15. Cultural mythology and global leadership in Israel

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INTRODUCTION

Israel is a country characterized as unique in many aspects, and while geographically located in the Middle East, its political, social and economical systems as well as the Jewish religion of the majority, and particularly its culture, differ substantially from its neighboring countries. These features and the scarcity of natural resources are reflected in the Israeli leadership style. The dominant national and managerial culture of Israel is close to that of Western societies (that is, the educational, political and legal systems, the welfare state, and the ethical values). With scarce natural resources, Israel looks for economic benefits from the human factor, and thus leadership plays a major role in Israeli society (Tzafrir et al., 2007).

Israel has a legacy of a nation surrounded by enemies, which requires fighting against all its opponents in order to survive. One myth that helps in such endeavor and prevails from the Biblical times, throughout the life in the Diaspora, up to the establishment of the state of Israel and up to date, is being the few standing up against the many. A complementary theme, typically coupled with ‘the few against the many’ is that of being ‘the chosen people’. Again, deeply rooted in the Bible, this theme is concerned with determination and pride, serving as self-fulfilling prophecy in many struggles along the Jewish and Israeli history.

The aim of this chapter is to present research and literature on both historical and empirical findings about leadership style and myth in Israel. Myths refer to people’s sacred stories about origins, deities, ancestors and heroes. Within a culture, myths serve as the divine charter, and myth and ritual are inextricably bounded (Schwartz, 2004: xliv). Myth does not need to be empirical history but a story that makes something psyche in our souls (Gabriel, 1991). Myths compel respect, not necessarily because they are true, but because they are needed. A myth that has survived has met legitimate needs in time and place. It reflects the way a particular individual or group of individ-
uals attempts to establish a distinct identity, and often is vital in laying the basis for a societal self-perception (Schmidt, 2004). The unique integration of historical and empirical facts illuminates the origin of Jewish/Israeli leadership style, and its present and future directions in Israel. In our analysis, we first highlight the relationship between myth and Judaism. We than present famous myths and discuss how these myths build and develop a comprehensive pattern of Israeli leadership across history. We further explicate how dominant cultural values are extrapolated from them. Next, we discuss how leaders have led in the past in order to understand the leadership myth while trying to explore what is going to happen next in the Israeli leadership arena. Finally, we examine how we can utilize these insights in working relationships with leaders from Israel. Our analysis is at both national and individual level, and is based on circumstantial evidence and logical argument.

OVERVIEW OF MYTH AND JUDAISM

Myth is not a simple, clear-cut concept, but a complex phenomenon that can be explained differently from various perspectives. Myths are meant to create attitudes, stir emotions, and help construct particular social realities conducive to the purposes of those transmitting the myth (Ben-Yehuda, 1995). Myths constitute very central motivating forces in a variety of domains such as politics, economy, religion and education (Hegy, 1991). Heyne and Herder became interested in local customs and legends, and found myths to be an expression of the intuitive and traditional knowledge of national and local particularities – in short, of the people’s soul (see Weik, 2001, 13). Thus, understanding the perceived myth from any country should not ignore its background, in this case, the fact that Israel is a society populated by a majority group, namely Hebrew-speaking Jews (76 per cent of the population). Encyclopedia Judaica (Berenbaum and Kolnik, 2007) helps us to connect myth and Judaism by providing a specific definition for myth: A myth is “a story about the universe that is considered sacred. Such a story deals with the great moments of a person’s life: birth, initiation, and death, referring them to events that took place in mythical times in ‘mythical times’ ”. They added that myths are often recited during a dramatic representation of the event they narrate, and conclude that ‘Through the ritual, man becomes contemporary with the mythical event and participates in the God’s creative actions’ (p. 710). Let us explore the roots and development of the local mythology in Israel, and how it builds on the past.

The most profound ‘mythology’ underpinning Israeli culture is the Bible (the Old Testament). The Bible not only serves as the basis to the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), but also as the basic way of
education, values and culture for most Israelis. The Bible encompasses a wide range of stories, relating to both general human values and the unique case of creation of a national, religion-based identity, under the strong leadership of several key figures. Further, Israel develops by using its relative advantage in a range of areas such as military to high-tech by shifting the knowledge from one to another. Thus, we focus in this section on myths that shape the local mythology in social, political, military and economical issues.

