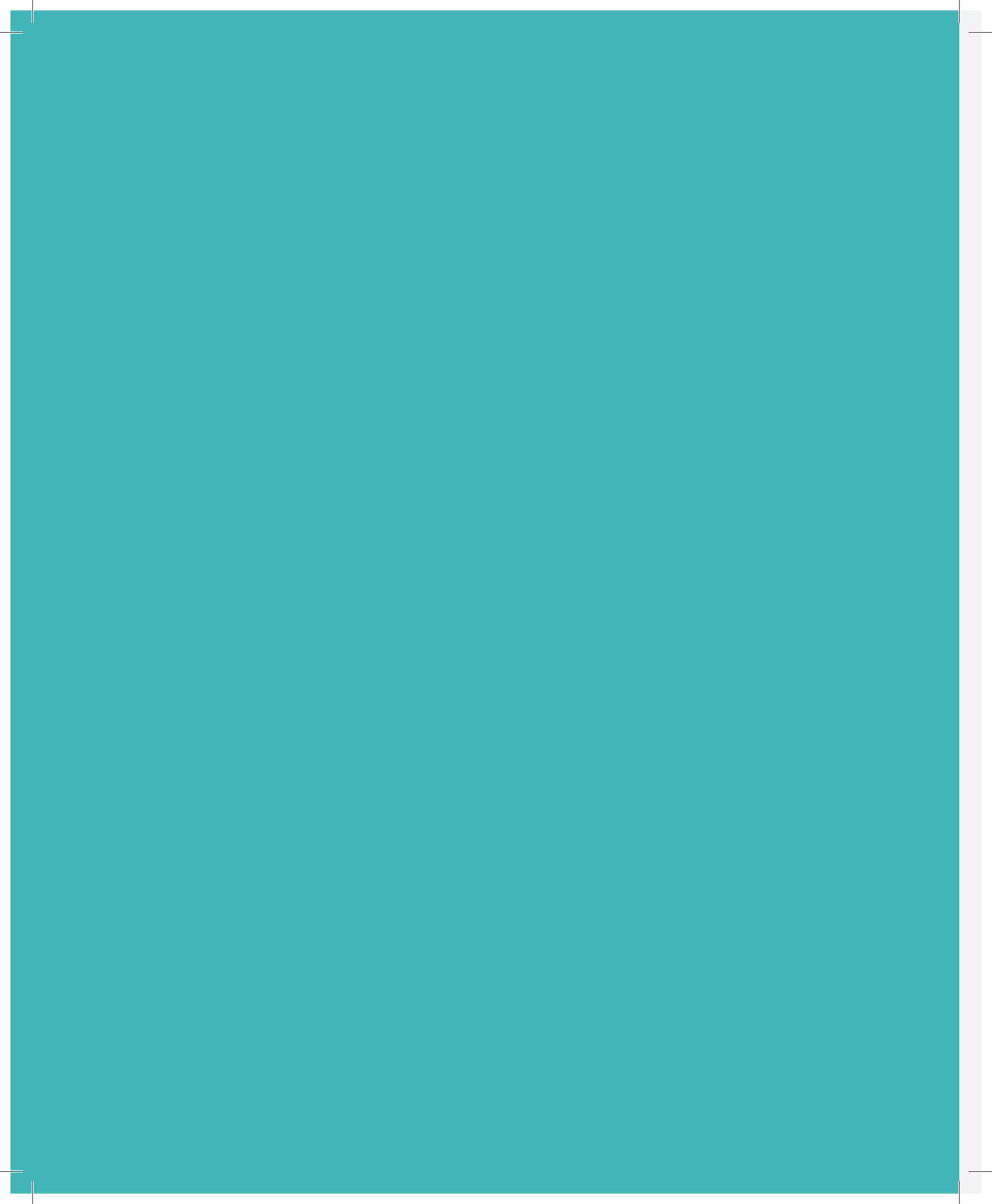




# Thriving Communities

Dr. Ofer Sitbon, Dr. Eilon Schwartz and Shaharit Fellows



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**Dr. Eilon Schwartz** is the Founding Director of Shaharit. Until recently, he served as the Founding and Executive Director of the Heschel Center, the leading leadership and capacity building organization in Israel for a sustainable future. He is also a faculty member and award-winning teacher of the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he teaches advanced degree courses in political theory, cultural criticism, social-environmental politics, and education. Over the years, Eilon has written numerous academic and popular articles on similar subjects. His book, **Living in the World: Human Nature, Ecological Thought and Education after Darwin**, about the contemporary debate on human nature and its implications for political and educational theory, was published by SUNY Press, and is to be released shortly in Hebrew. He has served as a board member of many organizations, including as the chair of the umbrella organization of the environmental movement, "Life and Environment," from 2008–2011. He also spent a year as a Visiting Professor at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies.

