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Two Dimensions of Jewish Identity

Introduction and Summary

Our perception of other religions depends on the type of group identity assumed as our religious identity. The issue of identity is too broad to be discussed here in a comprehensive way. Only one aspect of group identity is explored here—the one relating to positive and negative dimensions of identity. It is illuminated on the basis of Jewish texts and from the perspective of social psychology. Its consequences for attitudes to other religions are emphasized.

Generally speaking, negative identity is established by way of contrast: *I am me because I am not you*. It functions naturally, by turning against the enemies of one's own group, especially if identification is formed by the threat. On the other hand, positive identity is established by focusing on the values to be cultivated within the group, by belief in the internal values of one's own group: *I am me because I like being me*. In the context of inter-human (as well as interreligious) encounters, the difference between the two dimensions is beautifully expressed by the famous dictum of the Kotzker Rebbe:

> If I am me because I am me, and you are you because you are you, then I am me and you are you. But if I am me because you are you and you are you because I am me, then I am not me and you are not you.[1]

1 Menachem Mendel was a notable nineteenth-century hasidic master in the Polish town Kock.

The Kotzker's wisdom indicates that the positive identity, emerging from within, is better than the negative one, imposed from outside. The dictum is general, it refers to many, perhaps all, kinds of identity. While originally articulated in the framework of personal identity, its extension to issues of identity between groups, as well as of religions, seems appropriate.

According to social psychology (Zimbardo's experiments, Tajfel's experiments, see below), negative identification can be very strong even if the line of division is invented *ad hoc* and the alienation from the "other" is stimulated artificially. This means that the mere presence of a strong negative identity, against "others," is not by itself a guarantee of its depth or value. Group identification can be accidental, without a real threat or any other genuine source. Of course, there has been no shortage of real dangers in the history of Jews. The sense of forming a "camp," a proverbial besieged fortress, remains one of the essential determinants of the actual Jewish identity. It has rather negative consequences for attitudes to other religions: they are seen as a threat.

Yet the core of Jewish identity, or at least the religious identity, has always been positive—"for" something. It is the identity of the Covenant, the community of witnesses who bear witness to the Creator of this world. Contemporary Judaism is composed of different currents but all of them are united by a sense of faithfulness to the Covenant. If this is to constitute the basis for the attitudes towards other religions there is no reason to be negative about them, even if they are not appropriate for Jews. If the positive identity, i.e. rootedness in one's own tradition, is strong enough, other religions need not be seen as posing any threats.

Two Dimensions of Identity

Our attitude to other religions and their adherents is an instance of intergroup relations. According to social scientists, "Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members *in terms of their group identification*, we have an instance of intergroup behavior."[2] Henri Tajfel explains that 'identification,' in contradistinction to sheer belonging to a group defined from outside (for example, hospital patients), involves two necessary components: "a

2 M. Sherif, *In Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), 12; quoted after Henri Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations," *Annual Reviews in Psychology* 33 (1982), 1–2.

cognitive one, in the sense of awareness of membership; and an evaluative one, in the sense that this awareness is related to some value connotations."[3] Simply put, one has to know about the membership and treat it as valuable. In addition, often "an emotional investment in the awareness" is present.

Negative and positive identity

Ways of describing the opposition between two dimensions of identity

In the Jewish experience, both the negative and the positive aspects of identity are present. The problem is what is the relationship between them and whether one is, in some sense, preferable to the other. Negative identity can be seen in the many situations in which being Jewish means principally the necessity to share the Jewish fate, independently of one's beliefs. The story in the book of Esther is a good example, whether it is historically precise or not.

> And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws *are* diverse from all people; neither keep them the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed. (Esther 3:8–9)

The Jewish people are identified in contrast to others around them. To express Jewish identity, however, much more must be reflected, notably the mission contained in the values and concepts of Judaism. This is a vast issue, but even one quote suffices to see what is meant by the positive character of identity: the people of Israel are called to holiness:

> Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy. (Leviticus 19:2)

We see here the basis for positive Jewish identity, based on a particular mission and not reliant on the existence of an "other."

Another way of referring to negative and positive identities is by distinguishing between Jewish fate and Jewish faith. In the Talmud and in *Yoreh De'ah* both elements are mentioned while discussing conversion to Judaism.

> Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: 'What reason have you for desiring to become

3 Ibidem.

> a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions'? If he replies, 'I know and yet am unworthy,' he is accepted forthwith, and is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments. He is informed of the sin Gleanings, the Forgotten Sheaf, the Corner and the Poor Man's Tithe. He is also told of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments. ...
>
> And as he is informed of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments, so is he informed of the reward granted for their fulfillment. He is told, 'Be it known to you that the world to come was made only for the righteous, and that Israel at the present time are unable to bear either too much prosperity or too much suffering.' He is not, however, to be persuaded or dissuaded too much. If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith. Should any shreds which render the circumcision invalid remain, he is to be circumcised a second time. As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects. (Yevamoth 47a–b)

Almost the same formulations are repeated by Rabbi Joseph Karo (Yoreh De'ah 268:2) as part of legal direction for conversion. In our context, it is of interest that both fate and faith are mentioned, and that fate is mentioned first (Israel is persecuted) even though it has no necessary connection to belief or observance of the Torah, which would seem the main point of conversion. For someone who wants to become a Jew, loyalty to the Torah should be more important than just external belonging, even if becoming a Jew also means sharing the fate of the Jewish people. Why, then, is fate mentioned first and faith second? Is it accidental and unimportant? Does this indicate the primacy of negative identity over positive? Was this the result of historical experience or does it suggest that Jewish identity is predicated on the threat from the outside? To what extent do the Jewish people exist only in relationship to "others"?

Rav Soloveitchik has added two more pairs of terms. The contrast is between a camp, *machaneh*, and a congregation, *edah*, of witnesses (*edim*). The second formulation mentions the contrast between an encampment and a congregation.

The Torah relates that the Holy One concluded two Covenants with Israel. One Covenant was made in Egypt. "And I shall take you unto Me for a people, and I will be to you a God" (Exodus 6:7). The second Covenant was at Mt Sinai. "And he [Moses] took the book of the covenant ... and he said: 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord made with you in agreement with all these words'" (Exodus 24:7–8) ... Just as Judaism distinguished fate from destiny in the realm of personal individuality, so it also differentiated between these two concepts in the sphere of our national-historical existence. The individual is tethered to his nation with bonds of fate and chains of destiny. In accordance with this postulate, one can say that the Covenant of Egypt was a Covenant of Fate, and the Covenant of Sinai was one of destiny....

Fate signifies in the life of the nation, as it does in the life of an individual, an existence of compulsion. A strange force merges all individuals into one unit. The individual is subject and subjugated against his will to the national fate/ existence, and it is impossible for him to avoid it and be absorbed into a different reality...

In the life of a people (as in the life of an individual), destiny signifies an existence that it has chosen of its own free will and in which it finds the full realization of its historical existence. Instead of a passive, inexorable existence into which a nation is thrust, an Existence of Destiny manifests itself as an active experience full of purposeful movement, ascension, aspirations, and fulfillment. The nation is enmeshed in its destiny because of its longing for an enhanced state of being, an existence replete with substance and direction. Destiny is the font out of which flow the unique self-elevation of the nation and the unending stream of Divine inspiration that will not run dry so long as the path of the People is demarcated by the laws of God. The life of destiny is a directed life, the result of conscious direction and free will.

While the covenant of Egypt was concluded without the consent of the people of Israel... the Covenant of Sinai was offered to them before it was promulgated....

Acts of loving-kindness and fraternity, which are integrated into the framework of the Covenant of Sinai, are motivated not by the strange sense of loneliness of the Jew, but by the sense of unity experienced by a nation forever betrothed to the one God. The absolute oneness of God is mirrored in the unity of the nation that is eternally bound to Him. ...

