

**Shaul Kelner.** *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism.*  
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**Reviewed by** Sylvia Barack Fishman

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**Commissioned by** Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

Israel trips, often discussed within the framework of informal Jewish education, are set within a larger context in this brilliant analysis of the role that tourism has come to play for Jews and other dispersed populations in the twenty-first century. Shaul Kelner's study, winner of the Association of Jewish Studies' Jordan Schnitzer Prize for the best book in the social sciences category, is a different type of intellectual enterprise than the numerous reports on specific Israel trips that focus on demographic displays and graphs of measurable impacts. Kelner lucidly lays out evolving conceptual structures in the field of diasporic homeland tourism, illuminating a spectrum of intellectual trends, and using them both to enrich nuanced understandings of the larger significance of the Israel trip in contemporary Jewish life and to portray Israel trips as part of "broader transnational trends that are gaining momentum worldwide" (p. xx).

Kelner explores the reasons that tourism has become an important topic in social scientific study today. Certain types of tourism are devoted

to "political socialization," in that they "foster identification with a nation-state" in which the tour consumers do not reside. Diaspora tourism enables diasporans with no "direct social and material ties" to the country that is being represented as a "homeland" to visit a place that exhibits both "familiarity and strangeness," and to "actively position themselves in relation to it" (p. 17). This has been particularly true, of course, in regard to Israel, since few Jews traced "any immediate ancestry to the place," but with the rise of American ethnics many generations removed from immigration it is relevant to other diasporic groups as well. Within these carefully constructed tours, there is an implicit and sometimes explicit advocacy for multiculturalism: "they assert the legitimacy of maintaining sentimental ties with foreign countries and reject the notion that citizenship alone should define the boundaries of political community" (p. xx).

Tourism also attracts scholarly attention because it functions as a kind of magnet bringing together several different "actors" at the intersec-

tion of nationalistic consciousness and transnational, globally dispersed populations. Each category of actors--politicians and education professionals in the nation-state, NGOs supporting and professionals planning the tours, and tour consumers--have their own goals and play different roles. This makes for some very interesting divergences of intentionality and directionality. Thus, American Jewish policy planners and educators may look to Israel trips to "strengthen Jewish identity"--but, unlike their Israeli counterparts, they often have in mind a "specifically diasporic" identity, and care less about the centrality of Israel to American Jewishness (p. xx). Thus, while Israeli actors may be hoping for participants to be "better" Zionists, their American planners and supporters may be aiming for them to be "better" Jews and even better Americans, as in Horace Kallen's framing, a century ago, of the true America of multi-ethnic heritages, proudly upheld.

Clients who participate in an educational tour typically encounter a space that is neither a hermetically sealed "tourist bubble" nor a genuine, deep experience of quotidian Israeli life (p. 88). Israel and various sites in Israel are sacralized (p. 93) as tour professionals facilitate the "consumption of themed environments" (p. 96), framing the sightseeing, leisure activities, lectures, experiences, and shopping with the goal that attachments to Israel and Jewish social capital will both be enhanced, as Israel comes to seem like "a national homeland for them too." Kelner explains: "By setting up Israel as an object of symbolic consumption for gazing tourists, the homeland tours engage non-Israeli Jews in an essentially semiotic relationship with the nation-state. To the extent that they are successful, these diaspora-building projects foster a symbolic identification with Israel as a foundation on which pro-ethnic actions and relationships can then be built" (p. 89).

Ahad Ha'am's philosophy that Zion should be a spiritual and cultural wellspring for Jews around the world seems to be the dominant type

of Zionism informing the tours--rather than the classical Zionist vision of "dismantling diaspora" communities and promoting *aliyah*, emigration to the State of Israel. Indeed, Kelner says, the tours have a roundtrip ethos. Structuring the tours to enhance young diaspora Jews' "aesthetic engagement" with and enjoyment of Israel, asking nothing of them in return, not only makes participants arguably less critical of Israeli society and policies than they might otherwise be, it also may discourage critiques of their own diasporic communities (p. 195). Israel and the diaspora are lifestyle choices.

That said, the tours are structured to help participants own the Zionist narrative, especially "Israel's ashes to redemption story" (p. 93). Activities are arranged to convey that narrative in a highly experiential way that makes use of all the senses and emotions, as well as cognitive transmission, by marketing a range of Israel experiences and aspects of Israeli culture in vivid ways. A visit to the city of Safed, to cite just one example that Kelner analyzes, illustrates the deliberate "commodification of mysticism" through a layering of approaches: dramatic spiritual stories are told by tour leaders to their in clients quaint, historical synagogues; visits to artist's homes and kiosks emphasize their countercultural retreat from bustling cities to inspirational mountains and a religious ambience; in the "appropriately orientalized covered market" a variety of religious objects and ritual art, as well as "flowy" clothing are available for purchase. Both through conversation and through the structure of the sites visited, tour leaders play "on the cultural trope of bohemia as a place" where the Israelis they see "renounce material concerns and pursue a life of art and truth" (p. 85-86).

Tour participants do learn something about the social and political challenges that Israel faces, including the Arab-Israeli conflict. Tour planners and implementers work to make the Arab-Israeli conflict much less central to the

tourists' perception of Israel. In other words, after the client has gone on the trip, when s/he thinks of Israel the images and experiences that bubble up should not be the violent confrontations that are often pictured on the evening news. Instead, it is hoped that tour participants will "embrace" Israel as a significant symbol of "collective Jewish narratives." However, while the Israeli narrative is masterfully conveyed through experiential means, Arab nationalist narratives are primarily informational and dispassionate. This "fundamental asymmetry" grows out of what Kelner characterizes as a central *raison d'être* for the tours: "the important ideological work of the tours in securing diaspora Jewish support for Zionism's claim of a right to self-determination in the ancestral land. By making these claims subjectively compelling and experientially self-evident, the tours work to win Jewish hearts and minds in the face of global campaigns to delegitimize Jewish assertions of national rights in Israel" (p. 195).

This book is highly recommended for an interested general audience, and for use in courses in sociology, Israel studies, education, and contemporary Jewish life. It has fresh and intriguing approaches for scholars, but will be accessible to the intelligent layperson as well, because Kelner's use of verbatim quotes and descriptive fieldwork materials vividly conveys the texture and details of his analytical categories which might otherwise remain abstract concepts.

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