Just when the Biblical stories move from the general story of the creation to the roots of Judaism, one of the first strong narratives is that of Abraham and his argument with the Lord. This case represents the vital principles of distributive and procedural justice. Realizing that God almighty might be making an unfair decision (destroying Sodom and Gomorrah), Abraham starts arguing with God, requesting justice (under the principle of not destroying good people together with the evil ones), and haggling with God, until gaining a promise that God will alter his plan if there are ten righteous people living in Sodom and Gomorrah. Here we witness the value of justice, so strong that it allows a mortal human being to challenge God to give them a hearing before deciding. A bit of Chutzpa (and it is quite revealing that the word Chutzpa does not exist as an English word) and determination, coupled with strong negotiation skills.

While the Abraham story is about individual values, Moses represents the archetypical leader. He sets a vision, provides individual example, takes risks, represents his people against Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler, and leads his people into a dangerous journey to the Promised Land. Moses knows how to delegate (for example fighting is done under the guidance of professional fighters while he provides the moral and supports the morale), ready to learn from consultants (for example when Jethro advises him how to create a hierarchical managerial structure), and prepare the next generation of leadership to follow him. Moving ahead, King David represents a different leadership style, more political, interwoven with internal struggles and battles against external enemies. Also, King David is the combination of a warrior, poet, ruler, unifying the nation and making it a significant regional power. Yet, his personal values manifest mixed morality. Moreover, King David’s son, Solomon, is well established in the narratives of wisdom and Jewish genius. The story about King Solomon’s trial (the dispute over the baby, which he suggests to cut in two, and this way reveals the true mother) offers deep understanding of human psychology and manifests both wisdom and justice. To end the biblical mythology, one needs to note the lack of gender balance. Very few women heroines appear, as was typical in those days. Debora the prophet is an exception to the rule, where she is the leader figure admired by the people, and only with her blessing is the military leadership ready to charge for the battle (which is won, by the help of another female, Yael). The absence of female
leadership is manifested in many other areas; even though Israel was one of the first nations to elect a female political leader (Golda Meir), she was not a female-type person (Ben Gurion is alleged to have said that ‘she is the only man in the cabinet’).

Justice, wisdom, and other humans’ knowledge, ability and benevolence are one part of the equation. The other part is the belief in God. Thus, the internal and external trust served as a unique source of power for Judaism. This can be learned, for example, in the ten plagues afflicted by God himself as well as many other interventions by God and his messengers. Nevertheless, there is no reference in the Bible of faith such as the Christian or Islamic sense of the term. That is not to say that faith does not exist – but rather implicitly as a confidence in God. In Judaism the primary emphasis is not on profession of faith but on conduct. According to Yehudah Halevi, a medieval Jewish philosopher, belief applies only to things known by means of authority, and God possesses all knowledge and understanding. Accordingly, belief is an acceptance of the doctrines of Scripture based on authority. Maimonides, on the other hand, maintains that belief applies only to things known by way of demonstration. Belief is more than verbal acceptance; it requires understanding and a rational basis. While in medieval philosophy the description of faith formed an integral part of the theory of knowledge, the rise of modern science and the concomitant decline of belief in the divine revelation of Scriptures have made faith a matter of trust in God rather than of the affirmation of certain propositions. Martin Buber and Abraham Heschel see faith as a relationship of trust between man and God, which arises from, and manifests itself, in personal encounters between man and God, and man and man, which Buber calls the I-Thou relationships. Another tendency among modern philosophers, which reflects the influence of psychology, is to view belief as a psychological state which is valuable insofar as it motivates man to act in an ethical manner (Berenbaum and Kolnik, 2007). Thus, trust and confidence could help us to understand many other narratives in Jewish history.

The Masada mythical narratives for legacy of freedom as well as stand of a few against the many, ready to pay the ultimate cost to avoid betrayal of their religion and slavery, have served as very important functions for the Zionists as well as for military purposes. Along the same line are the freedom fights of the Maccabees (Hebrew Makabim), a national liberation movement in the second century BC that fought for and won independence from the Hellenistic Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and later, the military uprising of Bar-Cochva, against the Roman army, that have led to the exile to the Diaspora. A different manifestation of bravery coupled with trust in God is in the story of Daniel and the lions’ den.

