



הפורום הבינלאומי של  
הספרייה הלאומית  
المنتدى العالمي للمكتبة  
الوطنية الإسرائيلية  
The Global Forum of the  
National Library of Israel

# THE FATE OF SECULARISM

THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE:  
CONFRONTATION, COLLABORATION,  
AND MUTUAL INFLUENCE

The Second Gathering of the Global Forum  
of the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem  
29-30 November 2016 | 28-29 Cheshvan 5777

## SUMMARY





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## The Global Forum of the National Library of Israel

The National Library of Israel is in the midst of a renewal project designed to position it as a vibrant, creative, and influential intellectual center, which plays a meaningful role in the cultural, social and spiritual life of Israel and the Jewish people. The book in its deepest sense is the essence of Jewish identity, and so it is only natural for the “People of the Book” that this cultural center be located in its national library.

Realizing the National Library vision – which is vital for ensuring the continuity of Jewish culture – is not by any means self-evident. It is a monumental task that requires the cooperation of the finest minds, foremost cultural figures and best leadership that Israel, the Jewish people and the world have to offer. To this end, the National Library of Israel’s Board of Directors decided to establish the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel and to appoint Prof. Moshe Halbertal and Mr. Leon Wieseltier as its co-chairs.

The Global Forum is an important element in the transformation of the National Library’s renewal vision into reality. Every two years, the Forum brings together 80 prominent thinkers, cultural figures and leaders, men and women, Jews and non-Jews alike. The discussions at the Forum, which touch upon the most significant issues for Israel, the Jewish people and the world at large, take place with an emphasized linkage to the intellectual treasures of Israel and the Jewish

people, viewing them as a source of identity and inspiration, and as a relevant, challenging and influential resource for the contemporary agenda.

The Forum’s discussion topics are not confined to the relatively limited scope of issues relevant to the libraries of the past, which were primarily passive in nature. The vision of renewal assigns the Library an active role, to strive in making the treasures it holds accessible and to bridge between the wisdom, heritage and values embodied within them and the significant dilemmas confronting us today. The Forum has been created to aid the National Library in its new mission and is a central means through which it is striving to open its treasures to diverse and global audiences.

In the context of study, debate, education and creation, the new National Library of Israel is also obligated to encourage the work of interpretation and the deep critical discourse designed to hone an understanding of diverse meanings found in the collective body of Jewish creative efforts, the treasures of which are held within the Library’s walls. The Forum has a leading role in this task due to its intellectual might. It contains a most unusual concentration of wisdom, historical knowledge, academic depth, cultural sensitivity and love of the book and of books. The myriad fields to which the Forum members belong and the impressive achievements of each member

in his/her own field guarantee an intellectual discourse of rare quality.

The global recognition and personal prestige of the Forum participants contribute significantly to the success of the National Library’s renewal vision and to it taking its rightful place among the leading cultural centers of the world. Over time, the Forum has remarkable potential to impact the cultural, social and spiritual lives of Israel and the Jewish people. This will be achieved by the very act of raising issues on the public agenda, the quality of the discourse and the encouragement of public engagement with them. The Forum also helps enable the Library to fulfill its fullest potential, addressing dilemmas specific to the National Library of Israel, as its members provide expertise, guidance, professional connections and advice.

The Library we are toiling to rejuvenate is not a museum. It is a living bridge connecting the wisdom of the ages with our world today and with the challenge of building a better tomorrow. The impact of the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel is already being felt, an exceptional expression of the Library’s renewed mandate and vision.

**I am pleased that the Second Gathering of the National Library of Israel is convening in Jerusalem, evidence that this important Forum is becoming a regular event in the life of our people and country. The shared study of the book, books in general and of their relevance to contemporary issues is essential to our identity and our shared future.**

Mr. Shimon Peres, z"l  
The Ninth President of Israel

**The gathering of the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel, many of the members of which I know personally, assists in realizing the vision of fostering an inspirational intellectual beacon. We are all proud of our National Library, and together we will continue to ensure that it is a priceless treasure of enlightenment, progress, intellectual liberty and creative freedom.**

Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu  
Prime Minister of the State of Israel



**The Global Forum of the National Library of Israel has been established as an integral element of the transformative renewal process upon which the National Library has recently embarked. The Forum brings together leading thinkers and scholars from Israel and around the world in Jerusalem for a rare gathering of intellectual depth, historical knowledge, cultural sensitivity, love of the book and the written word.**

Mr. David Blumberg  
Chairman of the Board, The National Library of Israel

**The aim of the Global Forum is to create a regular community of thinkers, scholars, writers, artists and others who will attend to the noble work of interpretation, and take upon themselves the pleasures and the strains of attempting to establish, by means of dialogue about central ideas and central texts and central images from all the eras of Jewish civilization, the many meanings of what together we all cherish.**

Prof. Moshe Halbertal and Mr. Leon Wieseltier  
Co-Chairs of the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel





Greetings from the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu to the Global Forum Members



Mr. Shimon Peres z"l, Honorary Chairman of the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel



Mr. David Blumberg, Chairman of the National Library of Israel



Prof. Moshe Halbertal, Co-Chair of the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel



Mr. Leon Wieseltier, Co-Chair of the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel

**Tuesday, 29 November / 28 Cheshvan**

**08:30**  
**Gathering and Registration**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

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**09:00**  
**Opening Session**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

Chair: **Dr. Raquel Ukeles**  
 Welcome and opening remarks: **Mr. David Blumberg, Prof. Moshe Halbertal**  
 Introductory keynote speech: **Prof. José Casanova**  
**“The Sacred and the Profane: Confrontation, Collaboration, and Mutual Influence”**  
 Respondent: **Dr. Yochi Fischer**

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**10:30**  
**The Fate of Secularism – The Moral-Philosophical Dimension**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

Chair: **Prof. Avishai Margalit**  
 Speakers: **Prof. Meir Buzaglo, Prof. Jonathan Lear, Prof. Tamar Ross**

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**12:00**  
**Lunch**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

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**13:30**  
**Jerusalem and the Overlappings of the Sacred**  
 Mishkenot Sha’ananim Conference Center

Speakers: **Ms. Emuna Elon, Prof. Sari Nusseibeh, Mr. Amos Oz**

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**15:15**  
**Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions**  
 Mishkenot Sha’ananim Conference Center, open to the public

Chair: **Prof. Leora Batnitzky**  
 Keynote address: **Prof. Michael Walzer**  
 Speakers/Respondents: **Prof. Eva Illouz, Prof. Kesavan Veluthat, Mr. Leon Wieseltier**

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**17:15**  
**Violence in the Name of God – No Exit?**  
 Mishkenot Sha’ananim Conference Center, open to the public

Chair: **Prof. Rachel Elior**  
 Keynote address: **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

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**18:30**  
**Reception & Dinner**  
 The National Library of Israel

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**20:30**  
**A Different World Than We Knew?**  
 Panel and Discussion  
 The National Library of Israel

Chair: **Prof. Moshe Halbertal**  
 Panelists: **Mr. Mustafa Akyol, Prof. Dominique Moisi, Mr. Leon Wieseltier**

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**Wednesday, 30 November / 29 Cheshvan**

**08:30**  
**Gathering and Registration**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

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**09:00**  
**The Fate of Secularism – The Political Dimension**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

Chair: **Prof. Dominique Moisi**  
 Speakers: **Mr. Mustafa Akyol, Prof. Ruth Gavison, Prof. Moshe Halbertal**

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**11:20**  
**President of Israel’s remarks:**  
**Mr. Reuven “Ruvi” Rivlin**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

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**12:00**  
**The Fate of Secularism – The Social Dimension**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

Chair: **Prof. Fania Oz-Salzberger**  
 Speakers: **Prof. Shmuel Feiner, Prof. Haviva Pedaya, Prof. Diana Pinto**

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**13:30**  
**Lunch**  
 Mount Zion Hotel

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**14:15**  
**Tour – New National Library of Israel Building Site**

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**15:00**  
**Dilemmas of Accessibility in a Multicultural Society**  
 Working groups held simultaneously  
 National Library of Israel

Working group Chairpersons: **Prof. Nili Cohen, Adv. Ali Haider, Prof. Menahem Magidor, Prof. Jonathan Sarna, Rabbi Yuval Cherlow**

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**16:30**  
**Religion and Secularism in the Tumultuous Middle East**  
 Open to the public  
 The National Library of Israel, Givat Ram

Chair: **Ambassador Prof. Daniel Kurtzer**  
 Speakers: **Prof. Karen Barkey, Prof. Noah Feldman, Prof. Mati Steinberg, Prof. Shibley Telhami**

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**18:15**  
**The Fate of Secularism – Literary and Cultural Creation**  
**Closing session**  
 Open to the public  
 The National Library of Israel, Givat Ram

Chair: **Mr. Assaf Inbari**  
 Speakers: **Mr. Ozvaldo Golijov, Ms. Agi Mishol, Ms. Nicole Krauss, Rabbi Haim Sabato**  
 Concluding remarks: **Mr. David Blumberg, Mr. Leon Wieseltier**

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# Second Gathering of the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel

## Session Summaries



### The Sacred and the Profane: Confrontation, Collaboration, and Mutual Influence

Prof. Jose Casanova | Dr. Yochi Fischer

The modern Hebrew word for “secular,” *khiloni*, first makes its appearance in a second century CE Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Targum Onkelos. There, *khiloni* translates the Hebrew word *zar*, meaning stranger. It was only with the nineteenth century revival of the Hebrew language, and particularly in 1950’s Israel, that *khiloni* took on its current, secular – in both senses – definition.

This linguistic transformation is indicative of the ways that the meaning of the secular continues to evolve and change. In this opening session of the Global Forum, Jose Casanova and Yochi Fischer addressed the theoretical framework underlying the concept of secularism in the West, globally, and in Israel. Their careful analyses informed the Forum’s subsequent debates and discussions.