In order to explain the difference between a People of Fate and a People of Destiny it is appropriate to deal with a different contrast—that between

> an Encampment and a Congregation. The Torah uses both of these concepts with respect to Israel. (Numbers 10:2).
>
> Encampment and Congregation constitute two different sociological experiences, two separate groups that have nothing in common and do not support one another. An Encampment is created out of a desire for self-defense and thrives on fear. A Congregation is fashioned out of a longing for the realization of an exalted moral idea and thrives on love. In the Encampment, fate's rule is unlimited, whereas destiny rules in the Congregation. The Encampment represents a phase in the development of the nation's history. The continued survival of a people is identified with the existence of the Congregation.
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> ... A Congregation is a holy nation that does not fear fate and does not live against its will. It believes in its destiny and of its free will sanctifies itself for its realization. The Covenant of Egypt was made with a people that was born in the Encampment, the Covenant of Sinai was concluded with a holy people.[4]

According to Rav Soloveitchik, there are two ways in which people become a group: one is a camp, formed when they face a common enemy and the other is a congregation of witnesses, co-participants in a shared project. Jews are a people in both these ways. The first, a camp, results from what Rabbi Soloveitchik calls the covenant of fate (*brit goral*) or the covenant of Egypt. The second, a congregation, is called by him the covenant of destiny (*brit ye'ud*) or the covenant of Sinai. It is a call. The presence of this dimension depends not on external factors but on Jews themselves. Both dimensions exist but, we argue, one is higher than the other.

Rav Soloveitchik has applied the categories he introduced to describe the task of the present-day State of Israel. He describes a process that is supposed to raise Jews from being a people to being a holy nation.

> The Jewish community is obliged to utilize its free will in all areas of life in general, but in particular on behalf of the welfare of the State of Israel. ... Our historic obligation, today, is to raise ourselves from a people to a holy nation, from the covenant of Egypt to the covenant at Sinai, from an existence of necessity to an authentic way of life suffused with eternal ethical and religious values, from a camp to a congregation. The task confronting

4 Joseph Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek*, trans. David Z Gordon (New York:Yeshiva University, 2006), 51–71.

> the religious *shivat ziyyon* movement is to achieve that great union of the two covenants—Egypt and Sinai, fate and destiny, aloneness and loneliness. This task embraces utilizing our afflictions to improve ourselves, and it involves spinning a web of *chesed* that will bind together all the parts of the people and blend them into one congregation, "one nation in the land"; and the readiness to pray for one's fellow, and empathy with his joy and grief. As the end result of this self-improvement we will achieve the holiness conferred by an existence of destiny and will ascend the mountain of the Lord.[5]

These are, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks comments,

> not just two types of groups, but in the most profound sense, two different ways of existing and relating to the world. A camp is brought into being by what happens to it from the outside. A congregation comes into existence by internal decision.[6]

He reinforces the idea that identity can be internally motivated and directed. The Sinaitic covenant is more than just an event, it is a call. The presence of the dimension of destiny depends not on external factors but on Jews themselves. It directs us to the future, it sets a purpose, a task to be fulfilled.

To sum up, four pairs of concepts have been identified: (i) the negative and positive identification, (ii) fate and faith, (iii) camp (*machaneh*) and congregation (*edah*), (iv) the covenant of fate *(brit goral*) and the covenant of destiny (*brit ye'ud*). The pairs are closely related but not identical. For example, fate and camp are on the same, negative, side, but a camp is clearly made for defense against an external threat, and the Jewish fate encompasses more than potential and actual dangers: after all, it is not necessarily dominated by persecution and negative experiences.

The value of positive identity

Let us come back to the problem of why fate is mentioned first, before faith, in the sources about conversion. Perhaps it is due to historical experience. On so many occasions, fate has dominated all other aspects of Jewish identity. Or, at least, this is our experience, most dramatically felt in the time of

5 Joseph Soloveitchik, "The Voice of My Beloved Knocketh," trans. L. Kaplan, in *Theological and Halakhic Responses to the Holocaust*, eds. B. Rosenberg and F. Heuman (Hoboken, NJ, 1993), 104.

6 "Degrees of Prophecy," www.ou.org/torah/article/camp_and_congregation.

the Shoah: then, for the leaders of Nazi Germany and all who worked with them, Jewish origin alone, independently of one's beliefs or identification with the Jewish tradition, meant death punishment. So Jewish fate can be seen as a common denominator. At the same time, we know that there is something more important in Jewish identity than the fate imposed from outside. While both the negative and positive dimensions have occurred in Jewish existence, for Rav Soloveitchik one is obviously higher than the other. Few, it seems, would object. This means that we should stress the positive dimension. It is better to stress affirmation, the mission to bear witness, the internal resources rather than the fate, that is the bond created by common dangers. This should be clear for anyone who appreciates the religious or spiritual dimension of being Jewish, and it also emerges from the quotations given here. The positive identification, unlike the negative one, evokes the future, the Jewish messianic mission. Rav Soloveitchik interprets the distinction between the *brit goral*, "covenant of Egypt" and *brit ye'ud*, "covenant of Sinai," as a task: to go from the (mere) fate to the covenantal community. He applies this also to the State of Israel. "The mission of the State of Israel is neither the termination of the unique isolation of the Jewish people nor the abrogation of its unique fate—in this it will not succeed!—but the elevation of a camp-people to the rank of a holy congregation-nation and the transformation of shared fate to shared destiny."