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# Thriving Communities

## Introduction: Short Stories

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### #1

Tirat Carmel is a town of 19,000 persons on the western slopes of Mt. Carmel, abutting the upscale Haifa neighborhood of Denya. Unlike the residents of the latter, the people of Tirat Carmel are not particularly well-off. The town is in the fifth socioeconomic cluster (out of ten) and does not have a large stock of housing. Many of its people work in Haifa, which is also where there are cinemas, theaters, and concert halls—and, of course, the good schools to which many of them send their children.

This was the situation until a few years ago. In 2007, young parents born and raised in Tirat Carmel—most of them with children of kindergarten age—began meeting to discuss the education system in their town. Instead of sending their children to schools in Haifa, they decided to work together to improve the schools in their home community. A good education, they believed, has its roots in the community where the children are growing up. The members of the group, which grew out of and worked from the Tirat Carmel Center for Young Adults, met once a week for two years and studied various models for schools. Working in concert with the municipal Community Fund, they raised money to hire professional consultants to attend the weekly sessions at which they consolidated their dream and devised an action plan. Later, the group registered as an independent nonprofit organization—“Involved Parents”—with the goal of encouraging parents to play an active role in the running of their children’s school and enlisting other members of the community in the campaign to improve the schools. Today, parents from more than 40 families volunteer each week in preschools and schools, where they have initiated programs for children, parents, and teachers.

The parents’ efforts have had a major impact. A new and vital spirit has penetrated the schools. Teachers, sensing the new backing, enter their classrooms with renewed vigor. Children, seeing how much their parents are investing, have begun to see school as a place where they, too, should make an investment. The parents are benefiting from their new and stronger bond with their neighbors and their town. In the new climate, Tirat Carmel is seen as a place worth settling down in and investing in. The parents’ initiative has helped people view the town as the center of a vibrant community, as a good place to plant roots and raise a family.

### #2

In 2008, representatives of the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor made a festive announcement of plans to establish a science park in Beer Sheva to create jobs for all residents of the Negev. Dr. Muhammad al-Nabari quickly realized that it would not do very much for the residents of his town, Hura. For Dr. al-Nabari, who had been elected head of the local council several years earlier, the lack of jobs—an official unemployment rate of 20% and an actual figure that is much higher—was one of the town’s most severe problems. He understood,

though, that Hura's problems would not be solved by ostentatious projects like a science park or by efforts to persuade multinational corporations to locate high-tech plants in the Negev. Al-Nabari knew that, for many reasons—including the lack of good public transportation and the shortage of daycare centers for infants and young children—few women would agree to work outside the town. What is more, the good jobs available in Beer Sheva were not suited to most of Hura's residents, even those willing to commute on a daily basis. Al-Nabari believes that the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor, which tries to create jobs and then to suit workers to them, has it backwards. First you have to know the people who need to make a living and only then create jobs appropriate for them.

This is why visitors to his office see a whiteboard on the wall, covered by a chart. On one side of it, the town's residents are divided into groups: men with an education, illiterate men, women in polygamous families, and so on. Another column shows the number of persons in each group, the number of those looking for work, etc. This segmentation allows al-Nabari and his aides to isolate the specific needs of each group and to offer each of them tailor-made solutions. For example, in concert with AJECC, a civil-society organization, the Hura municipality set up a catering cooperative of single mothers who cook hot meals for the pupils in the town (instead of having the food trucked in from Beer Sheva). The women take part in decision-making for the project and will later vote on the distribution of the profits, which are to be devoted to encouraging community initiatives. The work suits the women's constraints—their daily schedule, their need to take care of their children during the day, and their skill set. So, for the first time, jobs have been created for Hura residents that are actually suited to them.

### #3

On July 25, 2007, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality sent bulldozers to demolish Ussishkin Arena, the legendary home of the Hapoel Tel Aviv basketball team. The action wrote an end to the loudest and most emotional confrontation in Mayor Ron Hulda'i's tenure. Someone sprayed a graffito in red paint on a section of the demolished structure: "Done but not over with, the story of the Ussishkin Arena."

And so it was. Ussishkin was more than an arena, and Hapoel Tel Aviv was more than a basketball team. The arena wasn't just its home court and the site of youth games, but also the center of a sort of unplanned, committed, and flourishing community. Even after the building was torn down, the community survived. That same year its loyal followers established the Hapoel Ussishkin NPO, which soon had a thousand members. The group founded and managed a basketball team, ran afternoon clubs for girls and boys, brought the players to visit children in the hospitals, and organized picnics and parties.

There were two motives for this activity. The first was anger: Hapoel's fans were furious at the ease with which the team's owner, Shoul Eisenberg, agreed to tear down the arena that was so precious to them, and understood that the only way to save the team was to regain control of it. The second motive was love: for the team, for one another, for what they felt to be their own legacy, for the community that had emerged around them. The campaign took as its motto, "Hulda'i, I'm in love with Ussishkin. What about you?"