Casanova began with a basic distinction between two different kinds of secularism as it developed in Europe. The first is historical-philosophical secularism, which applies to any theory of the origins and development of religion embedded in a particular philosophy of history that assumes religion’s dangerous irrationality and its inevitable supersession by reason. The second is political secularism, which includes political doctrines or ideologies that determine the separation between the religious and the political.

Both these manifestations of Western secularism are in a crisis that many describe as an alarming retreat. However, where others see catastrophe, Casanova identified an opportunity to study the phenomenon of secularism, and for its philosophical and political redefinition.

The current clashes between religion and the secular, he said, “should not be viewed as confrontations between the sacred and the profane, but between two different types of sacred claims – the religious sacred and secular sacred.”

In order to expand on this point, Casanova presented three models of secularization: the Nordic model of collaboration, the Catholic model of confrontation, and the American model of mutual influence. All three arose from the European reaction to the sixteenth century wars of religion. The ultimate solution to these bitter conflicts between Catholics and Protestants was not secularism but rather what he called confessionalization: by agreement, the territory of Europe was divided into separate Catholic and Protestant zones, with three mixed states – Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, themselves regionally divided along religious lines – in between.

This homogeneity remained even as the continent’s religiosity changed. “The process of



European secularization,” Casanova continued, “ought be understood primarily as a process of the deconfessionalization of states, nations, and individuals.”

However, the Protestant north and the Catholic south pursued different paths of secularization. The Nordic countries, Casanova said, followed a model of soft deconfessionalization, entailing collaboration between the national church and the state and the retreat of spirituality to the private realm; in other words, “belonging without believing.” In Catholic countries, particularly France, on the other hand, the conflict between the Catholic Church and the secular state led to the model of *Laïcité*, which dictates the removal of religion from the public realm.

In the United States, on the other hand, the lack of a state religion prior to secularization, coupled with Americans’ strong religious belief, led to a mixed solution. Like *Laïcité*, the United States mandates a strong separation of church and state. However, like the Nordic model, American society is characterized by the dilution of secular-religious boundaries.

Versions of each of these models can be found elsewhere in the world and in the context of other religious traditions. In Islam, for instance, Kemalist Turkey followed the Catholic model of *Laïcité*, Morocco adheres more closely to collaboration between religion and the state, and Indonesia has adopted a mixed model as in America.

“The globalization of the European religious regime,” Casanova concluded, “leads not to the exit of religion, as in Europe, but rather, as in the United States, it leads to all kinds of novel

religious transformations. What characterizes the contemporary global moment is not only that all forms of human religion, past and present, from the most primitive to the most modern, are available for individual and collective appropriation. Equally relevant is the fact that, increasingly, they must learn to coexist side by side in today’s global cities.”

Casanova clarified that while this globalization of culture exists alongside globalization’s economic effects, the two are not mutually dependent.

In her talk, which stimulated a great deal of discussion, Yochi Fischer applied Casanova’s roadmap to the Israeli context.

First of all, Fischer emphasized that Israeli secularism cannot be understood in isolation from Jewish theology and culture.

“Jewish secularism should be conceived as an aspect of religious dimension and not just in terms of transcending religion,” she said, citing the deep religious roots even of the word *khiloni* discussed above. The Israeli concept of the secular-religious divide, furthermore, has social and political ramifications. It entailed both casting Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries, many of whom were traditionally religious, as uncivilized, as well as a way of preserving the world of European Orthodox Judaism destroyed in the Holocaust.

But there are all more substantial differences. Christian secularism “perceives religious neutrality as the removal of divine symbols from the public sphere,” she said, “and does not provide the theoretical frame and opportunities

of religions whose religiosity and secularism derive from, and are linked to, a legal system that demands the integration of religion into the public, everyday life.”

In Israeli secularism, though it resembles the Nordic model of belonging without believing, the “belief” being left behind is not the private adherence to Christian dogma. Rather, Judaism, like Islam, is a religion of law. This crucial difference opens up possibilities of tolerance that Christianity – and Christian secularism – lack.

Because of this legal basis, Israeli secularism could well have made space for multiple varieties of religious practice – both Jewish and other – within the public space. If this is so, why does intolerance of religious difference, internal and external, plague Israeli society? For Fischer the answer lies not in secularism, but in the ethnic component of Israeli society and identity. Ethnic belonging, at the heart of the Israeli collective, is what engenders the prejudice, xenophobia, and fear that characterize Israel today.

Clockwise from bottom right: Prof. Dominique Moisi and Prof. Diana Pinto; Dr. Aviad Stollman; Dr. Yuval Levin and Prof. Karen Barkey



## The Fate of Secularism – The Moral and Philosophical Dimension

Prof. Avishai Margalit | Prof. Tamar Ross  
Prof. Meir Buzaglo | Prof. Jonathan Lear

In Jerusalem, the resurgence of religion and religious identity, and the test it poses to secular politics, is far from theoretical. In fact, concrete examples are often no more than a glance away. As the Forum members gathered at the Mount Zion Hotel, they could see, just across the valley, the walls of Jerusalem's Old City and its contested holy sites. This session's three thought-provoking presentations raised the question of how the fervor and devotion such sacred places inspire challenge the sovereign power of the state, and of reason itself.

Tamar Ross's opening talk surveyed creative and diverse Jewish religious models of accommodation with secularism. Rather than mere curios, these models represent substantive alternatives to the debunked Enlightenment idea of humanity's inevitable progress from religion to reason. In fact, by removing religion from the public sphere secularism not only undermines the participation of religious voices in the marketplace of ideas but may itself be responsible for creating religious fundamentalism. "Religion may have something positive to contribute to the moral character of the liberal state," she said. "Building on this common ground will enable democratic regimes to achieve a vision of solidarity that secular liberalism cannot create on its own."

Turning to Jewish religious thinkers' visions of

how religion might contribute to the creation of stronger liberal societies, Ross surveyed the ideas proposed by Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who advocated an absolute separation of religion from the state, and Rav Kook and his religious Zionist' followers, who believe, on the contrary, that the state is and must be holy and redemptive.

Ross also referred to contemporary religious voices who advocate models in which secular and religious worldviews can function simultaneously. For instance, Rabbi Shimon Gershon Rosenberg, known as Rav Shagar, advocated a soft pluralism entailing, as she put it, "absolute commitment to one's chosen truth, while acknowledging the absolute right of the other to choose his."

What such religious perspectives imply, Ross continued, is that social peace in the liberal democratic state may entail the weakening of secular sovereignty. This is especially true in the State of Israel, which draws from Judaism's unique relationship between religion and peoplehood. "The primary function of such democracies would be to provide the bureaucratic services essential for regional politics, and to enable their various subcommunities to express their more particular religious and secular identities in their respective localized spheres."

Meir Buzaglo reached a similar conclusion

regarding the need to limit, or bypass, the state in order to achieve social peace in Israel's diverse society. But rather than rely on theoretical models, he focused on the concrete reality of Jerusalem.

Buzaglo began by recounting three inter- and intra-religious encounters in Jerusalem. His first example concerned the Temple Mount, a contested site holy to both Jews and Muslims that was occupied in ancient times by the Jewish Temple and today by the Dome of the Rock. While messianic Jewish groups have sought the right to pray at the site – an activity Israel prohibited since gaining control over the Temple Mount in 1967 – Muslim groups have attempted to prevent what they see as a Jewish takeover of their holy places.

For Buzaglo, the important aspect of this story is not the conflict itself, but how the state's intervention has only served to exacerbate it. Citing the Basic Law that guarantees freedom for all citizens, an Israeli court ordered the police to allow Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount. But the parallel Muslim groups – whose

activities were arguably no more threatening to social peace and civic calm in Jerusalem – were banned. In the similar case of the Women of the Wall feminist Jewish group, which has been pushing for equal access to egalitarian prayer at this important Jewish site, the courts intervened to allow the women's prayer. For Buzaglo, the examples show that the state applies different interpretations of freedom to different groups, prohibiting some and supporting others.

Buzaglo's third story concerns last September's *Mekudeshet* festival held in the Hinnom Valley just below the Old City walls. In a shared prayer space Jews, Christians, and Muslims – including the *Muezzin* of the *Al-Aqsa* mosque – joined in prayer. "The optimistic side is the faith-based discussion," he said, "which is not directed by the courts and by politicians, but rather takes place between the residents of Jerusalem." By resorting less to the conceptions of justice and freedom advocated by the liberal state, and relying more on a grass-roots organization around a shared Muslim-Jewish tradition, he asked, might real cooperation be possible?

**Religion may have something positive to contribute to the moral character of the liberal state. Building on this common ground will enable democratic regimes to achieve a vision of solidarity that secular liberalism cannot create on its own.**

Prof. Tamar Ross

The session's final speaker also outlined a similar retreat from a sovereign idea of secularism. Here, though, the focus was on the rule of the psyche, rather than practical politics. Jonathan Lear delved into Freud's conception of reason's place in the soul, and an alternative path that psychoanalysis might, and should, have taken.

Lear began with Plato's tripartite division of the soul as outlined in Book Four of *The Republic*. According to this division, the appetitive and spirited aspects of the soul are ruled by the *logistikon*, meaning the soul's logical or reasoning aspect. While this rule could be understood as absolute despotism, in Lear's interpretation the *logistikon* is, in fact, the very psychoanalytic, capacity to listen to the self "so

that it can come to appropriate understanding of how one might live a life in view of other voices that are part of us."

However, this is not the route that Freud himself took. Inspired by a binary conception of the dichotomy between reason and religious belief, Freud dismissed faith as illusion. Freud's attitude, Lear said, "promotes arrogance in the culture that secularism is an inevitable project led by reason; psychoanalysis had added its voice to this." Instead, he called for a return to Plato's more open conception of reason: the idea that human beings have the capacity to struggle with the question of how to live in conversation with the many voices of the soul.