Soloveitchik's suggestion responds to new realities in Jewish life. However, more general challenges of modernity began much earlier. In a sense different from those considered above, modernity has brought the appreciation of a positive identity. While being Jewish had been largely imposed by the power of one's community and in this sense it was of a negative character, with the advent of modernity it became much more a matter of choice and in this sense it has become positive. This change was positively evaluated by the Abraham Joshua Heschel, the Apter Rebbe, one of the early hasidic masters and an ancestor of the twentieth-century philosopher of the same name. When one is free to choose then the voluntary belonging is more meaningful. In the language used by him, it can impact the work of redemption

> Now we have the best opportunity to achieve redemption. Until the present time a Jew did not have complete freedom of action, insomuch as formerly the leaders of the Jewish community had authority to punish transgressors against Jewish customs and communal regulations. Now, however, anyone

> may commit any offense against Judaism with impunity. Hence, he who chooses not to sin through self-control and reverence for his faith is worthier in the eyes of God than the law-abiding Jew of former generations.[7]

Freedom of choice has expanded so much in modern society that many people may have problems with identifications. This situation has been described as an emergence of "liquid" identity. One of the main proponents of the term was Zygmunt Bauman.[8] He noted that nowadays it is as easy to join a group as to quit. As a result, identities are now "market forces." While the dream of identity is a result of the need for security, liquidity makes it impossible. He described at length this rather extreme vision.[9] The problems indicated by him may seem rather abstract to traditional Jews. Equally strange, from a traditional point of view, is the earlier opinion of the famous French (non-Jewish) philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. In his 1946 article "Anti-Semite and Jew," analyzing the self-perception of his Jewish friends, he concluded that it was the antisemitic regard of others that defined the Jewishness of Jews. This concept is contrary to Judaism, but it describes well the extreme form of negative identity. The distinction between positive and negative Jewish identities occurs, as we have seen, within traditional thinking. The already quoted saying by Kotzker remains the best statement on the two types of identity.

The Insight Provided by Social Psychology

We must not underestimate the importance of negative identity. It may seem that not just the Shoah but much of the history of Jews has confirmed the permanence of dangers that shape negative identity. This is well expressed in the familiar *Vehi sheamdah* paragraph of the Haggadah.

> This promise has sustained our fathers and us. For not only one enemy has risen against us; in every generation men rise against us to destroy us, but the Holy One saves us from their hand.

The perception expressed in these verses remains an essential determinant of actual Jewish identity. In addition to hope and belief in the protection

7 After Louis Newman, *Hassidic Anthology*, 128–9.

8 Bauman was a sociologist who began his career in Poland, was forced to emigrate in 1968 and after a short stay in Israel, was living in the United Kingdom until his death in 2017.

9 In *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (Polity Press, 2004).

of *Ha kadosh baruch hu*, it contains the perception that Jews are always surrounded by mortal enemies. We are victims. This is related to what historian Salo Baron critically named the "lachrymose" view of Jewish history. Adherents of this view refer to various historical facts. Nevertheless, radical opinions that "they" are always and everywhere against us are not valid. The fact that this perception seems very strongly rooted is not a proof of its validity. A powerful indirect evidence against it is provided by modern social science. The most telling are Zimbardo's prison experiment and Tajfel's minimal group experiments. According to them, the negative identification with a group can be very strong even if the line of division is completely artificial and the perceived threat is stimulated artificially. This means that the mere presence of a strong identity defined as being against another group is not by itself a guarantee of its reality, not to mention its value. Let us see how this is possible.