The team that the new association put together flourished as happens only in legends. It finished its first season undefeated and was promoted to the First League. It finished its next season in first place and was promoted to the National League. In the 2010–2011 season, it reached the semifinals of the State Cup.

Hapoel Tel Aviv's success on the court was unbelievable, nothing short of a miracle. But it pales to insignificance in comparison with the unexpected success of the members of the Hapoel Ussishkin Association. Several hundred families that started from nowhere managed to create and preserve something delicate and enchanting: a united and thriving community. They understood that sports are not just sports and that Hapoel Ussishkin was in fact a school for mutual responsibility, for solidarity, for determination, and even for love.

**What do these three stories, and many others that are taking place in every corner of Israeli society today, have in common? The answer is that another kind of politics is emerging, slowly and quietly, in the cities and towns, in rural communities and villages. This new politics, of which the protest of the summer of 2011 is a magnificent expression, seeks the common rather than the divisive; it looks for solutions specific to the place, based on the insight that a good place is a place that is good for everyone. This is a politics that pursues an economy that serves people's need to make a decent and honorable living, instead of an economy of winners and losers. This is a politics that wants the state to make new investments in education, healthcare, and culture, but also understands that these services can be top-notch only if citizens, too, are involved. This is a politics that encourage a multilayered community life—festivals celebrated as a group, street parties, orchestras and choirs, amateur sports, local folklore, and much more. This is a politics that understand that the cultural capital of a place, of a family and friends, of a synagogue and a club and a neighborhood, is what provides the primary safety net for a happy life, from birth to old age. We call this politics “communitarian politics,” because it fosters individuals through their ties with one another, through the communities that build their lives, and through the link to other communities—all with the goal of building a place that is truly good for everyone to live in.**

**And all the rest, as Hillel the Elder said, is commentary.**

## The Community: The Link between the Individual and the State

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The community occupies the space that lies between individuals and their freedom, at one end, and the state and its responsibilities, on the other. Human freedom is the underpinning of democracy, and the state's responsibility is the clearest expression of shared citizenship and the social compact that binds us together. But that is not the whole story. Human freedom does not exist in a vacuum. It is manifested in the social contexts in which we build our lives. Nor is the state the end-all and be-all of our existence. It operates within the complex network of interpersonal relationships that is the precondition for its proper function. Without a supportive family, even the best school will fail. A safe space is not just the result of the number of police officers who are patrolling the streets. The community is, accordingly, both the expression of the human space and a prerequisite for both individuals and society to flourish.

A vibrant community life is based on social networks that create trust and mutuality. These, in turn, are the basis for the formation of social capital, which functions to benefit the individual and for the benefit of society as a whole. It is easier for members of a community to find jobs (drawing on a professional and social network); they are healthier (social isolation is a major risk factor for premature death, on a par with smoking and more significant than alcohol or obesity; what is more, public health systems are more effective in places where there is abundant social capital) and happier (community has been found to be a better predictor of happiness than income level). But community life also has a social benefit, in that it serves as a shield to keep teenagers from descending into crime and contributes to their welfare in various ways, such as deterring unwanted pregnancies or dropping out of school. In other words, an increase in my social capital increases my neighbors' social capital, but also depends on it. In Tirat Carmel, for example, parents' individual and natural desire to improve their children's education developed into public action on behalf of the entire community. Such parental involvement is also an important expression of active citizenship, which is crucial for democracy.

A community has many facets: some communities form through a shared bond to a place—a neighborhood, a village, a city, or a region. Some emerge from a shared heritage or coalesce around a unifying world view. They may organize in synagogues, churches, and mosques, but also around soccer teams, choirs, factories, and reserve units. For many of us, a bond to the community is a source of identity, security, satisfaction, artistic endeavors, and happiness. These various forms of community are not just a stage set for a different human story, but are themselves the context in which we build our lives. It is the web of memories, history, and space that gives meaning to our lives. Community is thus a significant form of organization that is essential for us to flourish as Israelis.

Of course there are also drawbacks to communities. They can be closed, hostile to other communities, and abusive towards members who are different. Traditional communities sometimes hold on to customs that are incompatible with fundamental values of modern society, notably with regard to the status of women. Female circumcision and polygamy are classic examples. In order to promote essential changes in these areas, we need to create culturally sensitive social arrangements, without surrendering the authority of the law, because, in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

But we should also turn the spotlight on the many advantages of these communities and see the diverse ways in which persons from different cultural backgrounds cope with the same existential questions. A close look at the traditional community space, with its economic, social, and environmental aspects, makes it possible for us to study, respect, and perpetuate important values such as mutual assistance, a slower pace of life, or the centrality of values that can serve as alternatives to the achievement-oriented or consumer culture. Traditional communities are often the basis for a strong and sustainable local economy. A recent example is the Yeroham Cooks project, in which local women provide visitors to the town with home-cooked meals in their own dining rooms. The project helps the women make extra money, strengthens the local economy, and also serves as an important channel for bolstering the sense of community togetherness. Traditional communities remind us, too, that the important economic safety net provided by the welfare state cannot be the only one, and that we will always have to rely also on the social safety nets extended by the family and the community, as exemplified by the Ultraorthodox free-loan societies and the extended family in the Arab sector.