The symbol of Jewish heroism was constructed, delivered, and believed as an authentic emphasized proud Jews fighting for their liberty and land and
helped to create and maintain a 2000-year-old link alive. This narrative carried the legacy through the Warsaw Ghetto rebellion against the Nazis, into the underground movements during the Turkish, and then the British rule in Palestine of the first half of the twentieth century, the Israeli army, and later on, into Israeli schools and youth movements. Individuals drew their strength to stand up to some real and utterly horrendous historical challenges from this myth. However, during the late 1970s much of the myth was already dissipating (Ben-Yehuda, 1995). The possible reasons for this vary, but one major reason is the ‘wake-up call’ of the Yom Kippur war, where initially the Israeli army was caught by surprise and suffered significant casualties. This was coupled with a significant disillusionment with the political system (leading later to political upheaval in 1977).

Yosef Trumpeldor is known as the Tel-Hay hero and a symbol of self-sacrifice for the country. He established the He-Halutz movement in Russia, whose aim was to organize and prepare young Jews for settlement in Eretz Israel. Trumpeldor was asked to organize the defense of the settlements, and reached Tel-Hay. Soon after (early in 1920), the settlement was attacked by a large number of armed Arabs. During negotiations with their leaders, an exchange of fire took place in which Trumpeldor received a fatal stomach wound (Berenbaum and Kolnik, 2007). Toward evening, Trumpeldor was evacuated, but died on the way. His last words were, ‘Ein davar, tov lamut be’ad arzenu’ (‘Never mind; it is good to die for our country’). The life and death of Trumpeldor became a symbol to pioneer youths and military service as a leader ready to fulfill himself what he was asking from others (Laskov, 1982).

Ghetto revolts and other armed Jewish resistance during the Holocaust are among the formative elements of Israeli Holocaust collective memory and Israeli national identity. The armed Jewish resistances play a central role in making the resistance an important element of Israeli identity. Their fighting in the spirit of Massada has been integrated into the narrative of national heroics (Cohen, 2003). This special case of fighting during the Holocaust strengthens the myth of the stand of a few against the many when life hangs by a thread in order to cope with massively pressuring circumstances.

Another legacy building on medieval myth is the Jewish as learners, wise and bright. While many nations built their wealth on agriculture and heroic legends on fighting (for example the knights stories), the Jewish were typically forbidden from owning land, thus wealth creation was typically in finance and banking, whereas the heroes were the Torah rabbinical students. The myth of the ‘Jewish genius’ as a problem solver shapes the high-tech industry by building, developing and investing major effort in entrepreneurship of start-ups in pharmaceutical, bio-tech, electronics and so on in the high-tech sector. These start-up products have attracted new global investors such as IBM, Intel, HP.
and Motorola, which have made significant investments in the Israeli economy (Tzafrir and Eitam-Meilik, 2005). Over the last three decades, Israel’s home-grown high-tech market has expanded dramatically (Yeheskel et al., 2001; Zilber, 2007). These leaders represent the culture of initiation, entrepreneurship, high ambition, great talent and improvisation ability, characteristics of Israeli management (Baruch, 2001). We elaborate on these elements later in the economical and industrial leadership section.

OVERVIEW OF ISRAELI LEADERSHIP

Archetypical Leader may emerge from many different arenas. Clearly one cannot cover the full range of such arenas and their unique consequences in a single chapter; however, the strength of our division to political, economical, and military limited to the independence period will well reflect on Israel building and development over recent decades. In Israel, which gained independence in 1948, history and mythological leaders played a significant role in the struggles for independence, and in the fight of existence ever since. In later years, the feelings of independence and strength as well as the moving towards individualistic values (versus collectivist ones) led to that self-reflection often associated with abandonment of several myths. Much of this followed ‘wake-up calls’ succeeding major events, mostly wars (like the euphoria after the Six Days war, or the crisis following the Yom Kippur war, and the mourning of Rabin’s assassination).

Political Leadership

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 strengthened the dominance of political elites in the elite structure. The dominance of political power arose from five main sociopolitical factors: the political elites’ control of state resources (political, material, and symbolic); the importance of the Arab-Israeli conflict; immigration absorption; the internal solidarity of the political elite, especially among the leaders of the leading party, Mapai; and, finally, the weakness of the other elites (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989). However, the establishment of the state, in addition, led to increasing differentiation of the various elites from the political elite, such as the new state-administrative elite (Maman, 1997).