Clockwise from bottom left: Mr. Mustafa Akyol; and Prof. Avishai Margalit, Prof. Meir Buzaglo, Prof. Jonathan Lear, Prof. Tamar Ross; Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

## Jerusalem and the Overlappings of the Sacred

Ms. Emuna Elon | Mr. Amos Oz | Prof. Sari Nusseibeh

According to the Babylonian Talmud's surprising tale of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, the responsibility for the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE lies not with the Roman army, with the Hasmonean kings, nor even with God. Instead, the Talmud blames Jewish society itself: the wealthy elites who succumbed to hatred, cruelty, backstabbing and revenge, and the political and religious leaders, the sages, who were too weak-willed to bend the rules even in the face of certain calamity.

How should we understand the story's apparent claim that the destruction was the result of a petty interpersonal fight? Is not adherence to religious law, which the story seems to condemn, the very thing that the rabbis demand? And what lessons should Christians and Muslims, who also sanctify Jerusalem and for whom the Temple Mount is also a fixture of sacred geography, draw from this tale, if any at all?

In this riveting session, writers Emuna Elon, Amos Oz, and Sari Nusseibeh reflected on these questions before a packed audience at Mishkenot Sheananim.

In her lyrical presentation, Elon, a novelist, journalist, and native Jerusalemite, argued that the lesson of this story is that even God himself could not hold the city together once it had so crumbled from within. The same holds true

today: the fate and sanctity of Jerusalem depends on the deeds of its citizens and leaders. Elon cited the law forbidding Jews from praying on the Temple Mount, the site of the former Temple and, today, of the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque, implying that it was an example of just the kind of abnegation of Jewish leadership that the Bar Kamtza story warns against.

"If I so much as move my lips when I'm standing there a policeman can arrest me, handcuffs and all," Elon said. Rather than preventing Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, she added, the Bible offers an alternative vision of the path to universal peace through the realization of Israel's national revival, including the rebuilding of the Temple. Only then, in the words of Isaiah, will God's house become a house of prayer for all people.

"I don't think Jerusalem was destroyed because of Kamtza, or Bar Kamtza," Amos Oz, the internationally renowned novelist replied at the beginning of his address, "or the heartless host, and not even because of the exaggerated modesty of the sages. Jewish Jerusalem was destroyed not once but twice by Jewish fanatics. And if Jewish Jerusalem is going to be destroyed a third time – and Arab Jerusalem along with it – it will be because of Jewish and Arab fanatics."

The word fanaticism, Oz noted, comes from

the Latin *fanum*, meaning temple, and he noted that temples and fanatics have more than an etymological connection. “Not that everyone who believes in rebuilding the Temple or praying at the Temple is a fanatic,” he said; religious faith itself is not the problem. Fanatics come in both secular and religious varieties, and belief is no obstacle in and of itself to reasonableness. “But

continued, “it isn’t about rights, and it isn’t about stronger and weaker claims. It is about life and death.” But even though the stakes are grave, two simple things can serve as antidotes to fanaticism: curiosity and humor. Both these moral virtues can inspire people to step outside of their own commitments and perspectives.

## God can reach you anywhere, but if you want to reach God you have to go through Jerusalem.

Prof. Sari Nusseibeh

every fanatic believes in rebuilding some temple or another.”

For his part, Oz identified one site in Jerusalem, the city of his birth, youth, and the beginnings of his career as a writer, as sacred to him: the library. But outside of the walls of the house of books, the sacred is encapsulated not in one location or another but in respect for human life and human suffering. Addressing those who claim that Jews have a right to pray on the Temple Mount – and, similarly, Palestinians who claim a right to return to the homes that they lost in 1948 – Oz insisted that we must make a distinction between rights and claims. While Jews may have the right to pray at the spot where the Temple stood, which is also the third holiest site in Islam, Oz asked if it would be wise to do so.

“This is what I say when I talk to fanatics,” he

If Oz spoke of the obligation to consider what others hold sacred, Sari Nusseibeh, the distinguished Palestinian public intellectual, began with a reflection on the different voices in himself.

“I want to confess to you,” he said, “that the overlapping of the sacred and the secular is something that I find that I suffer from myself in my own personality. I’m partly secular and I’m partly also religious, and I can’t always separate between these two aspects of myself.”

On the religious side, Nusseibeh shared his own reflections on the sacred status of Jerusalem in Islam. Jerusalem figures in the *Qur’an* as the location of the Prophet Muhammad’s *Qur’an* ascension to heaven. Despite the fact that the revelation came in Mecca and Medina, the Prophet had to travel to Jerusalem to make this miraculous journey. The story indicates,

Nusseibeh said, that for Muslims Jerusalem is seen as the gateway to the divine. “God can reach you anywhere, but if you want to reach God you have to go through Jerusalem.”

The reason for this sacredness is none other than the Temple. In the account of the ascension, tradition states that the Prophet’s steed, Buraq, was tethered to the Western Wall. Nusseibeh proposed that tradition locates this event here because the wall was already sacred to Jews, and that, in fact, the Jewish and Muslim sacred maps of Jerusalem are not only overlapping, but interdependent.

Unlike the two previous speakers, Nusseibeh argued that religious motivations necessarily become obstacles to achieving practical solutions to the thorny issue of how to make Jerusalem livable for all its peoples. When it comes to questions of politics, and especially the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Nusseibeh strongly advocated setting such issues of faith aside.

Clockwise from bottom: Mr. Amos Oz and Prof. Sari Nusseibeh; The audience at Mishkenot Shaananim; Ms. Emuna Elon



## Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions

Prof. Leora Batnitzky | Prof. Michael Walzer | Prof. Eva Illouz  
Mr. Leon Wieseltier | Prof. Kesavan Veluthat

On June 19, 1947, just days after the United Nations announced its partition plan for British controlled Palestine, David Ben-Gurion sent a letter to the leaders of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Israel party. The letter, meant to allay religious fears about the establishment of a Jewish secular state, granted significant concessions to ultra-Orthodox sensitivities.

This letter testifies to the certainty of the country's secular Zionist founders in their triumph over traditional Judaism. How is it, then, as renowned political theorist Michael Walzer has described, that only a few decades later these same socialist Zionists were swept from power by representatives of the traditional forces that they thought they had so soundly beaten?

In his recent book *The Paradox of Liberation*, the topic of this fascinating and provocative session, Walzer shows how Ben-Gurion was a product of his time. In his opening remarks Walzer discussed the progress and reversals of national liberation movements in India, Algeria, and in Israel — three case studies that stand for a global trend. In all three, secular nationalist movements threw off the yoke of colonial powers. These liberators established states that aimed not only for independence and self-determination, but a no less revolutionary goal than creating new societies and new men — and women. These leaders saw themselves as advancing towards a

future in which religion would become extinct; in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, "there is only one way travel in time."

However, the rejection of religion meant that "the liberationists were at war with the people they wanted to liberate." Eventually, the repressed beliefs returned to the stage, embodied in political parties that swept the secularists from power.

The liberators' great mistake was that they overreached in their rejection of religion. Instead of casting their peoples' religious traditions aside, they should have mined them for supportive elements; in other words, to "naturalize the values of the left in the culture." In the Jewish context, Walzer pointed positively to the Jewish feminist project of "rereading the Rabbis," as the title of Judith Hauptman's groundbreaking 1998 book has it, a project that has yielded tangible fruit in the normalization of feminism and the idea of women's equality in large swathes of the Orthodox world.

Walzer's theory has generated extensive debate, and this session, held before a captivated audience at Mishkenot Sha'ananim, was no exception. Leon Wieseltier, co-chairman of the Global Forum, raised doubts both about Walzer's analysis and about his solution. All secular revolutions, Wieseltier said, inherently

**No matter how many verses of *Tanakh* and *Qur'an*, no matter how many *hadith* or *sugyot* are reread in an egalitarian way, the Jewish and Muslim traditions, I think it is fair to say as an historical matter, will still remain overwhelmingly unegalitarian.**

Mr. Leon Wieseltier

involve discontinuity and rupture, and not only Walzer's three examples. This is because the people who gain their freedom do not thereby become immediately enlightened liberals, and there is no reason to be surprised by the fact that their subsequent choices and allegiances are sometimes illiberal and unenlightened.

His second argument focused on Walzer's remedy. Attempts to coopt the tradition by creative interpretation, Wieseltier warned, will be seen as inauthentic by the believers whom liberals are most trying to convince.

"No matter how many verses of *Tanakh* and *Qur'an*, no matter how many *hadith* or *sugyot*, are reread in an egalitarian way," Wieseltier said, "the Jewish and Muslim traditions, I think it is fair to say as an historical matter, will still remain overwhelmingly unegalitarian. There are ideals of justice and ideals of kindness in our tradition, but I have never found in our tradition ideals of equality. That concept is genuinely an innovation, something really new, a glory of modernity that was developed not out of the religious tradition but in defiance of it."

For Eva Illouz, Walzer's thesis overstates the secularism of Israel's Zionist founders. Jewish secularism was not the outcome of the Zionist movement, but rather its origin; the majority of the Jewish population of Palestine before Israel's existence was secular, the products of nearly a century of European Jewish enlightenment. Moreover, Zionism was, she said, a historical compromise position between the absolute secularism of Jewish assimilation and traditional religiosity. In comparison to French revolutionary ideals, Zionist thinkers gave little thought to citizenship as distinct from religious and ethnic affiliation, and shied away from radically rejecting religious symbols, or even the Bible.