## Community and Prosperity

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The simple idea of human growth and prosperity is slowly returning to the center of the political arena. This is the goal that the economy, society, and culture must serve. An economy that is expanding but does not help human beings thrive is not just or fair. As Nobel Economics-laureate Amartya Sen has argued, the volume of economic activity (GDP) does not necessarily reflect social happiness. Economic policy is supposed to permit people to have better lives—to support themselves in an honorable fashion, to develop their capacities, to pursue happiness. “If the GDP is up, why is America down?” asked three American scholars in a famous article published in 1995. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis were asking the same question in the summer of 2011.

Sen’s view is becoming the central thread in politics in various places in the world. In a report published in 2009, a committee of experts appointed by French president Nicholas Sarkozy, of which Sen was a key member (along with Joseph Stiglitz, another Nobelist in economics), proposed updating the formula for measuring the Gross Domestic Product to include other indicators than economic activity in the marketplace. The new metrics would reflect people’s quality of life and include higher education, health, social relations, and political involvement. A change in the way that growth is measured is essential in the environmental context, too: economic activity that pollutes the water we drink or the air we breathe harms the quality of our lives and our prosperity. So this is not just an intellectual exercise. Modifying the way we measure economic success could have a real impact on how we live, too.

But what is the link between thriving and community? No man is an island. We are social beings who build our lives along with others. Strong ties link us, as individuals, with the families and communities in which we grew up and in which we live, from which we draw our language, our values, our traditions, our worldview, our sense of humor, and our culture. To a great extent, we are molded by our families and communities. Community life is the arena in which solidarity and empathy blossom and flourish, along with the social practices that are their corollaries. We need one another and are increasingly dependent on one another. Human beings flourish only when we share with others. This means that the community is not just one more peripheral framework in which we pursue happiness, but in fact the central space in which all of us express our humanity. It is the framework in which all of us work together. We extend a hand to others, to help and be helped. We benefit from contact with other people. We are not the product of a “selfish gene,” but beings who are searching for meaning through our ties with others, even though we sometimes need to be alone. Our independence begins from living as part of a group, which is taken as self-evident and without which it cannot long survive.

But community life does not take place in a vacuum. There are situations in which a community withers and circumstances in which a community blossoms.

## When a Community Withers

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For the last three decades, the dominant economic policy in Israel, as in most of the world, has been one that seeks to impose the logic of the marketplace on ever-widening spheres of life. This economization of life severs economics from the social norms and institutions out of which it developed and in which it was embedded for many years. The spread of this approach has dissolved social capital, and, alongside it, community life. Its influence can be seen in many domains, from urban planning through to the school system. For example, the expanding purview of the logic of the marketplace and the discourse of efficiency propels processes based on economies of scale, which lead to megacorporations that elbow out small businesses and the self-employed. The disappearance of the corner grocery store in favor of supermarkets and the decline of vibrant downtown areas (which have been the meeting place for citizens ever since biblical Jerusalem and classical Athens) caused by the emergence of shopping malls on the outskirts of the city, catalyze processes of community disintegration and have an obvious environmental impact as well. The self-employed become wage-earners and wealth is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The attitude that these processes are inevitable, in the name of efficiency and competition, ignores the fact that the economy does not exist in a vacuum and that narrow economic efficiency frequently ignores social interests. These trends also go hand-in-hand with the ongoing process of our conversion from citizens into consumers (we might recall here, as an aside, that the Tel Aviv municipality, in all its official communications, refers to residents as “clients”) and the contraction of citizen involvement in shaping the public space. Voter turnout is falling. The public discourse is becoming increasingly superficial. The harmful effect on the community fabric impairs democracy as well. The efficiency discourse of economization is deaf to these contexts, but more and more people are coming to realize their importance. The great tent-city protest, as well as the many local initiatives all over the country, from Tirat Carmel to Hura and Ussishkin, represent the reactions of citizens who refuse to accept the withering of mutual responsibility and the fading of the joy of life together as a decree of fate that must simply be accepted.

There is no doubt that the economization of life has great persuasive power in Israel, as in the rest of the world. It stems in part from the representation of its assumptions about human beings (selfish and rational), society (“survival of the fittest”), and the economy (efficiency is everything) as “natural,” and from their linkage to concepts that have a positive resonance, such as “freedom” and “autonomy.” Community practices, by contrast, have come to be identified chiefly with predatory collectivism that tramples individuals underfoot and obscures their unique identities.