Experiments in the framework of social psychology

The first and most famous piece of evidence is Philip Zimbardo's prison experiment (1971). Slightly later Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (Billig, Bundy and Flament) devised the minimal group paradigm, or experimental methodology to investigate the effect of social categorization alone on behavior.[10]

> 1. Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment
> Twenty-five years ago, a group of psychologically healthy, normal college students (and several presumably mentally sound experimenters) were temporarily but dramatically transformed in the course of six days spent in a prison-like environment, in research that came to be known as the Stanford Prison Experiment... Otherwise emotionally strong college students who were randomly assigned to be mock-prisoners suffered acute psychological trauma and breakdowns. Some of the students begged to be released from the intense pains of less than a week of merely simulated imprisonment, whereas others adapted by becoming blindly obedient to the unjust authority of the guards. The guards, too-who also had been carefully chosen on the basis of their normal—average scores on a variety of personality measures-quickly internalized

10 I am grateful to Dr. Michal Bilewicz from Warsaw for bringing to my attention Tajfel's experiments and helping to find the appropriate sources.

their randomly assigned role. Many of these seemingly gentle and caring young men ... soon began mistreating their peers and were indifferent to the obvious suffering that their actions produced. Several of them devised sadistically inventive ways to harass and degrade the prisoners, and none of the less actively cruel mock-guards ever intervened or complained about the abuses they witnessed.'

The behavior of prisoners and guards in our simulated environment bore a remarkable similarity to patterns found in actual prisons. As we wrote, "Despite the fact that guards and prisoners were essentially free to engage in any form of interaction ... the characteristic nature of their encounters tended to be negative, hostile, affrontive and dehumanising" ...

The environment we had fashioned in the basement hallway of Stanford University's Department of Psychology became so real for the participants that it completely dominated their day-to-day existence (e.g., 90% of "prisoners" in-cell conversations focused on "prison"-related topics), dramatically affected their moods and emotional states (e.g., prisoners expressed three times as much negative affect as did guards), and at least temporarily undermined their sense of self (e.g., both groups expressed increasingly more deprecating self-evaluations over time).[11]

2. Tajfel's Minimal Group Experiments

British schoolboys, participating in what they believed was a study of decision making, were assigned to one of two groups completely randomly, but allegedly on the basis of their expressed preference for paintings by the artists Vassily Kandinsky or Paul Klee. The children knew only which group they themselves were in (Kandisky group or Klee group), with the identity of outgroup and fellow ingroup members concealed by the use of code numbers. The children then individually distributed money between pairs of recipients identified only by code number and group membership. ... The results showed that against the background of some fairness, the children strongly favored their own group.

... Subsequent experiments were even more minimal. For example, Billig and Tajfel (1973) explicitly randomly categorized their participants as X- or Y-group members, thereby eliminating any possibility that they might infer that people in the same group were interpersonally similar to one another because they ostensibly preferred the same artist.

11 Craig Haney and Philip Zimbardo, *American Psychologist* 53, no. 7 (July 1998): 709–27.

> ... The robust finding from hundreds of minimal group experiments conducted with a wide range of participants is that the mere fact of being categorized as a group member seems to be necessary and sufficient to produce ethnocentrism and competitive intergroup behavior.[12]

We see that group identification can be accidental or contrived, without a serious source of origin, without any meaning, let alone any real threat. When identification with the group is experienced, it is perceived as being "mine," just because I happen to be in it rather than in another one, the group identity is purely negative. Even if the resulting identification is strong, it can be surprisingly meaningless. The resulting attitudes to other groups are not based on firm grounds. Of course, Jewish identity is not of that shallow kind. Can we, however, be sure that we have never been influenced by some shallow, because fundamentally negative, aspects of identity?

Identity and Relations with the Other

The need for genuine encounter

The Kotzker's dictum, quoted above, is so general that it refers to many, perhaps all, kinds of identity, not just to Jewish identity. If negative identities are at work, there is no real encounter between me and you, because I am not really me and you are not really you; only, if we have positive identities we can meet—I as me and you as you. The issue of genuine interfaith dialogue has been discussed by philosophers including Martin Buber, A. J. Heschel, E. Levinas.[13]

The forming of a camp (*machaneh*), the proverbial besieged fortress, has rather negative consequences for attitudes to those outside one's camp, be they other nations, other religions, or the world at large. All are easily seen as a threat. Whatever is located outside the camp is automatically suspicious, seen as threatening, and as a result rejected, treated without respect. Rejection extends beyond the need to maintain boundaries and prevent unwanted influence by other cultures. "Rejection" casts the other in a negative light. It runs the risk of generating an attitude of disrespect and belittling the value of the other, be it person, society or religion. Such

12 Quoted from Michael A. Hogg and Graham M. Vaughan, *Social Psychology* (Pearson Education Limited, 2008), 405.

13 For an account see S. Krajewski, *What I Owe to Interreligious Dialogue and Christianity* (Cracow: The Judaica Foundation, 2017), 71–127.

attitudinal consequences will not follow if one's own approach is not that of camp-identity.