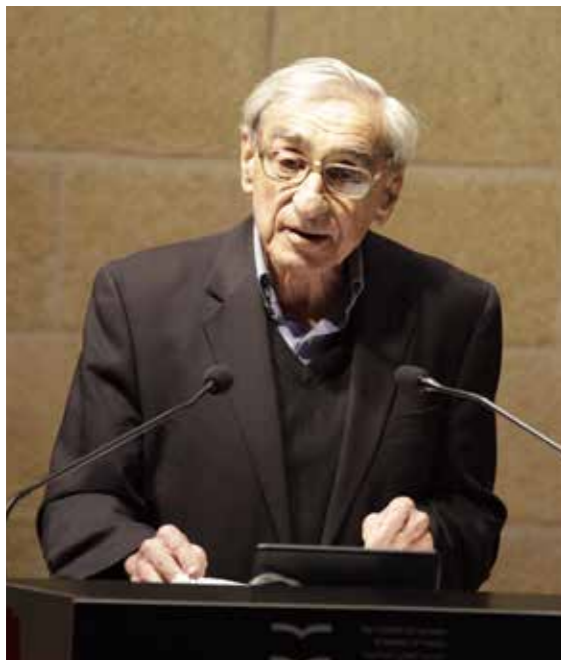
Illouz provided two provocative examples drawn from Israeli history. The first is the character of Josef Trumpeldor, an early Zionist who was killed in clashes with Arabs at the settlement of Tel Hai in 1920, and was later turned into a martyr revered by Zionists on the right and the left. Similarly, Illouz presented in detail the story of Hebron settler Sarah Nachshon's burial of her infant in the city's Jewish cemetery in 1975, the first in the cemetery since 1929. Though the Israeli military

ordered that the burial not take place, soldiers and the army's command were powerless to stand in the mother's way.

Both these examples revolve around the glorification of the willingness to sacrifice the individual for the nation. This cult of death, shared by the nationalist state and religious martyrdom, underlines how blurry the lines between religion and the secular state were and remain in Israel.

For the audience in Jerusalem, the Zionist case is naturally the best known and generated the most comment and debate. However, secularism's ultimate success or failure in India, the world's largest democracy, will undoubtedly play a larger role in shaping the global future.

In this vein, Kesavan Veluthat presented an overview of modern Indian political history from the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 to the election of BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. This overview highlighted the economic failings of the country's founding Congress Party, an ideological analog to Ben-Gurion's *Mapai*, rather than its disregard for religious traditions or sentiments. It was corruption, lack of investment in education, and the political crisis of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's authoritarian 1975 declaration of a "state of emergency" that swept Congress' Hindu nationalist opposition into power. Though he cast his response as a "footnote," Veluthat offered a subtle rebuttal of Walzer's main claim that the seemingly religious reaction to secular liberation was, in fact, religious at all.



Clockwise from Left: Prof. Michael Walzer; Mr. Leon Wieseltier; Prof. Leora Batnitzky, Prof. Eva Illouz and Prof. Kesavan Veluthat

## Violence in the Name of God – No Exit?

Prof. Rachel Elior | Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western Europe was torn apart by religious war. Inspired to inhuman cruelty by their religious zeal, Catholics and Protestants massacred each other in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and England. It was only at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, more than a hundred and fifty years after fighting first began, that Europe established a new political order of rationalism, secularism, and the nation state — an order that has dominated the world ever since.

In his riveting and masterful address, Jonathan Sacks compared our uncertain times to that bloody period in European history. Then as now, a combination of growing discontent with the ruling establishment, religious fundamentalism, and disruptive technology have led to disastrous upheaval and insecurity around the world.

However, he said, returning to the intellectual and philosophical models of the seventeenth century, particularly how thinkers like Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke engaged with sacred texts, could help us navigate these dangerous days. They, and others like them, began building the basis of our secular society not because they stopped believing, but rather because of the devastation of the wars of religion. "People searched for structures and institutions not built on doctrinal foundations," Sacks explained, "that could be used by and assented to even if you disagreed on theology."

Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, began his address with a paean to the new National Library of Israel building, now under construction just opposite the Knesset. "The Library is an important symbol of what *Am Yisrael*

**The Library is an important symbol of what *Am Yisrael* (the Nation of Israel) and *Medinat Yisrael* (the State of Israel) actually represent.**

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

(the Nation of Israel) and *Medinat Yisrael* (the State of Israel) actually represent,” he said, and the centrality of books, and the Bible in particular, to the Jewish identity. “It was not that the Jewish people created a book, it was a book that created and sustained the Jewish people.”

The information revolution that the printed book represents was critical in bringing about the world-changing events of the sixteenth century. As Sacks noted, all of the proposals for the reform of the Catholic Church that Martin Luther articulated in his ninety-five theses, famously nailed to the church door in Wittenberg in 1517, were already articulated by the English theologian John Wycliffe two centuries earlier. However, Luther lived in the time of printing, and this new technology, which the Church and secular authorities did not and could not control, allowed his ideas to spread rapidly. Today, the Internet is allowing today’s religious radicals, ISIS and Al-Qaeda, to outflank the powers that be on a larger, global scale.

In his talk, Sacks outlined four phases in the development of secularization. The first, in the seventeenth century, was the secularization of knowledge, and an appeal to reason, which was available to all regardless of doctrinal position. Then, in the eighteenth century, came the secularization of power in the American and French revolutions, and the separation of church and state. The nineteenth century followed with the secularization of culture, and art and popular culture replacing religious ritual as access to the sublime. Finally, the twentieth century saw the secularization of morality and the disengagement in the West from Judeo-Christian ethics.

To many the gradual expansion of the secular

sphere seemed linear and irreversible; certainly the State of Israel’s secular founders believed it to be so. But as today’s religious resurgence demonstrates, those beliefs were unfounded. Sacks explained this reversal as an expression of the failure of modern institutions to answer fundamental questions about identity and the purpose of human life. Science, technology, capitalism, and the state provide freedom, tools, and choices, but not guidance and community.

“A culture without community is unbearable,” Sacks said, “and people will turn to religion because religion has been historically the most powerful creator and sustainer of identities that human civilization has ever known.”

However, those turning to religion, and especially to religion in its most radicalized forms — made all the more available because of the Internet’s tendency to amplify extreme opinions — do not necessarily know much about it. Sacks cited the example of the British suicide bombers who purchased a copy of *Islam for Dummies* before setting out to fight in Syria.

Rather than being a laughable punchline, though, Sacks emphasized that this lack of knowledge makes their religious commitment all the more dangerous. All religions have hard texts that, when read simplistically, lead to apocalyptic thinking and demonization. Sacred scriptures are “full of unexploded mines,” he said, and they have “sometimes led people to kill in the name of the God of life and wage war in the name of the God of peace, practice cruelty in the name of the God of compassion and hate in the name of the God of love.”

In the face of this religious challenge, Sacks

returned to seventeenth century philosophy, and what those thinkers can teach us about answering extremism and religious violence. The great secular ideals that emerged at that time — the social covenant, the limits of power, liberty of conscience, tolerance, and human rights — came out of a dialogue with the Bible. An unshaking belief in the importance of religion can just as easily lead to freedom as it can to tyranny. “It is a short step from religious totalitarianism — everyone should follow one true faith,” Sacks explained, “to religious liberty — religion is important so therefore everyone should be free.”

The rich exegetical traditions of the three Abrahamic religions allow for just this sort

of reinterpretation. While fundamentalists approach sacred texts with a flat literalism, bypassing interpretation, the exegetical imagination “allows us to hear within the word of God for all time the word of God for this time.”

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism each have to embark on this reinterpretation themselves. One tradition cannot do so for another. In terms of Judaism, Sacks underlined the need to expand the Jewish conversation and engagement with the sacred texts to include all Jewish voices. “How,” he asked, “can Jews be at peace in the world if we are not at peace with ourselves?”



Right: Prof. Rachel Elijor; Left: Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks



Ms. Avital Sharansky and Mr. Natan Sharansky



Dr. Josef Joffe and Prof. Stanley Fischer



Prof. Jonathan Sarna and Ambassador Prof. Daniel Kurtzer



Prof. Nili Cohen



## A Different World Than We Knew

Prof. Moshe Halbertal | Mr. Mustafa Akyol  
Prof. Dominique Moisi | Mr. Leon Wieseltier

The Global Forum's discussions of the secular and the sacred come at a pivotal time. Defying the polls and conventional political wisdom, on June 23, 2016, British voters overwhelmingly supported a referendum calling for the country's exit from the European Union. Just a few months later, American politics experienced a similar upset, with Donald Trump's unprecedented election to the presidency.

In light of these events, the secular values that have undergirded Atlantic politics since the end of the Second World War now seem more fragile than ever. As session chair Moshe Halbertal put it, they cast doubt on the future of "our humanistic, democratic, liberal commitments." In this riveting evening session, Leon Wieseltier, Dominique Moisi, and Mustafa Akyol debated the implications of Trump, Brexit, and illiberal democracy the world over.

While Halbertal identified a breakdown in civility as one of the features of the 2016 presidential campaign, Wieseltier begged to differ. "Civility in American politics broke down a long time ago," he said. "American politics has been in an apocalyptic mode for a long time."

In this long historical view, in which he identified trends going back to the early 1990's, Trump's election is not so much a surprise as an unfortunate culmination. Wieseltier argued that

the illiberal America that voted for Trump has always existed, if below the radar of Washington establishment elites. However, the upheavals of globalization and the information economy; white voters' panic over the impending demographic flip in American society, in which whites will become the minority of the population; and the amplification of extreme positions that social media provides, brought these illiberal voices to the fore.

As for Trump himself, Wieseltier identified him with the political type of the strong man, in the manner of recent former Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi or Juan Peron, president of Argentina in the 1940's and 50's. Trump's "buffoonery, the egomania, the cult of his own personal will, the intellectual incoherence and promiscuity" are all characteristics that he shares with these leaders.

For most of those who voted for him, Wieseltier continued, their support for Trump was not a rational choice as much as it was an emotional one: a feeling of pain and resentment that overcame any reasoned consideration of policy or economic interest. While Wieseltier took hope from the fact that emotions eventually spend themselves, the larger lessons to be drawn from Trump have to do with the limits of emotion. "We have to learn," he said, "that no matter how justified the grievances, no matter how genuine the misery, no individual group

has right to impose illiberalism on the entire society."