But there are many ways to manage our lives. Economization is only one of many ways to model the building of relationships and is ultimately the product of a political choice by a democratic society. There have been many other options all over the world, and especially in Israel, and there still are. We do not have to be nostalgic about the old paradigms, which also had their weaknesses. The point is that economization has reached the end of the road: Israeli society has played too heavy a social, economic, environmental, and especially human price. Embarking on another course, like every other change in history, will not be based on imagination alone, but also on an overhaul of ideas from the past, in the critical perspective of the present. It should not surprise us that other ways of understanding human beings, society, and the economy—more communitarian and

less pessimistic—are still widespread in Israel. Many Israelis, from all social sectors, were members of youth groups. In many religious communities, mutual assistance remains a cardinal value. In recent years, too, we have witnessed the flowering of new urban collectives—in Migdal Ha'emek, Sederot, Beit Shemesh, and even Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. It is not astonishing that economization, as strong as it may be, never asserted total control in Israel, unlike the situation in the United States, for example.

Consider, for example, the healthcare system. The National Health Insurance Law, enacted in 1994, was based on the fundamental values of “justice, equality, and mutual assistance,” and won broad support from all sectors of Israeli society. The contrasting juxtaposition of these values to an exclusive adherence to the logic of the marketplace has allowed Israel to maintain a public healthcare system that is one of the best in the world (but nothing lasts forever, and today the partial privatization in the financing of healthcare services and their ownership are widening the gulf between the haves and the have-nots). The passage of a national health insurance law (with a much more limited scope than the Israeli version) proved to be an almost impossible task in the United States; here it was a political exercise that was almost taken for granted.

The use of human wellbeing as a criterion for the assessment of socioeconomic policy, and the role of the community in achieving it, is appropriate not only for weighing the economization of our lives, but also for looking back at earlier Israeli models, and especially the welfare state. Alongside its great achievements—the establishment of the National Insurance Institute, almost universal literacy, low infant mortality, a high life expectancy, free compulsory education, and more—the Israeli welfare state suffered from many problems. In many cases the bureaucracy, which wanted to care for individuals from cradle to grave, turned its citizens dependent and passive. Its universal nature was often translated into a failure to allow for the different, and this prevented it from offering a full solution to the diversity of human needs. The knowledge possessed by the communities, which in the pre-State era played an important role in defining individuals' needs and supplying them, was shunted aside by the concept of the all-knowing welfare state. The power of the professional bureaucrats left absolutely no room for public participation. For many years, sectors that were not part of the dominant majority—women, Mizrahim, Arabs—were discriminated against, as the welfare state failed to recognize their rights. At the same time, there were also broad social and economic changes in Israel and the rest of the world: high unemployment and demographic changes (notably the increase in life expectancy) caused pension and healthcare outlays to skyrocket.

These failures paved the road for the increasing economization of our lives, as an ostensibly efficient way to deal with the economic costs of the welfare state. But we should not throw out the baby with the bathwater. The two outstanding principles that underlay the establishment of the welfare state—a fairer distribution of social capital and the political and social integration of the various classes of society—were and remain the greatest achievements of the modern era and have made a major contribution to the prosperity of Israeli society. Today, though, having learned from the welfare state's achievements and failures, as well as from the social and environmental costs of the all-encompassing economization, the time has come to develop a new path—one whose perspective has a human scale and sees real human beings as the goal. Below we will sketch out an initial profile of a different economic, social, and environmental outlook. This outlook—which could be called

a “sustainable democratic economy”—takes human prosperity and community life as its basis and central tenet. It derives from an understanding that the economy can serve social interests if and only if it makes it possible for communities to flourish, along with the individuals who compose them. It will prosper over time only if it develops within its ecological limits. In this way, an economy that is shaped by the state and promoted by human creativity can develop. Economic stability and continuing prosperity are, of course, essential building blocks for the functioning of an active and vibrant democracy, as well.

## A Policy to Produce a Thriving Community

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### 1. Economic Policy

The economy can make a significant contribution to the strength of a community, but it can also injure it critically.

First of all, social and economic gaps within a society are not only an ethical problem. Today there is abundant information that spotlights the close link between inequality and the disintegration of a society. According to recent scholarship, the breadth of social gaps is a significant predictor of the prevalence of violence, unwanted pregnancies, prison population, the level of trust among individuals, corruption, and more.

Based on this indicator, Israel is in a bad way. The social restraints that the welfare state erected against the logic of the marketplace—unions, academia, the civil service, the judicial system—have grown much weaker in recent years. Israel has leads the Western world with regard to social gaps. The incidence of poverty is expanding (one of every three children—and more than half of all Arab children—live below the poverty line); wages are very low (40% of those living in poverty are employed; more than 50% of all wage-earners do not reach the income-tax threshold; and almost 75% earn less than the average wage); wage disparities are skyrocketing (in 2008, the wage expenses for a manager in one company included in the TA-25 index was 200 times the minimum wage); more than half of all teenagers do not earn a matriculation certificate (in Kokhav Yair, the eligibility rate was 75% in 2008, but only 12% in Jisr a-Zarqa); the public wealth is controlled by a tiny handful (according to a report issued by the Bank of Israel in April 2010, ten families control 30% of the Israeli economy); discrimination against entire sectors continues (in 2009, women earned, on average, only 66% of what men did; Arabs earned only half of what Ashkenazi Jews did); and the continued starvation of the public services intensifies privatization and the assault on social rights. The implications of this situation threaten all of us.