Our mythical journey starts with one of the most representative of the generation of Israel’s founding fathers, David Ben-Gurion. Early biographies, written shortly after the establishment of the state, clearly identified Ben-Gurion with a myth (Keren, 2000). Ben-Gurion employed authoritarian leadership combined with certain democratic norms and values. For example, in
the 1950s, serving as its first Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Ben-Gurion led Israel’s state-building efforts, absorbing Jewish immigrants from the wide Diaspora, establishing a working democracy, and constructing a modern army as well as various enterprises. Ben-Gurion is also remembered for his attempts to establish a new mission, rejuvenating the desert. In 1953, as part of his call for young Jews to settle in the Negev desert, he moved his residence to ‘Sde-Boker’, a Kibbutz in the Negev (Keren, 2000).

Golda Meir was the first Israeli woman to take over the Prime Minister role and as such she served as an image of a strong equal opportunity myth (Lieblich and Friedman, 1985). Even though she was clear about the fact that she was neither a feminist nor sympathetic to the feminist movement, in biography after biography she is portrayed as an ideal woman, not only as ‘the uncrowned queen of Israel’ but also as ‘Israel’s intrepid grandmother’, a successful politician who also possessed the essence of motherly ‘warmth and wisdom’. Meir was a shining example for other women not only in exemplifying how to fulfill their potential but also of their ambivalent feelings. Accordingly, Meir did not fit into the feminist myth, but to a myth of motherly/grandmotherly figure. Despite her major contributions to the founding and building of the state of Israel, after the Yom Kippur War in 1973 she was afraid that she would be remembered for this one thing only (Schmidt, 2004) and as criticism directed at Minister of Defense Dayan and her continued, Meir decided to resign (Diermeier and Roozendaal, 1998).

Menachem Begin had a heroic view of leadership. He was a gallant, authoritarian, and at the same time kind, honorable and decent gentleman (Hurwitz, 1994). Begin’s character as a leader was shaped, above all, in the relationship developed with the masses. Throughout his long political career, he displayed a brilliant ability to control his followers. Begin’s most conspicuous leadership quality was his orator’s skill. He brought the use of rhetoric for political ends to a great height (Sofer, 1988). It was not only his oratorical skills that made the impression, but the content of his speeches, his statements and the logic of his argumentation (Hurwitz, 1994). Begin accepted the notion that Judaic religion and nationality are inseparable (Sofer, 1988), in line with the Israeli declaration of independence. He viewed the modern state as the continuation of the long saga of an ancient people and stressed this fact in his speeches and articles (Hurwitz, 1994). He was closed to the view that the establishment of the state and the liberation of the homeland, after the Holocaust, marked the beginning of Messianic redemption. From that point of view, Begin objected Ben-Gurion’s dictum that Israel is merely a state of law (Sofer, 1988).

Yitzhak Rabin’s case manifests the Israeli political and military in terms of myth and leadership. Following a long army career, starting in the Palmach, the pre-state commando forces, he served Israel as the Chief of Staff during
the Six Days war and was elected twice as the prime minister. The tragedy of Rabin’s assassination is of unique importance to the Israeli collective memory. In shaping collective identity, collective memory builds on dramatic events to serve as symbolic milestones in the collective history. The Rabin myth that developed following the assassination is highly significant in that it forms part of the nation-constitutive myth. The media promoted the political ritual surrounding Rabin, building the myth of the man who became a symbol in his death. The media used elements of Rabin’s biography to shape a collective memory in order to construct a collective identity for Israeli society. ‘He was us,’ wrote Yonatan Geffen (Ma’ariv, 6 November, 1995).