"I would love to have the Western problems of illiberal democracy," journalist Mustafa Akyol began his talk. The challenges facing the Middle East, he said, are more fundamental and more dangerous.

Akyol argued that Turkey is part of the global drama of globalization and modernization, and

the region's current violence and unrest are part of the reaction to the confrontation with Western culture. In Turkey specifically, the rise of Erdogan and his Islamist AK party fits well within the model outlined by Michael Walzer's *Paradox of Liberation*, which was the subject of another lively session earlier in the day. As Akyol said, the rise of the AK can be profitably considered as a backlash of traditional Turks from rural Anatolia against the imposition of Kemalist secularism directed by Ankara.



Prof. Moshe Halbertal, Mr. Leon Wieseltier and Prof. Dominique Moisi

“We have our own thirty years war going on right now,” Akyol continued, and the establishment of religious theocracies, especially the Islamic State, that are unable to deliver on their promises of heaven on earth. Akyol mentioned the inspiration that he receives from the writings of Jewish enlightenment thinker Moses Mendelssohn, especially his unique conception of religious law. Mendelssohn, he said “was dealing with the same issues that Muslims are dealing with now.”

In response to the moderator’s question of whether European and American politics are following similar trends, Dominique Moisi answered simply: “It’s not similarity, it’s the same.” For years a culture of fear has united both sides of the Atlantic; the only difference, he said, “was that the Europeans knew, and the Americans didn’t.”

In the European context, Moisi identified the current rise of the far right in Europe as stemming from two interrelated phenomena. The first is the collapse of the three values that sustained post-war Europe: capitalism, democracy, and the idea of Europe itself. Moisi argued that the defeat of Communism in Eastern Europe, the West’s victory in the Cold War, actually laid the seeds for this collapse. Though Eastern European states were at first eager to join Western Europe – “to rejoin their geography and history” – they have become disappointed by all three of these basic values, which, in part because of globalization, have not managed to deliver prosperity or equality.

“What we are witnessing is a democratic regression,” he said, identifying a process that began in Hungary and Poland and is steadily spreading westward, “leading to illiberal democracy.”

Moisi’s second point was that white Americans’ sense of declining importance – justly or unjustly felt – is shared by Europeans as a whole. “We know in Europe that we don’t count any longer,” he calmly explained. “When you are discussing the Middle East, we know that you don’t care if there are Europeans at the table. The Chinese are not waking up in the morning saying: What are the Europeans thinking?”

The next crucial political decision point, in Moisi’s eyes, is the French election scheduled for April. “It would be arrogant and irresponsible,” he said, to dismiss the possibility of a victory for Marine Le Pen, leader of the extreme right Front Nationale party. And Le Pen’s victory would mean “the end of the Euro and the end of the European project.”

## The Fate of Secularism – The Political Dimension

Prof. Dominique Moisi | Mr. Mustafa Akyol  
Prof. Moshe Halbertal | Prof. Ruth Gavison

In 1925, the newly established Republic of Turkey banned traditional hats. The fez and the turban, associated with Ottoman culture and with Islam, were prohibited, and Western hats mandated in their stead.

While this law may seem ridiculous today, when Europeans themselves have abandoned fedoras and homburgs, it marks a significant political turning point. Confronted with the challenge of the West, the secular founders of the Turkish Republic sought to remake their society and culture along European lines; the hat law was only one of a package of social, economic, and political reforms designed to transform Turkey from a religious society into a modern secular state.

However, as Mustafa Akyol discussed in his opening talk at this wide-ranging session, the hat law did not solve the problems of Turkey and the Middle East. Wracked by violence and extremism, under threat and insecure, the Muslim world, Akyol declared is in, “the biggest crisis since the time of the Prophet Muhammad.”

That crisis, he said, is one that Jews can understand. Two millennia ago, under Roman occupation and torn apart by internal division, Jews faced a parallel challenge. Second Temple Jews had two responses to the cultural imposition by Rome: one, exemplified by the Jewish king Herod, was to collaborate with the stronger power and adopt its Hellenistic culture. The other, like the groups of zealots described by Josephus, pledged outright resistance.

**Thus a state like Israel needs a civic cohesion that is accepted by all to be thin but critical for the welfare of state. So all groups need to make a commitment to that structure of political community that gives them civil and political rights to participate.**

Prof. Ruth Gavison

According to Akyol, the Muslim response to Western colonialism was split along the very same lines: collaborating “Herods” like Ataturk and Reza Shah Pahlavi faced off against “zealots” like the *Wahhabi* movement – who themselves are partially of the Herods’ own making. The project of adapting and imposing Western technology and secular culture on Turkey, Iran, and other countries led to an inevitable backlash. “The problem of secularism in the Muslim world,” Akyol said, “is that it did not grow organically. It is an import of the Herods.”

However, he argued, there is no innate conflict between Islam and secularism so long as Islam is interpreted in a certain way. The central questions of Islamic politics, namely whether and in what way the authoritative text of the *Qur’an*, and the sacred law that flows from it, are binding

on society and the state, are not fixed. Secularism and secular law can be compatible with *sharia*, as they were in Ottoman times. “Islam does not define a theocracy,” he said. “Only a text, the *Qur’an*, and people who interpret it.”

If the challenge facing Islam stems from defeat, Judaism’s challenge comes from an unexpected success. The establishment of the State of Israel, Moshe Halbertal explained in his captivating lecture, took the Jewish religious establishment by surprise. Most authoritative rabbinic figures opposed the creation of the state, which they saw as a rival source of Jewish identity and power. In the decades since, the dominant attitude of most Orthodox Jewish leaders and communities to the state has been that of a minority confronting a secular, national Zionist majority.

Now, however, with the deep integration of religious groups and interests within the state and demographic growth among religious communities, the question of religious power is existential. If religious leaders become the ruling authorities in the state, how would they use that power? Would they impose religious obligations by force, or would they maintain a secular public sphere? As he starkly framed the question: “Will the State of Israel survive the religion of Israel?”

Though these political questions are alarmingly underexplored by Jewish religious leaders and thinkers, the tradition does contain internal precedents that would support the maintenance of a liberal public sphere. For example, on the question of the state’s secular authority, Jewish law – *halakhah* – could find reasons to recognize it as legitimate and binding. Similarly, when it comes to using the tools of the state to enforce *halakhah*, Halbertal emphasized that the religious tradition contains elements that would resist this misuse of state power. Specifically, John Locke’s argument that a forced religious act lacks conviction and is, therefore, inherently invalid, could be adopted and supported from within the tradition.

However, in order to rouse these latent elements, religious leaders will have to undergo a deep transformation of their self-perception. Speaking directly to the religious establishment, Halbertal cautioned: “The fact that you don’t address this issue puts a huge cloud over Israel.”

In a sense, Ruth Gavison’s closing thoughts considered this same question from the opposite side. “What we are really discussing is an important human question about circles of solidarity,” Gavison said. “How do we create

political communities, especially democracies, that are based on the consent of the people?”

In the case of Israel, she argued, secular and liberal ideals alone cannot provide this thick social glue. Given the strong religious attachments of much of the population, democratic principles necessitate that these religious commitments not be excluded from the public square. Similarly, neither secular nor religious groups can claim a monopoly and define the character of the state on their own. Thus a state like Israel “needs a civic cohesion that is accepted by all to be thin but critical for the welfare of state. So all groups need to make a commitment to that structure of political community that gives them civil and political rights to participate.”

According to Gavison, Zionism provides the civic cohesion Israel requires. For secular Jews, Zionism is a way to remain Jewish without being religious. It offers a framework for all citizens to debate the meaning of Jewish identity as a majority nation. Since the Zionist ethos, as she portrayed it, also mandates care for the country’s non-Jewish population, Israel’s minority communities can share in the state’s civic solidarity. Moreover, Muslim and Christian Arabs, and other minorities in Israel, want to be in a state that is stable and is founded on an ideal of citizenship. These communities also enjoy, she said, the “special energies Jews bring to the project of ruling themselves.”



Clockwise from left: Global Forum members; Prof. Itamar Rabinovich and Justice Dorit Beinisch; Mr. Mustafa Akyol, Prof. Moshe Halbertal, Prof. Ruth Gavison and Prof. Dominique Moisi

## President of Israel's Remarks

Mr. Reuven "Ruvi" Rivlin

When Reuven "Ruvi" Rivlin, the Tenth President of the State of Israel, addressed the assembled members of the Global Forum, he began with an unexpected apology. "I'm sorry that I have prepared for this meeting," he said. President Rivlin declared that he had come to give a substantive contribution to the Forum's debates, rather than simply conveying platitudes. "I think the subject you are discussing is of the utmost importance."

President Rivlin presented how three of Israel's main social groups — tribes, as the president referred to them — see the religious-secular conflict in Israel, and offered a possible solution.

The first of these groups was the ultra-Orthodox *Haredim*. Most of the *Haredi* leadership, President Rivlin explained, drawing on his close working relationship with ultra-Orthodox religious parties during his decades in politics,



Mr. Reuven "Ruvi" Rivlin, Ninth President of Israel

considers the State of Israel to be a secular entity essentially unrelated to Judaism and redemption. Jewish life in Israel is a continuation, in their eyes, of the diaspora existence that will continue until the return of the Messiah. On these grounds, the *Haredi* leadership calls for as little interaction as possible with the secular state.

However, in practical terms, recent decades have seen the integration of the ultra-Orthodox into secular Israeli society. This is exemplified by *Haredi* Knesset Member Yaakov Litzman's position as Minister of Health in the current government, the first *Haredi* politician to hold a ministerial post in Israel's history. *Haredim* are also engaging with the dominant, secular culture on the everyday level. Ultra-Orthodox men and women are part of the labor market, are entering academia, working in the media, and in art and film. This integration, the president said, indicates, despite the official narrative, a change in perspective on the part of the *Haredi* leadership.