Second, an economy that supports community must provide jobs for the human fabric of a real place, not an abstract global village, far from the limits and skills of diverse individuals, with to their specific occupational abilities and human wishes. The battle against the Wisconsin Plan reflected this lesson. An economy cannot be homogeneous. It must offer a spectrum of options for a spectrum of citizens. Every person has the right to a decent living.

The adoption of a communitarian economic policy, which would increase social equality and adapt the economy to suit people’s needs and desires, would also improve the quality of life. To achieve this, such a policy must focus on several areas:

- A massive public investment at the start of life. Research has found that children's early years are the best time for measures to reduce inequality. The public investment in the human infrastructure is the very best long-term social investment. An early elimination of national, social, gender, and ethnic barriers would permit more citizens to be active and to realize their latent capacities, in a way that would also contribute to the community and country and reduce the need for reliance on public support. There are diverse means to do this, ranging from implementation of the Free Preschool Law to funding of preventive dental care for children, which would reduce national outlays on healthcare.
- Expansion of access to economic capital. One of the key barriers to business initiatives is the limited access to credit at a reasonable rate of interest. Today, 1% of the Israeli population holds about 70% of all bank loans; it is difficult for people to meet the minimum terms demanded by the commercial banks, whose motivation is maximization of their profits. This vicious circle makes the strong stronger and the weak weaker. A publicly owned (but not necessarily a state-owned) bank, motivated by the best interests of the community, would be an essential step towards expanding the availability of credit. The decentralization of economic capital could draw on the social capital base: small community initiatives and the founding of small businesses by the disempowered strata (in the spirit of the idea of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus), would be encouraged, as would economic initiatives to benefit the public. Realization of this vital social objective would make it possible for every individual to express his or her inherent initiative and creativity.
- Greater community involvement in the design of public systems. A severing of the link between economic ability and the right to receive basic public services (education, healthcare, welfare) is a fundamental principle. All the same, the organs of the state must make use of the knowledge possessed by communities in order to improve their response to the diverse array of needs, both individual and community. The spread of communitarian ideas could also lead to a gradual change in how public systems understand various basic concepts. For example, the dominant paradigms in healthcare today are leading the system to the verge of collapse, because they refer to treatment of the ill and infirm, who require the most expensive and advanced technologies. A more communitarian and more holistic outlook would encourage a healthy lifestyle in general and significantly reduce the costs to society. We would see inexpensive and efficient public transportation instead of polluting private vehicles, bicycle paths and the encouragement of pedestrians, education about fresh and healthy food in schools and public institutions, support for the traditional open air market in the cities and new farmers' markets that link the fields to the plates on the kitchen table, and much more. Similar examples in other arenas of public services—community education, community policing, community-supported welfare—are tangible examples of why public services need public participation to be established and to succeed. Other important conditions are the inculcation of a community approach in government, commercial, and citizen activities, cultivation of the community profession, and training of professionals and the establishment of community development units as part of public systems.
- A strengthening of the social economy. Alongside the public sector, the business sector, and the Third Sector, a new "Fourth Sector" is emerging. It consists of social businesses (economically independent firms

that pursue social or environmental goals) and cooperatives (commercial enterprises with joint ownership and democratic decision-making processes) and expresses the growing attempt to apply business entrepreneurship to the attainment of social welfare and not just to the maximization of profits. These projects, which constitute a growing share of economic activity all over the world, deserve to be encouraged because of the total economic and community benefits inherent in them, including the bolstering of the democratic culture and its incorporation into economic life as well, a fairer division of profits and reduction of wage disparities, and the community commitment of many such businesses. They also reflect the trend to blur the distinctions between economic initiatives and social initiatives—with the former increasingly aware of their social responsibility, while the latter develop economic tools.