Although the assassination took place nearly 50 years after the establishment of the state in 1948, it is related to the ‘battle for peace’. The fact that in November 1995 Israelis were still dealing with the story of the 1948 War of Independence was expressed in the description of Rabin’s death. His death was portrayed not as a passive act of weakness, but as an act of heroic sacrifice and supreme courage – the fall of a soldier on the battlefield. The death of Rabin turned him into a ‘peacemaker’, the symbol of Israeli society’s longing for peace (Peri, 1999). This myth serves as a basis for the invented tradition (Hobsbaum and Ranger, 1983) on which the imagined political community is built (Anderson, 1987; Bhabha, 1990). This myth is fostered by various ‘state cults’ and provides them with legitimacy (Azaryahu, 1995: 8–10). The battle that Rabin was fighting was widely described as ‘the battle for peace’ that would bring the War of Independence to an end. Rabin called himself ‘a soldier of peace’ (Peri, 1996), and that was how King Hussein eulogized him at the funeral: ‘Yitzhak Rabin lived as a soldier and died as a soldier for peace’ (‘The Speech of King Hussein,’ Ha’aretz, 1995: A4). This image continued to follow him in the collective memory. Peri (1999) described that the most dramatic expression of the attempt to make Rabin a mythical, larger-than-life hero was the reference to him as someone still living in the world above, appealing to him directly to act from there. Signs of deification were evident in sentences such as, ‘Guard me from above, because I’m afraid now’, which appeared on stickers, graffiti and posters, and in songs, such as one that said, ‘Be strong up there’, and in a poster relating to him in words taken from a prayer addressed to God, ‘He who makes peace in the heights’.

**Economical and Industrial Leadership**

The separate formation of the economic elite from the political elite originated with changes in the political and economical structure. It was not surprising then that socialism was the leading socio-economic ideology during the first decades of Israel’s existence. This helped to generate a strong sense of cohesion in the country and enabled it to cope with enormous difficulties such as
security and the heterogeneity of its population. Tzafrir et al. (2007) summarized that global and political changes (the loss of the hegemony of the ruling Labour Party in 1977) were the driving forces behind shifting ideology from the social model to the capitalist one. Since the early 1990s Israel’s core economy has been composed largely of high-tech companies (including pharmaceutical), alongside more traditional markets like textiles and agriculture with extensive investment in high technology. Reflecting on the above, we will draw one organizational example and discuss several individual leaders.

The Israeli hostile environment raising defensive needs and the Jewish genius create an outstanding defense industry. The creativity and new products development (high-tech in nature) resulting in a huge success in the battle fields gave the defense industry a special status in Israel. Rafael is a fine example of a legendary organization, nationally owned, with roots set up before the establishment of the state. Rafael with its expertise gained extensive experience in design, development, and production of weapon systems in several arenas such as Satellite Propulsion Systems and Air-to-Air Missiles. Rafael’s core employees comprising scientists, engineers, and experienced employees have managed to be at the cutting edge of high-tech and develop most progressed systems under professional leadership at all levels in the organization.

The defense industry symbolizes one part of this phenomenon while military leadership represents the other part. The military elite represents one of the most powerful elites in Israel and established its power from several sources. First, the significant meaning of the Arab-Israeli and Israel-Palestine conflicts. Second, the military elite’s relative autonomy, the extension of IDF and defense system functions to many civil areas, the IDF’s organizational growth following the 1973 Yom Kippur war and, above all, the centrality of security issues in the Israeli experience (Grinberg, 1991; Kimmerling, 1993). Last but not least is the significant proportions of high-ranking officers’ contacts with people in other elite groups who were once themselves part of the military elite (Maman, 1997). There are many examples for the diffusion from the military arena to national politics (Dayan, Rabin, Sharon, to mention a few), local (Mitzna, Holadaï, and others) as well as to the business one (for example, Peri, Ben-Noon). The shift from military leadership to civilian and the importance of these leaders to daily life in Israel is an example per se for how strong and relevant is the role of military leadership in Israel.

**Business Leadership**

Examples of specific individual leadership in the industry will be manifested
by the cases of Horvitz, Wertheimer, Lautman and Shwed: Eli Horvitz is an example of a leader with a great business vision. He led Teva, a pharmaceutical company, from a modest organization to a significant MNC in the global market. Constant entrepreneur, he expanded the company through mergers and acquisitions, keeping public activities (including chairing the Israeli Confederation of Business and Industry) alongside his industrial leadership (Sasover, 2001; www.education.gov.il/pras-israel). Like Horowitz, Stef Wertheimer started his career in the military – in the pre-Israel commando, and moved to the industry. Following his vision, he established Iscar, which has now become one of the two leading global firms in production of metal cutting tools and techniques for machining. Its innovative products, home-designed, have made Iscar a world leader in manufacturing industries such as automotive, aerospace and die and mold production (www.education.gov.il/pras-israel). Similarly, Lautman moved to the business world after a successful short military career, and became a global entrepreneur in the textile business. Later he became involved in public services in roles such as chair of the Israeli Confederation of Business and Industry and an ambassador for peace and progress of Israel’s industry. People like Stef Wertheimer and Dov Lautman not only declare a business vision but integrate their vision into the Zionist vision to contribute to the economical flourishing of Israel.

