expresses opposing social trends. From its establishment, the State of Israel instituted a canonical Memorial Day in its educational system, since schools are seen as a central agent of memorialization, which in turn is part of the establishment of a sense of Israeli nationhood. Following fierce debates as to national identity in the 1990s, as well as structural changes in the

school system, the nature of school memorial ceremonies also began to change. As of now, school ceremonies include both strong canonical elements alongside components of renewal and protest. These ceremonies are one of the locations at which national identity is negotiated; such negotiation is characterized by a dialectic between hearing "other voices" in the community, and between encouraging a sense of obligation to and identity with the state's values by veteran elites.

Scholars of the social sciences and of education who research the changes which took place in memorial ceremonies during and since the 1990s have noted a number of trends in the reshaping of the ceremonies:

De-militarization of the ceremony
The use of military elements and national symbols has been attenuated. The ceremony is not always held at the official time (marked by the sounding of a siren throughout the country at 10 AM), or at an official place (at a local monument). Military practices such as standing at attention in military formation or saluting the flag are not always carried out. The latter are sometimes replaced by new practices: drumming while lowering the flag to half-mast; the master-of-ceremonies tells a story instead of leading a quasi-military ceremony; standing in a circle and holding hands instead of standing at attention while the national anthem is sung.

Changes in values and texts
There is less use of canonical texts, of speeches bearing a heroic, patriotic message. Instead there is a growing emphasis on mourning the loss of young lives, and participation in the unending pain of the bereaved families.

Protest and criticism
Along with an increase in empathy for personal pain and loss, there is an increase in expressions of protest and criticism. The protest is for the most part focused on the terrible loss of young lives, but occasionally there are more subversive voices as well. The latter refuse to see war as "fated" or "forced on us," and on occasion question war's moral cost.

The Memorial Day ceremony is one of the central events around which a school builds its institutional identity. Thus in recent years we are witness to changes which reflect the presence of new school populations (immigrants, for example) and the demands of other groups in the Jewish population for recognition of their place in society. Both schools whose population may be termed "marginalized," and schools serving well-established populations use the Memorial Day ceremonies to create a local community of remembrance. Both see the ceremonies as an arena for enabling various groups to make their voices heard vis-a-vis their connection to the State, especially as to the meaning of military service.

While well-established groups conduct identity politics in the name of establishing and strengthening a national identity, marginalized groups use the school ceremony to emphasize their own identity. This is done in a number of ways: adopting the canonical

ceremony (national-religious, for example); attempts at creating a different ceremony (Sephardic); challenging the very existence of the ceremony (ultra-orthodox). The use of the ceremony as an arena in identity politics by various marginalized groups is mainly possible in schools which belong to specific political-social organizations offering an alternative ideology and social support. Thus public schools which are identified with "weak" populations often find it difficult to build a local remembrance community. Whether willingly or not, they continue to serve as the State's agents of remembrance and hold memorial ceremonies of the canonical type.

3) Itzhak Rabin Memorial Day

The choice of a date marking the assassination of Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin was the subject of heated debates in the first years following his murder. Much of the political Left, including the Rabin family, demanded that Rabin's death be marked on November 4, the anniversary of the date on which he was slain, according to the Gregorian calendar. Others demanded that his death be marked on 11 Tishrei, the date according to the Jewish calendar. Support for November 4 came mainly from those who wished to exclude large sections of the religious-Zionist population, since the latter stand accused of collaborating in the vicious incitement against Rabin which preceded and ultimately caused his death. The eventual decision to mark the day according to the Jewish calendar assigns to the assassination canonical status as an act perpetrated against all citizens, and as part of the heritage of Israeli society and the Jewish people as a whole.

Another issue debated was and is the question of what should be memorialized: the murder of a public figure, or the life of this particular figure. The decision to emphasize the former is expressed by using this day to strengthen democratic values and democratic public discourse by attempting to define the border between freedom of expression, on the one hand, and incitement, on the other. Simultaneously, the expectation that Itzhak Rabin the man be remembered posits the need to define the heritage which he left behind and which is worthy of being inculcated in future generations.

To sum up

These examples, both ancient and modern, reflect the cultural role of ritual and the use to which it is put in society by dominant as well as marginal groups in their attempts at defining a collective consciousness. The overlapping of the educational and the cultural turns rituals into an arena in which individual identity is created. This identity is ultimately based on the "winning" version of ritual, whether shaped by social elites or by their challengers.