

Taking Jewish Identity Metaphors Literally

Eli Gottlieb

In “Metaphors we live by,” Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that, “the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (p. 3). They support their argument with linguistic analyses of dozens of examples of what they call “conceptual metaphors.” For example, “ARGUMENT IS WAR”:

We don't just talk about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack ... It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing. (p. 4)

To drive home their point, Lakoff and Johnson invite us to consider a culture other than our own in which argument is viewed, not as war, but as dance. In such a culture, they suggest, arguers would see themselves as performers, whose shared goal is to create an aesthetically pleasing recital. Participants in such a culture would not only talk about arguments differently to us; they would conduct them differently. In this sense, argue Lakoff and Johnson, the metaphor of argument as war is not “poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical; it is literal” (p. 5).

In what follows, I examine how Jewish educators talk about identity. In the spirit of Lakoff and Johnson, I do this by analyzing the metaphors they use when doing so. To investigate what educators mean by Jewish identity, or by identity education, I consider what it would mean to take their identity metaphors literally.

Metaphors of Jewish identity have multiple sources. Some derive from studies of the self and its development in the social sciences. Others derive from

popular conceptions of learning and Jewishness. Once we put these metaphors to use, however, we are inveterate mixers. Like hyperactive cocktail shakers, we combine our identity metaphors into ever more exotic concoctions. And because we not only talk in metaphors but also think in them and act upon them, our resulting ideas and practice end up being, well, a little mixed up.

Sometimes, more than a little. Sometimes, the metaphors we use to talk about Jewish identity are so thoroughly mixed up that we literally don't know what we are talking about. That, more or less, is my argument below. I begin by comparing and contrasting three metaphors that have dominated the literature on identity development. Next, I examine tensions between these metaphors. I then analyze instances of metaphor use "in the wild" (c.f. Hutchins, 1995). These latter instances are all texts written by educators whose goal is to provide a rationale or framework for Jewish identity education. I conclude with some thoughts about the practical importance of metaphorical coherence.

Theoretical Metaphor I: Crystallization

I begin with Erik Erikson. Not because he said it all first or best (although some argue that he did both), but because his metaphors have stuck. Erikson coined many phrases (e.g., "identity crisis," "moratorium") which have seeped into everyday language. But I want to focus here on a metaphor that underlies almost all of his writing on identity, namely, "crystallization" (see e.g. Erikson, 1968, pp. 160–162). Crystallization is the process by which tentative, fluid elements of personality become a structured and stable whole. According to Erikson, crystallization is not something that happens suddenly, once and forever after. It is an iterative process, in which successive structures are broken down and reconstructed, with each new crisis and reintegration. Indeed Erikson's "eight stages of man" (see, e.g. Erikson, 1963/1950) is intended, among other things, to chart and characterize successive crystallizations.

Crystallization is a dominant metaphor in Erikson's writings in the sense that it pervades his account of identity, even when he does not use the term explicitly. In Erikson's writings, an identity is something that is "formed;" it has structure; it is a coherent whole built of previously disparate parts; it is integral, stable, and unified, as opposed to fluid and tentative.

This motif of structure, stability and coherence is further crystallized (if you'll pardon the pun) in the writings of Erikson's popularizers and appliers. James Marcia's influential operationalization of Erikson's theory, for example, defines four possible identity statuses: diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium and achieved. A person with an achieved identity, according to Marcia, is one who

... has experienced a crisis period and is committed to an occupation and ideology. He has seriously considered several occupational choices and has made a decision on his own terms, even though his ultimate choice may be a variation of parental wishes. With respect to ideology, he seems to have reevaluated past beliefs and achieved a resolution that leaves him free to act. In general he does not appear as if he would be overwhelmed by sudden shifts in his environment or by unexpected responsibilities. (1966, pp. 551–555)

Even without reading his descriptions of the three other statuses and the ways in which they fall short of this ideal, one gets a sense of what characterizes mature identity for Marcia: stability, continuity, resolution. These qualities emerge out of prior flux and flow. Once achieved, however, they provide structure and a center of gravity.