Integration does not come without conflict. Paradoxically, one of the signs of *Haredi* entry into society is the increasingly fraught struggle over the religious status quo, a set of informal norms granting ultra-Orthodox communities some autonomy and control of basic religious questions for Israeli Jewish society overall. *Haredim* want to expand the sphere of religious

norms because of their desire to participate fully in the public square.

While ultra-Orthodox communities see the State of Israel as a secular entity, religious Zionists take the opposite view. Following the teachings of the influential rabbi and mystic Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, and others, they view the establishment of the State as the very beginning of redemption.

During Israel's first years, religious Zionists accepted the secular character of the Israeli public sphere — believing, with Rav Kook, that secularism was no more than a veneer covering a true religious core — and worked with the socialist Zionist establishment. Religious Zionists believed that they could influence state and society from within.

But just as ultra-Orthodox Judaism has changed in the past decades, religious Zionism has undergone just as radical a shift. Once, to borrow President Rivlin's metaphor, "the kosher supervisor in the dining car," they are now "the engineer driving the train." Religious Zionist parties, and the religious Zionist agenda, have become the leading force in Israel today.

For many in this camp, the State's legitimacy, the president emphasized, depends on its adherence to the process of redemption. "Thus the internal religious Zionist debate over the religious status of the State of Israel," he said, "has become a central issue on the agenda of the State of Israel as a whole."

Regarding secular Zionism, President Rivlin conceded that both leftwing and rightwing Zionist parties worked to establish a Jewish homeland that was not dependent on the Torah, the commandments, Jewish law, or rabbinic institutions. Nevertheless, all Zionist leaders believed that the State of Israel was the realization of the Jewish dream of the return to Zion. Secular leaders never shied away from invoking traditional Jewish language loaded with messianic and religious symbolism.

"Secular Zionism, therefore," the president said, "provided a modern interpretation, and even a secular one, of the promised redemption, but still saw in its state-building project an unvarnished realization of the messianic promise." Ironically, the only group that believed that Israel was an entirely secular entity was the *Haredim*.

**Thus the internal religious Zionist debate over the religious status of the State of Israel has become a central issue on the agenda of the State of Israel as a whole.**

Mr. Reuven "Ruvi" Rivlin, Tenth President of Israel

Thus in Israel, as elsewhere in the modern world, the secular state, in the sense of the total secularization of the public sphere, is only an illusion. However, this ultimate failure of the secular project does not mean that religion and secularism must continue battling eternally in a zero-sum game. “I came to express hope,” President Rivlin said, “because there is another way besides the total rejection of religion from the public square and the total subjection of the state to religious authority.”

The compromises between religion and secularism advocated in Israel until today have taken place at the national level. Whether in terms of Sabbath observance or adherence to ritual dietary laws, these compromises have ignored the particular local character of Israel’s various cities and regions, leaving all sides unhappy with the result.

“Perhaps now is the time to have this debate on the local level,” President Rivlin proposed. In this way, he argued, solutions can be tailored to what each group wants in the areas of their greatest population density. Why should the contentious issue of public transportation on *Shabbat*, which secular residents of Tel Aviv desperately desire but religious residents of neighboring Bnei Brak adamantly oppose, be solved on a national level? Both cities, he emphasized, can work together very well so long as they can decide their issues for themselves far from the national stage.

“I want to imagine with you another kind of compromise, compromises that express the tribal composition of Israeli society — tribes that are not going to change their basic characteristics and needs,” President Rivlin concluded. These new compromises promise “to remake the public space of the Jewish and democratic state, the democratic and Jewish, for all of us.”



Mr. Reuven “Ruvi” Rivlin and Mr. David Blumberg

## The Fate of Secularism - The Social Dimension

Prof. Fania Oz-Salzberger | Prof. Shmuel Feiner  
Prof. Haviva Pedaya | Prof. Diana Pinto

On April 17, 1881, Judah Leib Gordon, one of the central figures in the Jewish enlightenment, published a piece of short fiction in the Hebrew journal *Hamelitz*. Written two decades before Herzl’s *Altneuland*, this story presents a dystopian vision of a future Jewish state. Undoubtedly, Gordon writes, religious forces will take over, rabbis will rule, and the secular, Hebrew culture that he and others had been building for a generation will disappear as if it never existed.

For Feiner, whose lecture opened this engaging session, Gordon’s story was just one of the two items he “borrowed” — metaphorically — from the National Library of Israel collections to present in his talk. As a student “I was very close to these collections,” he recalled. “I spent hours in the archives and collections, and I was inspired.”

The first item Feiner chose to discuss was a small booklet published on the April 24, 1784. The booklet, entitled *Words of Peace and Truth*, was written by Naphtali Herz Wessely, an advocate of secular Jewish education. Wessely had written the work as a defense of his proposal to establish a modern Jewish educational system that included secular subjects. He argued that even for the observant, as he was, breaking the clerical monopoly on education was an absolute necessity.

As Feiner noted, Wessely’s pamphlet was not the end of this controversy. It continues in Israel today in the debate over what is known as *limmudei liba*,

the mandated core subjects like mathematics, history, and science that many ultra-Orthodox schools refuse to teach their students. The secular left and right’s effective concession to the belief that “religious fervor requires removing all secular texts,” is inherently dangerous. Without the educational revolution that Wessely began, the prodigious Jewish achievements in secular fields would have been naught.

Wessely and Gordon’s writings show, Feiner said, that “religion, as we identify it today, in its social and historical aspects, is not only a set of ritual texts that we have preserved through the long years of the exile and brought to sovereign Israel. Rather, today’s religion was fashioned in the face of the challenge of secularism.” Both the liberal and Orthodox streams of Judaism came to be in the face of the secular challenge: the first as an enlightened concession, and the second as a fundamentalist, militant response, which has only grown in strength since the nineteenth century.

From Haviva Pedaya’s lecture, it would seem that Gordon’s dystopia is, in fact, a sad irony. Gordon feared an enlightened Hebrew secularism being overrun by the dark forces of religion. But as Pedaya presented Israel today, it is the secular, European elite and the state they created that imposed their ideology on a traditional, immigrant society.

“Israel,” Pedaya explained, “is not only the arena for processes that began in Europe, but also for

those that started in North Africa and the Middle East.” For Jewish immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa and their descendants, referred to as *mizrahim*, secularism was not identical with emancipation. On the contrary, she said, just as in the Islamic world as a whole secularism was associated with European colonialism, so too *mizrahim* viewed secularism as technology and modernism, but “not as a basis for constructing individual identity.”

In this broader context, Israeli secularism, she said, should be seen not as the ideology underlying society as a whole, but the identity of just one of the various communities into which Israeli society is increasingly divided. However, like all Western communities, this secular community is shallow and fragile, with no obvious models or framework. How, Pedaya asked in closing, can the secular community, and the liberal values that it upholds, contend with other communities?

Writer Diana Pinto reflected on the dim prospects for secular, humanist values in Europe’s immediate future; Gordon’s dystopian story echoed in her address like a distressingly accurate premonition. But rather than being restricted to internal Jewish society, Pinto described an

onslaught by aggressive, reactionary forces on Western liberal democracy as a whole. In the face of this challenge, seen most recently in the Brexit referendum and Trump’s victory in the American presidential elections, what should European liberals do?

Pinto began her address with an example of the first type of response. On January 9, 2015, just two days after the deadly attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper, a gunman associated with ISIS attacked a kosher supermarket in Paris. In the immediate aftermath, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls made a famous statement at the scene: “France would not be France without its Jews.”

As a Jew herself, Pinto said, Valls’ pronouncement could not help but instill pride. However, she asked, what are the implications of such a sentence for the future? How would a French Muslim react to this pronouncement — that a France without Jews is unthinkable, but a France without Muslims would be just fine? And a member of the Christian right might well feel that Valls was going too far: France existed long before the Jews arrived, however great or small their contributions may have been.

In ordinary times, these subsequent reverberations could be easily dismissed. But Pinto emphasized that today pluralist democrats, especially the Jews among them, are on increasingly shaky ground. While the extreme right may once have been laughable, it is no longer. She wondered if France’s Marine Le Pen might try to reach out to disenfranchised French voters, including Muslims, other minorities, and the economically downtrodden with a message of integration through national patriotism. Some, no doubt, would accept the invitation of “joining the patriotic club and being given their fair share.”

However, Jews’ position in this new political landscape is not only, and perhaps not primarily, that of the victims. Pointing to Trump’s threats to create a registry of Muslims, Pinto underlined that Jews must make their voices heard not only for their own community. “Wherever we may be in the Western world,” she said, “we have to take stands now that make us take on responsibilities for others.”

**Religion, as we identify it today, in its social and historical aspects, is not only a set of ritual texts that we have preserved through the long years of the exile and brought to sovereign Israel. Rather, today’s religion was fashioned in the face of the challenge of secularism.**

Prof. Shmuel Feiner



Prof. Diana Pinto, Prof. Shmuel Feiner and Prof. Haviva Pedaya



Prof. Fania Oz-Salzberger



Mr. Yair Hamburger, Mr. David Blumberg and Prof. Stanley Fischer



Mr. David Blumberg and Rabbi Haim Sabato



Prof. Itamar Rabinovitch, Mr. Ido Nehushtan and Mr. Aaron Abramovich



Rabbi Baroness Julia Neuberger, Ms. Parvathy Mankuzhi Needlakandhan and Prof. Kesevan Veluthat

## The Dilemma of Accessibility in a Multicultural Society

Alongside the Global Forum's discussions of the fate of secularism in the modern world, the impact of these global trends on the National Library of Israel was not forgotten.

As the national repository for Israel and the Jewish people, as well as home to world class collections of the Middle Eastern and European cultures that are integral parts of Israel's makeup and history, the Library serves as an encounter point for the country's diverse groups, faiths, and communities. Meeting the needs of such a multicultural population represents a considerable institutional challenge. As Israeli society continues to transform – religiously, culturally, and economically – the Library must adapt to ensure that it remains open to the widest spectrum of scholars, students, and citizens.