- A change in the balance of power between workers and employers. In the last few decades, the status of workers in Israel has deteriorated, as the percentage of unionized workers dropped from 85% to about 30%, while the share of those employed through personnel firms has become the highest in the developed world. As a result, workers' rights have been impacted negatively in many domains. The weakening of the working class is a classic example of the economization of life, which treats workers' dignity as a luxury that must give way to maximization of profits and competitive ability. But it also attests to changes in the labor market, notably the transition from a manufacturing economy to a service and knowledge economy; these, too, have helped undermine the achievements of the labor movement in Israel and the rest of the world. We should aspire to introduce a real change in worker-employer relations, because a zero-sum game, in which workers' interests necessarily collide with those of the employer, are a sure recipe for hostility, exploitation, and alienation. When workers become interested parties in a business, share in responsibility and decision-making, and derive direct benefit from its profits, everyone comes out ahead. In this context, stronger labor unions could modify the dynamic of the power relations between workers and employer and gradually lead to greater worker participation in decisions about a company's future. A significant contraction of the bargaining disparity between workers and employers, including a combination of taxation tools and the emergence of new social norms, would also lead to a fairer distribution of the profits produced by the firm and significantly reduce the wage gaps, which are the most prominent symbol of the unjust nature of the current economic structure.
- Strengthening local economies. Economic policy tends to be managed as a function of the considerations of the global market and leaves entire communities behind. There is an urgent need to develop a much more diverse policy that understands that economic development must be multifaceted. Steps such as support for small factories and businesses that operate in the jurisdiction of the local authority (for example, by encouraging local authorities to purchase services locally) would bolster them and leave their capital at home. The environmental benefit, too, of local production and consumption (a reduced need to transport goods, less of a need for mobility to go shopping) is clear. It would also be appropriate to encourage the establishment of satellites of high-tech industries in Arab localities and other places in the periphery, in order to help them develop. Local capital, which encourages local economic activity, has a glorious history of success; in recent years it has resurfaced as an effective tool to diversify financial activity and bolster the role of money in strengthening the community. Finally, the establishment of

cooperatives in various sectors—from food to financial services—is one means whereby organized communities can offer a local alternative that can compete with the rapacious global economy.

## 2. Social Policy

Communities will flourish if we adopt a social policy that values them, supports them, and helps them move forward. The social wealth that should be distributed among all residents of the state does not consist exclusively of income, but also of leisure time and quality of life. Here too we can point to a number of important directions for action.

- Stronger families and a modification of the structure of the labor market. The family is an important element that supports individuals. The appearance of “alternative” families of various types in recent decades has led to a vast change in the character and definition of the family. These changes do not, however, eliminate the need for social support in the family setting. The family—any family—is essential for its individual members to flourish, but it also creates important community goods such as parental involvement and reduced crime. The creation of conditions that permit families to thrive will of course require greater gender equality, so that more women can work outside the home and more men accept domestic responsibilities. A first step in this direction is a gradual structural change in the labor market that would make it friendlier to families. There are diverse ways to do this: a shorter workweek would provide more leisure time to bolster the ties between parents and children; encouraging women to go out to work, especially in traditional societies (where this would be a gradual process that shows consideration for their tradition—part-time jobs, options for working from home, subsidized daycare, additional tax-credit points, and so on); making workplaces more parent-friendly; etc.
- Increased leisure time. We live at such a furious pace that many of us simply have no time for ourselves, for our family, and for our community. In the race to make a living, we work on average more than our parents did, just to tread water or run in place. A shortened workweek, along with a major reduction in poverty, would allow many citizens to build themselves a variegated economic life. The influence of economic class and family or group background would be diminished. The concept of work would expand beyond industrial production in the direction of creative endeavor. A leisure-time culture—which is a precondition for reinforcing community life and bolstering mutual responsibility and perhaps even altering the pace of life—would develop. More leisure time would also make it possible for more citizens to take part in civic and democratic action.
- Public and community education. As a key agent of socialization, the education system, too, plays an important role in strengthening communities. In addition to transmitting a unifying civic foundation, with full public funding (in order to detach the quality of schools from the families’ economic status), schools should also give expression to the voice and aspirations of the communities in which they operate. They should serve as neighborhood community centers. A school’s catchment area would be its immediate community. Significant parental involvement in designing curricula would make it possible to develop unique

courses of study. Exposure to the material studied in the other school systems would facilitate learning about the various communities.

### **C. Planning and Environmental Policy**

Community life, almost by definition, is a more local life. Hence a communitarian policy would also be more sustainable. It is possible to think about various directions in this context, of which the most important is urban planning. Community life in cities is (also) a product of successful urban planning on a human scale, which encourages ties and encounters between individuals and between communities. Planning that promotes communitarianism takes place with the community's participation, takes social impacts into account, is considerate of the local culture, fosters the creation of a multigenerational social fabric, and allocates space for local community activities. Such planning can include dense construction with green spaces that preserve the fabric of neighborhood life; the creation of public spaces that are defined, accessible, safe, and inviting, in which the community emerges; holding interpersonal and intergroup contacts on an equal, spontaneous, and voluntary basis; and cultivating neighborhood identities that encourage residents to accept responsibility and contribute to the preservation and development of the area where they live. It would also be appropriate to revive downtown neighborhoods by locating most jobs and commerce there and by making it more difficult to construct shopping malls outside cities and along highways. Preference should be given to urban renewal that recycles existing infrastructure and reinforces the existing urban fabric, with priority to the public transportation system.

## **Towards a New National Consciousness**

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Despite the great importance of the community aspects of life, their reinforcement must not cause us to forget that all of us are citizens of a modern country and that democracy depends on the existence of a shared and open public space. The closure of communities, each inside its own bubble, is a sure formula for ignorance, suspicion, and friction. Along with the differences, we live in a state of mutual interdependence. Air pollution and crime influence the quality of life of every community.