Gil Shwed represents the younger generation of entrepreneurs starting-up and leading high-tech, IT companies. He is the founder, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Check Point Software Technologies Ltd, the leader in internet security. In 1993, Shwed invented and patented Stateful Inspection, now a de facto standard technology. Together with two co-founders, he wrote the first version of FireWall-1, the company’s flagship software solution that became the world’s first commercially available firewall product in 1994. During the following years, he led Check Point to be a leader in both firewall and VPN (virtual private networks) markets. Check Point redefined the internet security landscape, a multi-billion dollar industry, under Shwed’s leadership. The company has operations around the world, and its intelligent security solutions secure hundreds of thousands of customers, including 100 percent of Fortune 100 (Asis, www.nrg.co.il, 2000; www.checkpoint.com/corporate/gilshwed). Shwed and Check Point are not an isolated example. Mirabilis, another Israeli firm, that invented the internet ICQ search engine, was bought by AOL for over $400M in the late 1990s.
COMMENTARY BOX

Commander of the Israeli Air Force

When asked about leadership, Major General Eliezer Shkedy said that it is essential to say what you think, no matter what your rank is. This is a sign for openness to critical thinking, and organizational democracy. Young pilots will operate as leaders to those senior to them on certain activities and will learn to be the future leaders.

CEO of NICE Systems

The leader as a source of inspiration came also from the business sector. Mr Haim Shani indicated that their challenge is to identify uprising leaders that can take others with them with their initiative and passion.

Chairman of Macabi Tel Aviv Basketball Team

This sentiment fits well with recent writing on leadership, whereas other accepted leadership qualities are appreciated. For example, the Chairman of Macabi Tel Aviv basketball team, former Europe champion, talked about the leader as one who is ready to take risks and responsibility, using the example of who will take the critical shot in the last seconds of a basketball game.

CEO of Fisher Pharmaceuticals

Dr Fisher praised the ability of Israelis to be entrepreneurs, but at the same time to collaborate with down-to-earth managers in order to take the great ideas and enable them to materialize.

Expert Consultant for Political Leadership

Moving to the political arena, Prof Yechezkel Dror is more skeptical about the effectiveness of the governance in the Israeli political system. He argued that it is much harder to develop and establish political leadership in the complex political environment of post-1967 Israel. Yet Israel benefited from leaders who had the bravery, self assurance, and zeal, as manifested in former Prime Ministers on both sides of the political map – for example, Rabin and Sharon.
GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

Stepping into the twenty-first century, Israel has to cope with globalization, a volatile and dynamic high technology-dominated environment, diffusion of a new generation, and a hostile environment. These require an advanced leadership to keep the cohesion of the people in order to deal with new emerging problems. Harel and Tzafrir (1999) mentioned that Israel provides a convenient laboratory for researchers and practitioners in as much as it is a ‘Maduradam’ (microcosm) for leadership in small countries that based their market position on their human capital. Therefore, many small countries who wish to gain economic development could learn and benefit from the analysis of the case of Israel as a departure point for their growth.

Since the beginning of Jewish history and Abraham, as the first Jewish leader, the Jewish and Israeli leadership have shared several characteristics in common: (a) the myth of ‘a few against many’ helps to unify the group into achieving common goals and missions; (b) using human capital as a source for competitive advantage is strengthened via the myth of the ‘Jewish genius’; (c) the myth of the ‘pioneer’ leading the way to entrepreneurship with great vision in various domains; and (d) ‘justice’ as a guiding principle helps to create a collectivist environment and to cope with constraints. These principles, coupled with incredible trust in God, moral and legal rights, and competence, have guided many Israeli leaders since the beginning of its history.