This afternoon session was dedicated to this very challenge. Forum members were divided into five small discussion groups. Each group had a chairperson familiar with the Library's collections and vision, and was assisted by a member of the Library's senior staff who presented a challenging case study to prompt conversation.

The groups sought to bring the Forum members' insights to bear on the question of how to make the Library more accessible to the country's diverse (and often divided) populations. The discussions touched on underserved

communities, particularly ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arabic speakers inside and outside Israel; digitization and other means of outreach; and the meaning of accessibility itself.

Though the Library is home to materials of natural interest, both *Haredim* and Israeli Arabs, many members of these communities are wary of the state's national, Zionist institutions. Forum participants emphasized that this outreach requires careful thought and attention. In terms of Israel's Arab communities, the Library has invested in expanding and digitizing its Islam and Middle East Collection, initiated programs to bring Arabic speaking schoolchildren and writers to the Library, and held events celebrating Arab and Palestinian culture.

Avigdor Shinan emphasized that Palestinian and Jewish schoolchildren who visit the Library should not only be exposed to items from the collection that relate to their own culture – for instance, showing a manuscript of the *Qur'an* to Arab children but a Bible manuscript to Jewish children – but to the other's as well.

As much as study and scholarship are central to ultra-Orthodox identity – and a small number of *Haredi* scholars are frequent patrons – many *Haredim* are still wary, or unaware, of the National Library. Aside from the overall tensions between these communities and the State, Elchanan

Discussion Groups of Global Forum Members



Reiner, the Library's Academic Director, pointed to the gap between two conflicting conceptions of knowledge. While openness and accessibility are central to the idea of the modern library, the ultra-Orthodox conception is the exact opposite: knowledge is tightly controlled and access depends on merit, rank, and skill.

Forum member David Meyers suggested that in order to attract more *Haredi* patrons, and to meet its new role in the digital age, the Library should emulate the model of the *beit midrash*: a place of loud voices, of debate, and of high energy, as opposed to a temple of silence and shushing librarians.

Just as the Library faces challenges in reaching out to all the different sectors of Israeli society, it also must negotiate its relationship with Jews abroad. The Library is home to unique and rare collections from Jewish individuals and communities past and present. Several important collections mentioned in the breakout sessions include the new Franz Kafka manuscripts, the "Afghan Geniza," and historical documents from the Viennese Jewish community. The Library's custodianship of the material in all three cases

raises fundamental questions. For instance, should the Viennese documents, which represent three hundred years of Austrian Jewish history, be retained by that community, rather than be transferred to Jerusalem? Or, as the courts ultimately decided, does the historical Viennese community that preserved those documents no longer exist – except in its descendants living in Israel? As Princeton's Leora Batnitzky proposed, in this instance digitization of the material is an obvious compromise solution.

However, deciding what materials to digitize and in what order is itself a vexing quandary. Should Jewish material have priority? Manuscripts, newspapers, books, or archives? Material useful for scholars or the general public? More famous



or more obscure collections? With so much scholarship now dependent on scans of primary sources, electronic books, article aggregators, and the Internet, finding the right balance between scholarly priorities and access for the general public is especially difficult.

Tomer Persico, for one, argued that scholarly archives should be given priority, while Daniel Kurtzer, among others, said that scholars will continue to do the exhaustive research that they have always done, and materials related to the most relevant topics of Zionism and modern Jewish history should be digitized first.

Just as crucial to the question of digitization is the concern over what materials to highlight and publicize. Menahem Magidor, member of

the Library's Board of Directors, pointed to the example of a rare photograph of the *Bahá'u'lláh*, the founder of the Bahai religion who spent his last years in Ottoman Palestine, in the Library's collections. The Bahai community requested that the picture, a sacred object in their eyes, be given to them. While this request was rejected because of the precedent it would set, the decision was made that access to the photograph would be limited out of respect for the faithful. On the other hand, if the general public is unaware of the Library's many treasures, it will have failed in one of its central missions.



Discussion Group of Global Forum Members

## Religion and Secularism in the Tumultuous Middle East

Ambassador Prof. Daniel Kurtzer | Prof. Karen Barkey  
Prof. Noah Feldman | Prof. Mati Steinberg | Prof. Shibley Telhami

As Daniel Kurtzer rightly noted at the beginning of this fascinating session, the current sectarian conflicts riling the Middle East present a case study of the Forum's debates. In that sense, he said, the session's lectures by four leading experts on the region represent the culmination of those discussions.

Karen Barkey opened the session by reflecting on the pluralism that flourished in Ottoman times, and continues, in modified forms, until today. The Ottoman diversity of sects and legal authorities fell victim to radical Western secularizers. These secular regimes' incapability to deliver on their economic promises left people little choice but to turn to the social services that religious institutions and religious parties provided. At the same time, the regions' human diversity was disrupted by the massive displacements of Jews, Armenians, and Kurds in the early twentieth century. Now, it is undergoing another, equally wrenching transformation with the mass exodus of Christians and others.

However, Barkey also noted positive counter-trends. The vestiges of the Ottoman millet system, which guaranteed minority communities a measure of self-rule, persist throughout the former empire and help protect communal rights and identity. She also cited the example of everyday pluralism in shared worship at sacred shrines. People belonging to different

faiths and different classes, secular as well as religious, take part in the rituals of communities that are not their own, be it Muslims who participate in a Greek Orthodox procession or Jews and Christians visiting a Sufi shrine. These observances, she said, "show the possibility of alternative discourse and alternative practice from below by people engaged with each other coming up with solutions themselves. In today's world, they are also source of a great alternative narrative to religious violence."

While Barkey looked back to the Ottoman past, Mati Steinberg located the causes of the region's turmoil in more recent times. The revelation of the ideological emptiness of Arab nationalism and the failure of Arab states to meet their populations' basic economic needs has, he argued, enabled the rise of religious parties and ideologies.

Steinberg pointed to the example of the downfall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, which, he said, was caused by the failure of Morsi's government to deliver on their economic promises. Monarchies like Saudi Arabia remained in power during the Arab Spring because the kings and princes have money to spend, not because their people are happier with their leaders.

The events of the Arab Spring are referred to as

catastrophes – *nakabat* – just the term used to describe the *Nakba*, the destruction of Palestinian society in 1948. The use of the plural, as well as the flood of millions of new Arab refugees, he said, makes Palestinian suffering less unique and less prominent. However, while this may open opportunities for tactical cooperation with Arab *Sunni* states, Israel cannot count on lasting alliances so long as the Palestinian issue remains unresolved.

In his cogent and penetrating talk, Shibley Telhami agreed that the region’s current sectarian conflict is not the result of resurgent religious identity. Rather, these events are the realistic political outcome of two global events: the 2003 Iraq War and globalization’s arrival in the Middle East.

The active destruction of the Iraqi state by coalition forces, Telhami said, left people with little institutional support other than religious institutions, the only alternative form of political affiliation tolerated under Saddam’s autocratic rule. At the same time, the war upset the balance of power in the region, leaving *Sunni* Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, to face a rising Iran on their own; necessarily, they funneled support to groups sharing their own religious ideologies. Finally, the power vacuum in Iraq created a space for the return of Al-Qaeda to the heart of the Middle East.

Telhami further explained that globalization, especially the widespread adoption of social media and smart phones in the years leading up to 2010, explains the timing of the Arab Spring.

“At its core,” he said, “the Arab uprisings were not religious forces attacking secularism, nor religious forces contending with each other – they were essentially the periphery going against the center.” The information revolution made the anti-establishment feeling of the disenfranchised more real, “because it brought information on a scale they had not seen before.”

The session’s closing speaker, Noah Feldman, sought to return the religious-secular divide to the center of the discussion of the Middle East. While agreeing with previous speakers that the Arab Spring was not caused by sectarian or religious tensions, the uprisings did generate a public debate on Islam versus secularism.

Feldman discussed Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, as representing the best, middling, and worst results of the popular uprisings that began in 2010. While in Tunisia the leading Islamist party opted for cooperation with secular groups and the creation of a liberal constitution, in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood was swept from power by the military in part because of its religious affiliation. Feldman underlined, however, that al-Sisi’s regime in Egypt should in no sense be characterized as secular. “Politics in Egypt,” he said, “will continue without the Muslim Brotherhood, but will have religious, identitarian, and spiritual components.”

In Syria, in contrast, while protesters used slogans borrowed from their Egyptian and Tunisian colleagues, their opposition to the al-Assad regime was perceived by the leadership as the *Sunni* majority’s challenge to *Alawite* minority rule. “It was a zero sum game from day one,” and compromise seems impossible.

In his conclusion, Feldman cast the appeal of the Islamic State in light of these observations. Both within the Middle East and globally, the Islamic State, he said, represents a frustration not only with secular regimes but with the failed compromise position of Islam and democracy attempted by the Muslim Brotherhood and, with much more success, by *Ennahdha* in Tunisia. “The aspiration to a pure neo-caliphate reflects the frustration with and the rejection of the possibility of secular governance in any form.”



Prof. Karen Barkey, Prof. Mati Steinberg, Prof. Shibley Telhami and Prof. Noah Steinberg



Ambassador Prof. Daniel Kurtzer

## The Fate of Secularism – Literary and Cultural Creation

Mr. Assaf Inbari | Rabbi Haim Sabato | Ms. Nicole Krauss  
Ms. Agi Mishol | Mr. Osvaldo Golijov

In 1917, pioneering Hebrew poet Hayim Nahman Bialik wrote an essay entitled *Halakhah* and *Aggadah* that addressed the two central genres of traditional Jewish literature: the law and legal exegesis of *halakhah* and the narrative interpretation of *aggadah*.