Theoretical Metaphor II: Masks

Erikson's account of identity, and the crystallization metaphor that underlies it, are still alive and well in the discourse and practice of contemporary educators. However, as early as the 1970s, some psychologists began to take issue with Erikson. These critical voices gained in volume, rising to a peak in the 1990s, when they combined with other proponents of postmodernism.

The writings of Kenneth Gergen are a good example of this critique and its evolution. Gergen sought not only to undermine Erikson's crystallization metaphor but also to replace it with an alternative one. Gergen was, and remains, refreshingly explicit about his goal. In 1972, he published an article in *Psychology Today* titled, "Multiple identity: The healthy, happy human being wears many masks." In it, he targeted for critique the following two assumptions of Eriksonian theory:

1. That it is normal for a person to develop a firm and coherent sense of identity, and
2. That it is good and healthy for him to do so, and pathological not to. (p. 31)

Gergen reports on various empirical studies that he and others conducted to demonstrate the fluidity of our self-conceptions and their susceptibility to change. "Taken together," writes Gergen, "our experiments document the remarkable flexibility of the self (p. 65). We are made of soft plastic, and molded by social circumstances." This does not mean that we

should see ourselves as fakes, argues Gergen. For “Once donned, mask becomes reality” (p. 65).

Gergen encourages us to “abandon the assumption that normal development equips the individual with a coherent sense of identity” (p. 65). Rather than worrying about incoherence and instability, we should be more concerned

when we become too comfortable with ourselves, too fixed in a specific identity ... we should learn to play more roles, to adopt any role that feels enjoyable ... [The] mask may not be the symbol of superficiality that we have thought it was, but the means of realizing our potential.” (pp. 65–66)

Gergen was not the first to conceive of identities as masks (see, e.g., Shakespeare, 1599, 2.7.1037–1040). However, he was one of the first psychologists to argue that multiple identity is not only a fact but also a value. In other words, for Gergen it is not only *normal* for us to wear many masks but *desirable* for us to do so. He developed this prescriptive element further in his book, *The Saturated Self* (Gergen, 1991), arguing, in effect, that under conditions of postmodernity, in which everything is in flux, multiple identities are more adaptive than are fixed, coherent ones.

Theoretical Metaphor III: Stories

In the last two decades, as postmodern enthusiasms have waned, a third metaphor has gained in popularity: Identity as narrative. There seem to be several reasons for the shift. Not the least of which is the difficulty researchers have faced when attempting to operationalize metaphors like “crystallization” and “masks.” As Sfard and Prusak (2005) write:

After many hours spent in libraries and on the web, we concluded that we would not be successful unless we came up with a definition of identity more operational than those to be found in the literature. Lengthy deliberations led us to the decision to equate *identities with stories about persons*. No, no mistake here: We did not say that identities were *finding their expression* in stories—we said they *were* stories (p. 14; emphasis in the original)

The “story” metaphor shares something with the “crystallization” metaphor and something with the “masks” metaphor. Like crystals, stories have structure

and coherence. Without these, they wouldn't be stories. Yet, like masks, the meaning of a story changes to some extent with each new telling, as goals and audience vary.

When Mixed Metaphors Lead to Muddled Theory

In terms of fashion cycles in social science, the above three metaphors have been presented in rough chronological order. However, one should not conclude from this that these metaphors are related to each other as Hegelian thesis-antithesis-synthesis, or that social-scientific theorizing about identity is somehow cumulative. Firstly, the three metaphors I have chosen to highlight are only some of the more prominent ones. Other popular metaphors for identity include, “negotiation” (Swann, 1987), “membership” (Tajfel, 1974), and “participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Secondly, versions of each metaphor have appeared before. Something like Erikson's crystallization metaphor is implicit in the writings of William James (James, 2009/1890), while Gergen's mask metaphor is anticipated to a large extent by Erving Goffman's writing about self as performance (Goffman, 1959).

For our current purposes, it is sufficient to note that each of the three metaphors I have highlighted is still in current use—often by the same person, occasionally in the same breath. This is where the trouble starts.

Mixing incompatible metaphors, is, according to George Orwell (1946), “a sure sign that the writer is not interested in what he is saying.” As he explains in his essay:

A newly invented metaphor assists thought by evoking a visual image, while on the other hand a metaphor which is technically ‘dead’ (e.g., iron resolution) has in effect reverted to being an ordinary word and can generally be used without loss of vividness. But in between these two classes there is a huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves.