Each of the above four myths is manifested by and drives Israeli leaders to behave in creating a unique national culture. These myths help leaders to lead and transform the ideas of a democratic Jewish state into a reality. For example, the myth of ‘a few against many’ has encouraged both political and military leaders to unite the nation in the face of attacks and possible collapse. Such were David Ben-Gurion’s decisions on the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 despite the overwhelming presence of enemies, and Yitzhak Rabin, as Israeli military Chief of Staff, in the Six Days war leading an exceptional winning campaign against many countries served as the basis for the wide international agreement for Israeli borders. Second, the high-tech industry is an exceptional example manifesting the myth of ‘Jewish genius’ as a reality. Israel is one of the global leaders in the high-tech industry because of both internal and external phenomena. The external phenomena via an increasing investment of multinational firms in building and maintaining research and development laboratories. The internal one synthesizes national firms that have reached a significant export success with different products (such as the defense industry) as well as national firms which become a multinational organization – Teva for example (Yeheskel et al., 2001). The integration of the myths of the ‘Jewish genius’ with the myth of the ‘pioneer’, plays a major role for business leaders’ success. The examples presented of Horvitz, Wertheimer,
Lautman and Shwed paved the way for business pioneers and many translated their dreams into reality, trusting the Israeli’s human capital in establishment and development of their companies. Finally, the state of Israel, according to the myth of ‘justice’ states, offers equal rights for all its citizens. This terminology of justice is also serving the Israeli Supreme Court to protect equal rights for minorities.

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

What can people from different nations learn in order to better understand how the Israeli mythology works, and engage effectively with Israeli leaders? The answer varies across issues. Political leaders are caught in between the needs to be strong, in particular military-wise because of the continuous threats that have accompanied Israel and its people for over a century, and do not seem to fade away. While in any country, economy, culture, external and internal issues are very important, in Israel, life depends at the outset on security issues. The very existence of Israel as a nation requires constant struggle, and thus, security is crucial for day-to-day living. A person who deals with Israeli leaders must understand this and take it into account when negotiating, because political leaders are well aware that this is existential and as a result, serves as a crucial measure for their evaluation in the future.

There is a clear need to prompt and progress creativity and innovation with great confidence in abilities, knowledge, and competence in facilitating new ideas into reality. Israeli businessmen are happy to be entrepreneurs, take risks, and exploit inventions and their human capital (Avrahami and Lerner, 2003). Their leaders capitalize on these qualities, as can be seen from how the MBA flourished in Israel, in line with western norms and practice (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000). Nevertheless, one must acknowledge the fact that a shift from collectivist to individualist society has recently emerged. There is a clear change, where Americanization has taken over, and money speaks, so doing a business requires more than just a dream. Finally, global companies which recruit and/or work with Israeli employees have to understand and utilize the direct attitude of their local employees and managers.

Trying to aggregate Israeli leadership style is easier said than done. Taking the entire context of this chapter, one could ask how the past and the present history will shape leadership behavior for the future. In this chapter we discussed several characteristics for driving Israeli leadership that exemplify the attitudes and actions in a political and business context. There are, of course, many other possible causes of behavioral outcomes in addition to these, personality traits for example, but they are beyond the scope of this chapter. Turning back to our point of departure helps us to summarize the
possible weaknesses as well as strengths of Israeli leadership style. The combination of some myths, such as ‘pioneer’ and ‘Jewish genius’ with trust and confidence in their knowledge, skills, and abilities, convinced the Israeli leadership to initiate and to encourage entrepreneurship. Specifically, many Israelis establishing start-up companies that are building on inspiring ideas and dreams have based their progress on informal relationships. This is in line with Hofstede’s study (1980), where Israeli culture has a very low power distance. Thus, on the one hand investors in Israeli high-tech firms need to check the balance between organizational life stage and the human resource management formal system. This recommendation is one step ahead from Krau (1993) who believed that the need for achievement explains the lack of planning among Israeli managers: they do not plan – they improvise. On the other hand, firms need to pay attention to the difference between the stage of creating knowledge and the stage of knowledge utilization.

Concerning the above, investors as well as other people doing business with Israeli business people should realize that they will not get into a dead-end road. The fighting spirit based on the combination of ‘a few against many’ and the Jewish genius helps to encourage creative ideas until the last minute. Nevertheless, this attitude and behavior could bias rational decision making, reinforcing the illusion that we can always win and survive even under awful circumstances, for example, neglecting the economic idea of sunk cost. Last but not least, Tzafrir et al. (2007) argued that in the earlier days of Israel it had a clear collectivist culture, but the shift towards individualistic society is stronger now than ever, and is reflected also in business behavior. Thus, managers look for individual success and use the organization as a vehicle to achieve it which could impact the level of team work. However, team work still exists, representing one of the major strengths of Israeli industry. Thus, this change is performing in accordance with the myth of justice, proving that myths do survive in day-by-day reality.

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