As writer Assaf Inbari, the chair of this concluding session of the Global Forum, emphasized, in Bialik's eyes *halakhah* itself is art, an essential component of Jewish literature. Jewish literature that is truly Jewish must, like *halakhah*, ask fundamental Jewish questions, and command and influence Jewish lives.

Bookended by musical renditions of Bialik's poetry, the session's four speakers – the poet Agi Mishol, novelists Haim Sabato and Nicole Krauss, and composer Osvaldo Golijov – reflected on Bialik's claims and categories in their own work, and in the field of Jewish creativity in general.



Ms. Nicole Krauss

Hebrew poet Agi Mishol opened the session with the question of inspiration. In her lyrical address, Mishol argued that literary inspiration is a species of revelation. "Every poet has something in him or her that is religious," she said. "Poetry is a kind of prayer."

Mishol emphasized that the power that inspires is overwhelming and, sometimes, implacable. There is no contract with inspiration, and no certainty that it will return to bless us again. "This power can suddenly fill us or leave us for reasons of its own, and abandon us without leaving any signs or breadcrumbs behind." And, just as in the religious experience, poets are dependent on it and protect the moment of inspiration with their daily rituals: the *Shakharit* (morning prayers) of first coffee, the first cigarette, the first page.

Novelist and educator Haim Sabato also reflected on the religious aspects of literary creativity. However, as someone deeply immersed in the world of traditional text study, "for me," Sabato said, "the movement is the other way, from the *beit midrash* (study hall) to literature."

Sabato described the process of creation of his five books, all of which draw deeply not only on the biblical and rabbinic sources and on the perspectives gained from a religious life, but also on the stormy emotional trial of belief itself. "A

**Every poet has something in him or her that is religious. Poetry is a kind of prayer.**

Ms. Agi Mishol

person who doesn't experience faith can't write about faith, just like someone can't write about love who hasn't loved," he said. "Someone who has lived in faith his whole life can't help but have faith break out in his writings."

In its essence, and despite the prevailing opinion in the Jewish religious world, literature is not antithetical to faith. Growing up in Cairo in a learned family from Aleppo, Syria, Sabato was equally immersed in literature and in religious study. Walking to synagogue on Saturdays, he recalled, the family would read aloud a poem by the great medieval poet Yehuda Halevi. Back home, he would listen to his mother recite Moliere's plays in French. "In my life there was nothing strange," about this happy coexistence, he said, "and for that reason I didn't understand the imagined contradiction between them."

"If there is anything particularly Jewish about Jewish literature," said award-winning American novelist Nicole Krauss, "it is an investment in the notion of literature as an act of self-invention." For Krauss, what Judaism provides is a set of questions, and a fertile ground for exploration and, indeed, redefinition.

In her talk, Krauss described the significance of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, and the Talmud's story of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's escape from besieged Jerusalem, to her 2011 novel *Great House*. In Krauss's poetic description, Ben Zakkai's answer to the central post-destruction question – What is a Jew without Jerusalem and the Temple? – was to "turn Jerusalem into an idea. Turn the Temple into a book, a book as vast, as holy, and as intricate as the Temple itself."

**Someone who has lived in faith his whole life can't help but have faith break out in his writings.**

Rabbi Haim Sabato

**Over the last two days, we have discussed a wide range of views about painful issues. But more important than those views is the fact that we are having a conversation at the National Library, which in itself is a place where thousands of books are having a conversation. When we close our ears and storm out, when we refuse to listen, or the person in power censors the conversation, we all lose.**

Mr. Osvaldo Golijov

However, she said, it was only after completing this novel that she realized the story of Jewish literature begins long before the first century CE. The disparate sources and traditions that came together in the Bible, composed over a period of hundreds of years, show that “the heart of Jewish identity was invented in literature.”

Krauss’s new, soon-to-be-published novel, a section of which she read, stems from this new fascination. One of the novel’s central preoccupations is the biblical portrayal of King David: as a lover and a fighter, a divinely elected ruler, a tragic hero, and even, in the ascription of the Psalms to him, as a poet. “Because of David, two hundred years after his death,” Krauss said, “the writers of *Genesis* and *Samuel* established the sublime limits of literature almost at its beginning.”

In his wide-ranging and masterful lecture, Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov

translated Bialik’s distinction between *halakhah* and *aggadah* to a wider plane. Golijov’s point of departure was a statement by Israel’s Minister of Culture Miri Regev in an interview to *The New York Times* that her goal was to challenge the Israeli cultural elite who think that Chekhov is more important than Maimonides.

Reflecting on this statement, Golijov argued that without Chekhov Israeli culture would be poorer. “One thing we miss is the presence of play in a society,” he said, “imagination, empathy, and creativity, which are essential to the work of trying to solve human conflict.”

Play is not only a characteristic of Chekhov, of course. Writers throughout the ages have played with norms and expectations, and the powers that be have always been ready to censor and repress.

In the end, what must be protected and

encouraged, Golijov said, is the conversation. “Over the last two days, we have discussed a wide range of views about painful issues,” he said. “But more important than those views is the fact that we are having a conversation at the National Library, which in itself is a place where thousands of books are having a conversation. When we close our ears and storm out, when we refuse to listen, or the person in power censors the conversation, we all lose.”



Left to Right: Rabbi Haim Sabato, Mr. Osvaldo Golijov, Ms. Agi Mishol and Ms. Nicole Krauss



Mr. Leon Wieseltier and Ms. Nicole Krauss



Global Forum members visit the building site of the New National Library of Israel complex.



Prof. Shibley Telhami, Prof. Noah Feldman and Prof. Yedidia Stern



Prof. Sammy Smoocha and Prof. George Kanazi

## The Second Gathering of the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem

Over the course of two spirited and stimulating days, November 30 and 31, 2016, the Global Forum of the National Library of Israel convened in Jerusalem.

The topic of this year's Forum was the fate of secularism, a subject that is critically important to the future of Israel and the world today. Forum members, a diverse group of eighty prominent scholars, writers, and religious leaders gathering now for the second time, brought their considerable intellectual weight and expertise to bear on discussions of the relationships between church and state, the sacred and the profane, and Judaism and power.

Though individual panel sessions and presentations were devoted to various topics, several central questions animated the Forum as a whole. Beginning with Jose Casanova's opening lecture on the historical models of secularization in Europe, the definition of secularism itself was one of the gathering's recurring themes. Is there a difference, as Forum co-chairman Leon Wieseltier proposed, between "soft" and "hard" versions of secularism, or is secularization inherently coercive? Is the secular a necessary prerequisite for an open society, or on the contrary, should one adopt Tamar Ross's position that secularism itself stands in the way of democracy and civic solidarity?

Michael Walzer's engaging presentation of his 2015 book *The Paradox of Liberation* raised a complementary set of issues. Whether Forum members agreed or disagreed with his central thesis — that the twentieth century secular liberators of former European colonies ultimately lost power because they failed to incorporate religious traditions into their ideologies — Walzer's model served as a touchstone for all the presentations that followed.

It could hardly have been otherwise. The retreat of secularism and the resurgence of religion are global phenomena that have confounded secularists most of all. Is contemporary religious intolerance, as Karen Barkey proposed with respect to the former Ottoman Empire, primarily a product of local history and regional events? Or must one take a larger view, that the crisis of secularism today stems from a failure of meaning in the face of the epochal changes sweeping the contemporary world?

The Forum's setting in Jerusalem, a city sanctified by its pilgrims and profaned by its politics, ensured that the status of secularism in this holy city, and in Israel as a whole, would occupy a place at the center of the deliberations. As Meir Buzaglo pointed out, the Mount Zion Hotel where many of the Forum's sessions were held sits just opposite Jerusalem's Old City; a mere glance out the window puts one face to face with

a seemingly intractable swirl of religious conflict.

Indeed, the presentations returned again and again to the questions of what is happening to religion and secularity in Israel, and how the growing tensions between religious and secular identities, communities, and ideals could and should be resolved. One need only point to President of Israel Reuven Rivlin's address, which proposed a devolution of control over the enforcement of Jewish religious prescriptions to municipalities and regional governments, to understand how crucial such questions are to the future of the Jewish State.

The fate of secularism is no mere academic query. It is a matter of life and death, and the Forum was electrified by the urgency of the questions it considered. In Israel, the political power of religious nationalism grows at the expense of the country's founding secular ideals. In the Middle East, Israel's neighbors are locked in bitter struggles internally and for regional supremacy, while next-door Syria is decimated in civil war. Abroad, the unexpected victories of populist leaders and movements in Europe and the United States have redrawn the global political map, and may spell the end of the post-World War II international system. In a telling comparison, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks likened our historical moment to the period of the wars of religion that rent Europe in the sixteenth century.

Some speakers bemoaned these developments. Others sought to reframe and challenge the assumptions behind liberal faith in the secular state and liberal discomfort with religion. Underlying all the lectures, though, was an appeal to reflection in uncertain times. David Meyers put it best when he called the Forum "to take stock of the current moment, and to think whether it is

a moment of recalibrating once again the nature of the relationship between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular."

There is no better place for such reflection than the National Library of Israel. As the Library continues on its path of renewal, a process reflected in its efforts to expand the collections and engage ever wider circles of readers just as much as in the soon-to-be completed building, it remains rooted in its one hundred twenty-five year history. The depth and breadth of the Library's holdings reflect the country's diversity: it is both the national repository for Israel and the Jewish people, as well as home to world class collections from the Middle Eastern and European cultures that have played such integral roles in defining Israel's makeup and history. These books, documents, journals, files, and musical scores are the sources that ground our essential intellectual work and to which we must return anew to face our world's contemporary challenges.

"To me," said Amos Oz in his moving address, "one place in Jerusalem has been sacred since I was a little boy: the Library." The Library's holiness lies in the very aspiration that animates the Global Forum: to think deeply and critically, to gather diverse voices in conversation, and to create an intellectual and cultural sanctuary that is open and accessible to all.

The Global Forum of the National Library of Israel  
Second Gathering – Summary

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