According to Orwell, then, if we want to ascertain whether an educator means what he says when he talks about identity, we have simply to observe whether the metaphors he uses are mutually compatible.

Similarly, a good way to ascertain what precisely educators are trying to do to learners' identities is to consider the verbs they use to describe what

they are doing. For example, if an educator talks of “strengthening” a learner’s Jewish identity, we can assume that this educator considers a healthy, mature Jewish identity to be one that is robust and resilient in the face of attack or attrition. We can assume also that, according to this educator, Jewish identities *need* strengthening; left to their own devices, Jewish identities are somehow fragile or liable to collapse. As this example demonstrates, verbs often function in educational discourse as telescoped metaphors. One more thing before diving into the data: My aim here is not to criticize particular educators or institutions. It is, instead, to highlight confusions and internal contradictions of which we are all guilty, and to illuminate the power of the words we employ in the service of educational aims. The authors of the examples cited below are committed, thoughtful and well-intentioned colleagues. By carefully analyzing their uses of identity language, my aim is not to criticize them in particular, the values they hold dear, or their professionalism as educators. As a Jewish educator, I share many of their goals. If I point any fingers, therefore, it is at “us,” not “them.”

Practical Metaphors I: Strengthening Distant Identities

I begin with a text I received from the Jewish Agency, which served as background material for a lecture I was to give their senior professional leadership. With impressive courage and self-awareness, the Agency was in the midst of re-examining its goals with respect to Jewish identity. One of the documents (Jewish Agency for Israel, 2010) began thus:

In June 2010, the Board of Governors approved new strategic directions for the Jewish Agency that focus on strengthening the Jewish identity of the younger generation as the central vehicle through which we can impact the Jewish future and address some of the major challenges facing the Jewish world. . . . Our new strategic directions . . . will . . . prevent young Jews from around the world opting out of the global Jewish collective and growing apart from Israel [and] prevent young Israelis who are increasingly distanced from their Jewish roots opting out of the global Jewish collective. (chapter 5)

For a policy document, the prose is admirably clear. Yet, even in these first few sentences, we are faced with ambiguities and tangled metaphors. Clearly, “strengthening the Jewish identity of the younger generation” (chapter 13) is a

major goal. But is it an end or a means? Is it a proximate goal, the achievement of which will draw us closer to the ultimate goal of “addressing some of the major challenges facing the Jewish world”? Or is the supposed direction of causality reversed, with strong Jewish identity as the ultimate goal and facing the Jewish world’s major challenges a means to that end?

Setting these ambiguities aside and moving on to the latter part of the excerpt, we note the introduction of a new set of not entirely compatible metaphors. We have young Jews “opting out,” “growing apart,” and becoming “increasingly distanced.” And, correspondingly, we have “our new strategic directions” which will “prevent” these undesirable outcomes. Formulations like these are so familiar to us that we tend to gloss over them without pausing to worry over coherence or meaning. We can see where the authors are heading and we want to keep up. But, just once, let’s pause and re-read. We started with talk of “strengthening” and now we’re talking about “preventing.” If what we were trying to prevent was “weakening,” this would all make perfect sense. We’d be for strengthening and against weakening. But look closely. It’s not “weakening” we’re seeking to prevent: it’s “distancing.” And even here, we seem to be talking about several, distinct kinds of distancing. There’s “opting out” and there’s “growing apart” and there’s becoming “increasingly distanced.” It appears that the authors consider these phrases and ideas to be interchangeable, with variation introduced merely for literary effect. But they’re not. “Opting out” suggests that Jewish identities are like newsletter subscriptions. You click on the “unsubscribe” box and you’re done; a rational consumer exercising his freedom to choose. “Growing apart” assumes that Jewish identities are like relationships; despite the good will on both sides, it’s just not working anymore; musical differences and the desire to see other people have grown too large to ignore; it’s time to call it a day. “Increasingly distanced” suggests that it’s not even our fault; some unnamed other is the culprit. Distancing isn’t something we’re doing; it’s something that’s happening to us.