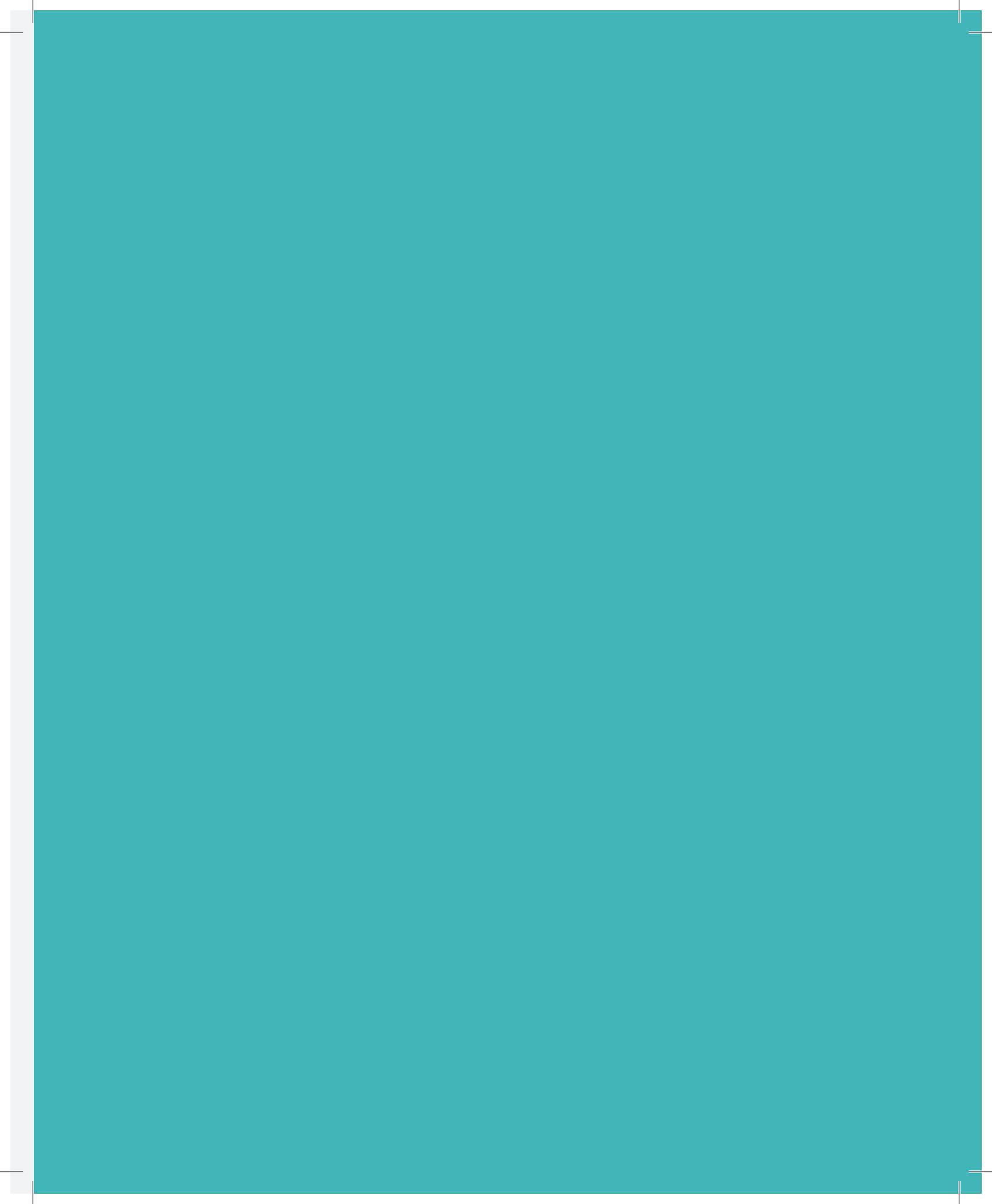
We must always take account not only of the importance and centrality of the community bonds in the life of each individual, but also of the bonds between the individual and others, and of communities with other communities. This perspective, a sort of up-to-date national consciousness, needs to crystallize around a complex web of links among the many communities that compose Israeli society. The community is important, but it must never be fostered at the expense of the mutual responsibility that is the foundation of the concept of national citizenship.

A community is not meant to replace the individual's freedom or the state's responsibility. It must never weaken the bonds among all of us, our responsibility for all human beings, and the partnership among all the citizens of the country. There are important steps that have to be taken in order to bolster the ties among the citizens of the state, but they must not come at the expense of the community. A secure and happy life cannot blossom

without the cultivation of an additional social initiative, appropriate to our daily life, as part of life itself. That is where we live our lives. Communities that thrive, in the places where we all are born and grow old, are an essential space for politics. Thriving communities are the cornerstone for the construction of a state in which the residents' wellbeing is not just a slogan.







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