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Redundant Celebration?



Israeli ID card
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Dafna Mekel

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Everyone has identity card

Worship of Israeli identity cards is nothing less than idolatry

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I can't stand the ceremonies conducted around here. The ceremonies serve as an incubator for words of arrogance and falsehood, empty slogans and dreary speeches. But, I also realize that a modest ceremony can be a moment of reflection and pride, highlighting the beautiful, honoring those who are truly worthy of respect. None of these elements are present in the ceremony that has become widespread in recent years in [Israeli](#) high schools: In a festive gathering in the school's courtyard, next to the monument to fallen soldiers or facing Mount Moriah, the 10th graders receive identity cards.

This ceremony does not signify any particular achievement by the recipient; he does not take upon himself any burden of commitments. It only entails obeying the Identity Card Carrying and Displaying Law of 1982: "A resident who reaches the age of 16 must carry an identity card with him at all times. Anyone violating this law is subject to a fine of 5,000 shekels." The card is not a symbol of good citizenship. It is essentially a tool with which the state controls its citizens.

I certainly believe that there is a place for identity cards in Israel. But I regard this as an existential need and not as a cause for celebration. What is the meaning of the ceremony? At most, the Ministry of Interior is providing excellent service to the citizenry by saving the children the bother of traipsing to the Population Registry office – though such a visit would actually do more to prepare them for adult life than the speeches by the mayor and the student council president.

The Ministry of Education's website includes a document with tips for those organizing the ceremony. It is evident that the authors found it difficult to explain the meaning of the ceremony. All I could find was: "In order to make the ceremony more festive and meaningful, it is best to involve the youth in its planning and implementation." Egged Tours is more specific, suggesting that the ceremony should be an unforgettable experience. The menu of "unforgettable" activities includes: a visit to Herzl's tomb, preparing fire displays, and hip hop performances.

Perhaps there are some who feel the need to design a secular Israeli coming-of-age ceremony as opposed to the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. In this regard, I envy the haredi (ultra-Orthodox) world. No haredi yeshiva would permit such a ceremony. This reflects the ambivalent attitude of the yeshiva world to the State of Israel and preserves the value of not wasting time that could be spent studying – a value that even had a place in our secular state schools.

The Ministry of Education recommends playing songs during the ceremony such as "I Have No Other Land" (which does not apply to all of the children) and "Fly Off Young Bird" (overseas?). Playing the song "Each Person Has a Name" is grotesque. If we're already taking Zelda out of context, we could have changed the words to say: "Each person has a name given to him by a clerk at the Ministry of Interior, and by his father and mother. Each person has a picture, which models his height and smile, taken at the photo booth in the mall. Each person has an address with walls, provided by the mayor. Each person has an identity card number, and a control number issued by the computer..."

There is one place in Israel where receiving an identity card is profoundly meaningful. For the residents of east Jerusalem, the blue card serves as a card of life.

The Ministry of Interior is proud that it issued the card last year to high school students in the eastern part of the city. I was not at the ceremony in east Jerusalem, but it is easy to imagine the elation among the students who received the right to bear the card, which they see as symbolizing the annexation.

Israeli nationalism needs the Hebrew language, social solidarity, a constitution, an

army to protect it, knowledge of the history of the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. It needs to shake off the lust of occupation. The worship of identity cards is nothing less than idolatry.

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