It doesn’t take much hermeneutical heavy lifting to realize we’re confused. All we have to do is look at the text’s surface structure. If you’re in the mood to roll up your sleeves and get really stuck in, consider what a strong identity might look like. Is it strong like a password, strong like an ox, strong like a bridge, or strong like an alcoholic beverage? Is it strong because it’s immovable or strong because it’s flexible? Is strength acquired through exercise, distillation, or buttressing? And how is distancing prevented? By corralling the endangered into small spaces with high fences? By removing “opt out” boxes? By relationship counseling?

Practical Metaphors II: Bequeathing Commitment

The next text is from the Israel Defense Forces Education and Youth Corps' (2011) "Torat Hahinukh" (or "Education Doctrine"). The Education and Youth Corps provides training and enrichment courses for soldiers and commanders in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) at various points in their careers. It also provides other corps in the IDF with embedded education officers, who are responsible for the ongoing education of soldiers in the units to which they are assigned. A key area in which the Education and Youth Corps is active in the development of soldiers' "Israeli-Jewish identity."

I begin with the authors' statement of the goals of education in the IDF:

Ultimate Goal: Cultivation of a strong feeling of belonging and meaning among soldiers and commanders. Strengthening their commitment to service in the Israel Defense Forces through understanding the ties that bind them to the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state and to the Jewish people.

Goals:

1. Strengthening the concept of military service as a meaningful act for the individual and as a conscious expression of his belonging to the State of Israel and the Jewish people;
2. Understanding the complex environments within which IDF commanders and soldiers operate, and assistance coping with issues of legitimacy and direction, in order to support the commitment of commanders and soldiers to fulfill the missions they are assigned;
3. Strengthening the components of personal identity, alongside the components of collective identity, and strengthening the individual's ability to distinguish between them. (p. 56)

As in the previous example from the Jewish Agency, "strengthening" features heavily. But here it plays a different role. Strong identities are means, not ends. The ultimate goal is that soldiers be committed to service in the IDF; the strengthening of their Israeli-Jewish identities is a means to that end. Second, strengthening is conceived here as an activity that involves meaning-making, understanding, and differentiating between different components of one's identity. These latter themes are developed further in a passage that describes the Education and Youth Corps' methods:

The approach to work on Israeli-Jewish identity includes several complementary, interrelated components:

- A. The educational mission: Building two supports on which the discussion will be based: Knowledge and emotion
 - B. The educational activity: The educational move that enables the creation of change based on the educational mission
 - C. The result: Strengthening and deepening commitment, based on integrated meaning work: Knowledge, emotion and clarification.
- (p. 59)

This description is followed by a diagrammatic representation of the educational process (see Figure 1):

From the above we see that the IDF sees its mission as to engage soldiers' hearts as well as their minds; to bring about change in the soldiers' identities through values clarification; and thereby to deepen their commitment to service in the IDF. Moreover, we are presented with a visual metaphor of construction, reinforcing the impression that Israeli-Jewish identity is made up of a particular set of building blocks and the IDF's role is to serve as a builder. Indeed, this metaphor of the IDF as a builder of Israeli-Jewish identities has deep historical roots, reaching back to David Ben Gurion's oft-quoted aphorism: *Am boneh tzavah boneh am* —“A people builds an army builds a people.”

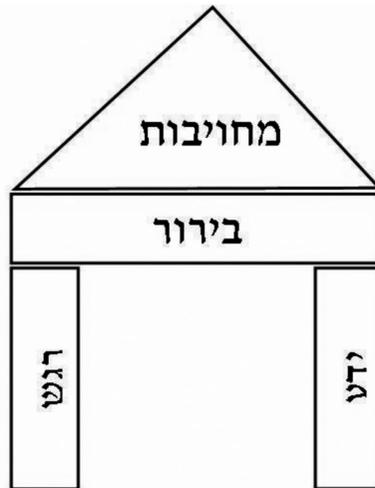


Figure 1 The IDF's approach to work on Israeli-Jewish identity (IDF Education and Youth Corps, 2011, p. 59). The left column represents “Knowledge,” the right column, “Feeling,” the horizontal bar “Clarification,” and the triangular roof “Commitment.”