The core of Jewish identity, or at least the religious identity, is fundamentally positive, despite our noticing elements of negative identity even in the conversion ceremony. We are Jews "for" something. We are supposed to be the community of witnesses (*edim*) who bear witness to the Creator of this world. Even though contemporary Judaism is composed of different streams, almost all of them are united by a sense of faithfulness to the special covenant Jews have with God.[14] The nature of the covenant can be disputed as can be the details and more generally the role of *halakhah*. Still, the resulting identity has a positive core. Everything depends on our faithfulness. While it involves being different from others, the contrast itself is not the source of identity. Consequently, identity needs to not necessarily mandate belittling the value of other cultures, societies and faiths. I wish to illustrate this claim in a homiletical manner based on the following commentary on a Talmudic passage.

> Whoever sets a particular place for himself to pray [in the synagogue—this follows from the context], the God of Abraham comes to his aid, and when he dies, people say of him, "What a humble [*anav*] and pious [*hasid*] person he was, of the students of Avraham Avinu." (Berakhot 6b)

Although this Talmudic dictum does not directly deal with identity, it can be interpreted in a way that throws additional light on our distinction between the two dimensions of identity. It presents a rather surprising opinion: What is so praiseworthy about establishing a particular, regular place for worship? And what has it to do with Abraham and "the God of Abraham"? On the face of it, it is just a reference to the supposed initiation of morning prayer in a regular place by Abraham, and the suggestion that if someone imitates Abraham in this respect, he would follow in his footsteps and be similarly humble and pious. Later, the custom of having a regular place in the synagogue is recommended in *Shulchan Arukh*. Still, the praise for following this custom seems to need further justification.

A modern student of *Mussar* gives one: "fixing yourself to one spot you free up all the other space for others to use."[15] This is indeed a striking explanation. It can be interpreted as a praise of a positive identity, attachment

14 Reconstructionist Judaism may constitute an exception since it redefines traditional understandings of God.

15 Alan Morinis, *Everyday Holiness*, ch. 7 "Humility," 49.

to one's place, that does not denigrate other places. This applies to different expressions of identity. If we take religious identity as one example, we would be led to read it as follows. If each of our religions has a set place in the world "synagogue" of religions, then the rest of the space is left for others. We have a place, but it is only one among many. Our tradition prevails in our place, but in other places there are other religious traditions.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, finds in the way Torah describes how Jacob became Israel a teaching that is relevant to positive identity construction. He talks about "being secure in one's own identity," which can be interpreted as a reference to positive identity. And he adds that, similar to the encounter of Israel-Jacob and Esau,

> when brothers, religions, faiths, are secure in their own identity, they can meet as equals and part as friends... Something of the deepest possible consequence is being intimated in the story of Esau. The choice of one does not mean the rejection of the other. Esau is not chosen, but he is also not rejected. He too will have his blessing, his heritage, his land. ... To be chosen does not mean that others are unchosen. To be secure in one's relationship with G-d does not depend on negating the possibility that others too may have a (different) relationship with Him. Jacob was loved by his mother, Esau by his father; but what of G-d who is neither father nor mother but both and more than both? In truth, we can only know our own relationship with our parents. We can never know another's. Am I loved more than my brothers or sisters? Less? Once asked, the question cannot but lead to sibling rivalry (one of the central themes of Bereshit). But the question is an invalid question. It should not be asked. A good parent loves all his or her children and never thinks of more or less. Love is not quantifiable. It rejects comparisons. Jacob is Jacob, heir to the covenant. Esau is Esau, doing what he does, being what he is, enjoying his own heritage and blessing. What a simple truth and how beautifully, subtly, it is conveyed.[16]

16 Commentary on Toledot, Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation: Bereshit* (Maggid Books, 2009), 146.