Elsewhere in the text, the authors develop this approach in relation to specific “components” of Israeli-Jewish identity, such as “the people’s heritage,” “Zionism” and “bequeathing the memory of the Shoah” (pp. 48–49):

Strengthening the sense of meaning and belonging of soldiers and commanders requires the development of a consciousness of shared fate and shared destiny. In these contexts, the goal is to understand that we are connected by memory of the past and a view of the challenges of the future. The work will focus on acquaintance with the components and characteristics of Israeli-Jewish identity, on cultivation of respect and tolerance for different approaches and streams in the world of Judaism and on processes of personal clarification. . . . When feet are planted deep in national, cultural and ethical heritage, there is a different power to the hand that holds the weapon. . . . To strengthen the sense of belonging among all who serve, the IDF seeks to advance acquaintance between groups and to cultivate tolerant and open discourse. The activity will address the common denominators and deepen also by clarifying the disagreements. . . . Bequeathing the memory of the Shoah in the IDF in these contexts strengthens the soldier’s sense of belonging to the Jewish people, the State of Israel and the IDF. (pp. 48–49)

Of the three metaphors we reviewed earlier, the IDF’s approach is closest to Erikson’s “crystallization.” Soldiers encounter ideas and groups that challenge their existing concepts of who they are and what matters to them. The IDF initiate and choreograph these encounters to encourage reflection and then commitment. Moreover, the desired product of the process is a firmly constructed identity, with all building blocks put together in such a way as to ensure that the resulting structure is strong enough to withstand future challenges.

So far, so clear. However, look a little more closely at the verbs used to describe the process. There’s “strengthening”—which is to be expected. But there’s also “development,” “acquaintance,” “cultivation,” “clarification,” and “bequeathing.” These all appear in passive rather than active forms, obscuring who exactly is doing what to whom. Moreover, the actions to which they refer are not in any obvious sense interchangeable. For one thing, they entail different kinds of subjects, objects and relations between the two. Development happens to an individual. Acquaintance occurs between one individual and another, or between an individual and some other object. Cultivation occurs when

one individual tends to the growth of another object or quality. Clarification is something one does to one's own thoughts or ideas. And to bequeath is to transfer one generation's property into the possession of the next. In other words, the process involves one, two, three or more actors, depending on the verb. Similarly, the objects on which the implied actors act vary from persons to ideas to cultural legacies. These are objects of a bewildering variety of shapes and sizes.

It is only when we pause to read slowly, and to take seriously the metaphors used here to describe identity education, that we realize how eclectic and vague the description is. The authors' use of passive, abstract formulations obscures tensions that become apparent the moment we attempt to translate them into concrete terms. Consider the relations between bequeathing and commitment. Commitment can't be bequeathed. This isn't an empirical fact but a logical one. Committing is something you do; it is active. Receiving a bequest happens to you; it is passive. Indeed, the overarching metaphor (made explicit in the diagram) of identity education as an act of construction, with the IDF as builder, is in fundamental tension with the doctrine's emphasis on individual reflection, meaning-making and commitment. If the soldier constructs his own identity, then the IDF isn't so much a builder as an architect and supplier of building materials. On the other hand, if the IDF *is* a builder, then acts of meaning-making, clarification, and commitment by individual soldiers are beyond its power to perform. Such acts of interior design are simply not the kinds of things that can be contracted out to a third party; they can be performed only as DIY (Do It Yourself).

At the Mandel Leadership Institute, we run an educational leadership program for senior IDF officers. When I ask these officers to describe the IDF's educational role in Israel, many reply: *lehaqnot arakhim*. The closest idiomatic translation I can offer for this phrase is "to impart values," but this doesn't do justice to the eccentricity of the formulation. The verb, "*lehaqnot*," is a *hiph'il* construction of the root, *kanah*—to acquire. Translated more literally, the term, "*lehaqnot arachim*," means approximately, "to cause others to acquire values." Consider this for a moment. The phrase acknowledges on one hand that values are something that a soldier—or any person, for that matter—can acquire only for himself. On the other hand, it places the IDF in the role of subject and the soldier in the role of object. In its mixture of active and passive, this linguistic move is similar to "bequeathing the memory of the Shoah." The fact that there are multiple phrases in the IDF's educational lexicon that contain built-in ambiguities about who is doing what to whom suggests that

the ambiguity isn't accidental. Consciously or otherwise, the IDF is grappling with the question of how far it can or should intervene in the development of soldiers' Israeli-Jewish identities.

Practical Metaphors III: Connecting the Uninvolved to Authentic Jewish Personalities

My final example is from a report by Hillel International (Zwilling, 2010) on its recent initiatives to increase "Jewish engagement" among students in the USA. The report begins by defining the challenges these initiatives seek to address:

In an era of extended emerging adulthood, where personal interests and social networks reign over institutions and organizational membership, organizations are being pushed to define new ways to connect the next generation to the richness of Jewish life. Hillel has taken this challenge to heart ... In 2006, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life released a five-year strategic plan that enunciated a new mission: "Enrich the lives of Jewish undergraduate and graduate students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world." (pp. 4–5)

At the outset, we are faced with two distinct metaphors: "connection" and "enrichment." The "connection" metaphor is elaborated somewhat in the subsequent paragraphs:

Rather than focusing on the number of participants in Hillel programs alone, Hillel now evaluates its success based on students' Jewish growth. Participation in one-off activities, it is felt, is a limited measure of success, as it only denotes attendance at a Hillel event. On the other hand, growth implies a meaningful transformation, laying the foundation for students to embark on lifelong Jewish journeys far beyond their four years on campus.

Hillel embraced two methodologies to move its work beyond "the institution" and "the program" to help each student connect to, explore, and affirm their Jewishness: "Relationship-Based Engagement" and "Meaningful Jewish Experiences."

Relationship-Based Engagement is an outreach method based on building relationships with students as individuals, learning about their stories, gaining an understanding of what is of interest and value to them,

and connecting them to Jewish life in ways that support their development and growth.

Meaningful Jewish Experiences are experiences that create positive Jewish memories, Jewish self-confidence, Jewish knowledge and connections to Jewish people/community. Meaningful Jewish Experiences lead students to develop ownership of their own Jewish experiences—making active choices to advance their Jewish journey and ultimately, although often later in the future, to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life. (pp. 6–7)

From these paragraphs we learn that the things to which Hillel seeks to connect young Jews are several and various. They include, “their Jewishness,” “Jewish life,” and “Jewish people/community.” What Hillel means by “enrichment,” however, is less clear. From the context, it appears to include some or all of the following: growth, meaningful transformation, exploration, affirmation, journeys, knowledge, self-confidence, ownership and commitment.

As in the texts by the Jewish Agency and the IDF, we are presented with a bewildering array of actions and relations. What does it mean to connect to one’s Jewishness? Is it like getting in touch with your feminine side, spending quality time with your father, or logging onto a Wi-Fi hotspot? And how does one connect to Jewish life, if not by participating in “one-off activities?” (Zwilling, 2010). By participating repeatedly in routine activities? If so, which activities? And how many times must one participate in them to qualify as connected? Similarly, what is a meaningful transformation? How does it differ from a meaningless one? Is it a procedure you perform on yourself or something that someone else—preferably a licensed professional—performs on you? And how does one help a person “to explore”? (p. 6). By supplying the would-be explorer with the metaphorical equivalent of shoes? A GPS? A research grant? A native guide? Wanderlust?

None of these suggestive metaphors is developed or elaborated. However, additional clues as to the conception of Jewish identity underlying Hillel’s approach appear later in the document, when two strategic initiatives are described: The Campus Entrepreneurs Initiative and Senior Jewish Educators:

Campus Entrepreneurs Initiative Interns are previously uninvolved Jewish students, from broad and diverse social networks, who are hired by Hillel and trained to use relationship-based engagement methods in building and developing their own social networks to connect their uninvolved Jewish peers to Jewish life. . . . Senior Jewish Educators are talented

educators with deep Jewish knowledge and authentic Jewish personalities who serve as mentors and teachers for students' Jewish journeys, focusing particularly on those students who are not already involved in Jewish life on campus. . . . CEI Interns and Senior Jewish Educators encourage students to become an active part of defining or expanding their Jewishness. This principle of self-efficacy lays the groundwork for students to continue to find their own meaning in Jewish life long after they graduate. (pp. 7–14)

One striking feature of these descriptions is the implied gulf between those whom Hillel has recruited and the larger body of Jewish students that their recruits are expected to serve. The “involved” are contrasted with the “uninvolved.” Senior Jewish Educators possess “deep Jewish knowledge and authentic Jewish personalities”—implying that others possess only shallow Jewish knowledge and personalities that are not (yet?) authentically Jewish.

Another striking feature is the difference between the before and after pictures of the target students. After being connected to their Jewishness by more involved peers and guided on their Jewish journeys by mentors more knowledgeable and authentic than themselves, they “become an active part of defining or expanding their Jewishness,” and are able to “find their own meaning in Jewish life.” How exactly this dramatic shift from passive to active is supposed to occur is not explained. In most of the sentences used to describe the two strategies, Hillel volunteers and professionals are the subject and target students the object. By what process do these latter, formerly passive individuals suddenly acquire agency? Moreover, if agency is a necessary condition for authentic Jewish identity, then, when Hillel professionals cast students as objects rather than subjects, they deny them—by definition—the very thing they say they wish these students to have. Hillel’s mixed metaphors thus seem to lead to conceptions of identity education that are either circular or paradoxical.

The Importance of Being Literal

When I confront educators with their mixed-up identity metaphors, most do something remarkable: They acknowledge their discomfort and admit they have a problem. Indeed, they worry more about the moral implications of their everyday talk than about its logical consistency. It is uncomfortable to recognize that, while you prefer to think of identity education as a rational and noncoercive enterprise, your language casts you in the role of a planter or

builder and those whom you teach in the roles of plants and buildings. That educators don't deny or ignore this discomfort is impressive. It would be all too easy to rebut my arguments as *pilpul* or nitpicking, the kind of "foolish consistency" that Ralph Waldo Emerson attributed to "the hobgoblin of little minds" (Emerson, 2007/1841). But, as these educators recognize, my critique is not about grammar or vocabulary; it's about ideas and actions.

When talking or writing about identity, I encourage us to take our metaphors literally, or at least to mix our metaphors responsibly. Not always or exclusively, but with sufficient regularity as to keep our heads clear and our feet within reasonable reach of the ground. As Orwell warned, when metaphors become unmoored from the images they were created to invoke, incoherence and banality follow. To paraphrase Orwell, our language of Jewish identity "has become ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts" (Orwell, 1946). Let us endeavor to clean up our language and have wiser thoughts.

Bibliography

- Emerson, R. W. (1841). *Self-Reliance*. Retrieved from <http://www.emersoncentral.com/essays1.htm>
- Erikson, E. H. (1963/1950). *Childhood and Society*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.
- Gergen, K. J. (1972). Multiple Identity: The healthy, Happy Human Being Wears Many Masks. *Psychology Today* 5(12), 31–35; 64–66.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Modern Life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the Wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
- IDF Education and Youth Corps. (2011). *Torat hahinukh (Hebrew)*. Retrieved from http://www.chinuch.aka.idf.il/SIP_STORAGE/files/0/1620.pdf
- James, W. (1890). *The Principles of Psychology*. Retrieved from <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/j/james/william/principles/>
- Jewish Agency for Israel. (2010). *Securing the Future: Forging the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Jewish People (Part II: Operationalizing the Strategy)*. Jerusalem, Israel: Jewish Agency for Israel.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3(5), 551–558.
- Orwell, G. (1946). Politics and the English Language. Retrieved from http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e_polit/
- Sfard, A., & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling Identities: In Search of an Analytic Tool for Investigating Learning as a Culturally Shaped Activity. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 14–22.
- Shakespeare, W. (1599). *As You Like It*. Retrieved from <http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/playmenu.php?WorkID=asyoulikeit>
- Swann, W. B. (1987). Identity Negotiation: Where Two Roads Meet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(6), 1038–1051.
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and Intergroup Behavior. *Social Science Information/sur Les Sciences Sociales*, 13(2), 65–93.
- Zwilling, J. (2010). *Emerging adults: The Hillel Model for Jewish Engagement*. Retrieved from https://www.bjpa.org/content/upload/bjpa/c__w/Zwilling-Emerging-Adults.pdf