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## **Current Judaism, Religiosity, and the Meaning of Work in Israel**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the effect of religiosity on the meaning of work for Jews in contemporary Israel. In 2006 the Meaning of Work study used a sample of 1175 Jews who were participating in the Israeli labor market. The findings reveal that religiosity affected all six dimensions of the meaning of work. Secular Jews had higher intrinsic and economic orientation and higher work centrality than traditionalists Jews and especially higher than religious Jews. Moreover, religiosity correlated positively to interpersonal relations and obligation and entitlement norms. The findings and their meaning in the unique Israeli reality are discussed in the paper.

### **Introduction**

Work plays a fundamental role in an individual's life, and work values have notable social and economic consequences in organizations and society. Similar to work values, religious values have an impact on an individual's perceptions and attitudes and on society. In various nations religion is a pivotal institution of culture; consciously or unconsciously, religious beliefs and practices affect individual attitudes about important facets of life (Harpaz 1998). Work centrality and its derived values, beyond the personal aspect, greatly affect a state's economic growth. Weber, in his seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, showed that Protestant theology, particularly in its Calvinist/Puritan forms, created an ethic that perceived work as a virtue and laziness as a sin that causes failure in life. Protestant Reformers like Luther and Wesley preached that working hard, excelling at work, even in menial jobs, and saving for the future, were the believer's mission to God and paved

the road to redemption. The latter, according to Weber, was the cause of the rise of capitalism and the success of individuals and societies that internalized this ethic. This idea of success depended not only on social conditions, but also on the internalization of fundamental religious ideals and values.

Protestantism (Weber) and Judaism (Harpaz 1998) view work as the highest form of worshipping God and request their followers to behave accordingly, namely work hard, be frugal, etc., as a manifestation of faith. Parboteeah, Hoegl, and Cullen claim that since the essence of the Protestant work ethic is likely to be present in other religions, it is important to examine the effect of cognitive, normative, and regulative elements of national/social religious contexts and relate them to individuals' work values. The cognitive aspect refers to the personal or private religious beliefs that reflect the existence of the divine (e.g., belief that God exists, belief in heaven or hell). The normative aspect is typically manifested through religious practice (e.g., participation in church/mosque/synagogue activities, praying in private). The regulative component aspect is related to the existence of a state religion (a country's religious institutional environment). It is interesting to study how religious groups internalize, translate, and implement their religious beliefs into their work values. The present study attempts to explore the relationship between religiosity and the meaning of work among Jews. In the examination of this relationship, we assume that individuals' religiosity will be related to their work values.

#### *The Israeli Context*

The state of Israel was founded by Jews in 1948 and the dominant culture is Jewish and secular, with a western orientation. The Jewish society in Israel has undergone a gradual change in values, similar to that of the Western world, moving from a collectivist society in its early years to an individualist society. These global processes have left their mark on Israel and can be seen in the rapid change that has occurred since the late 1970s. Today, Jewish society places great emphasis on the different dimensions of individualism, cultivating personal independence, and autonomy, while granting a high degree of social permissiveness (Sharabi). As part of an Americanization process, Jewish-Israeli culture has become more and more materialistic, emphasizing instrumental achievements (Sharabi; Sharabi and Harpaz 2007, 2011a).

#### **Relationship between the Meaning of Work and Religiosity in Israel**

Six variables were found to define operationally the meaning of work. These are: work centrality, intrinsic orientation, economic orientation, interpersonal relations, entitlement norms, and obligation norms (for the empirical process leading to the extraction of these six variables, see Harpaz 1998). I present findings pertaining to these six variables and their association with level of religiosity, and formulate relevant hypotheses based on the few available studies on the relationship between the meaning of work and religiosity among Jews.

#### *Work Centrality*

Work centrality refers to the degree of general importance that work has in the life of an individual at all times (MOW; Sharabi and Harpaz 2007). Early Jewish thinkers considered the meaning of work, the nature of work, and the contribution of work to society and to the

lives of its members (Harpaz 1998). The Talmud says, “He who does not teach his son a craft teaches him brigandage” (Kiddushin 29a). Judaism, like Protestantism, attributed dignity to human labor; no one, regardless of one’s social position, was to consider oneself above working people, as Rabbi Shemayah said, “Love work, hate lordship” (Avot 1:10). Besides the Judeo-Protestant work ethic, articulated by “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Exodus, 20:9), there is also a contrasting view: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it” (Joshua, 1:8). Namely, the only right kind of work is worshipping God. There is a compromise between these two approaches, suggesting an integration of work and the studying the scriptures. “If there is no flour (sustenance), there is no Torah (Bible studying); if there is no Torah, there is no flour” (Avot 3:21). This ambiguity between work and religious observance is reflected in the studies among Jews.

The studies conducted in modern Israel on the relation between religiosity and work-related attitudes reveal a consistent pattern. Studies that were conducted in the 1970s found no differences between religiosity and work centrality (Levy and Guttman 1981, 1985). Levy and Guttman (1985) found a positive correlation between the importance of hard work and the belief in God among Swiss employees, while among Israeli Jews they found no correlation. Several studies conducted in the 1980s found lower commitment to work among the more religious than among their less religious counterparts (Shamir; Harpaz 1990). Harpaz (1998) found that in Germany and the Netherlands individuals with higher religious conviction had higher work centrality than those with no religious conviction; in Israel the findings were the opposite. Snir and Harpaz found that religious conviction and religious education were negatively related to work centrality among Israeli Jews in the 1980s and the 1990s. Based on the above findings, the first hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Among Israeli Jews, higher religiosity correlates to lower work centrality.

#### *Intrinsic and Economic Orientation*

Few studies focus specifically on the relationship between intrinsic and economic work values and religiosity. Weller and Tavori found that Israeli religious nursing students express stronger intrinsic orientation to their work than their non-religious counterparts. Huisman and Schwartz showed that religiosity was tied to certain motivational types of values among Israeli Jews, Dutch Catholics, and Protestants. Religiosity among Jews was positively linked to traditional motivation and negatively linked to hedonism motivation. Another study found that Israeli Jews with higher religious observance had lower intrinsic orientation than those with no religious conviction, while in Germany and the Netherlands the findings were the opposite (Harpaz 1998).

In Jewish religious books there is no focus on economic values. Work is an important means for fulfilling economic needs, but correspondingly the individual has to fulfill spiritual needs, as written in the Bible, “man does not live by bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3). There are very few studies that examine the relationship between religious observance and economic orientation (pay, income, money, materialism). A study that investigates the importance of income among adult Israeli Jews found no correlation between religiosity and income (Levy). Findings from Germany and the Netherlands reveal that individuals with

high religious conviction had a lower economic orientation than individuals with no religious belief, while in Israel no differences were found among Jews (Harpaz 1998).

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between secular, traditionalist, and religious Jews regarding intrinsic and economic orientation.

#### *Interpersonal Relations Orientation*

People's differing needs for establishing and maintaining human companionship through interpersonal relations in the work place are important when the work requires group efforts, as opposed to individual performance. In a study among Israeli Jews, religious respondents exhibited a more positive inclination toward interpersonal values than did non-religious respondents (Levy and Guttman 1981). Interpersonal values play a central role in Judaism, and that explains why students at schools that emphasize Bible studies tend to stress values associated with social orientation (Dor and Maslovaty 1993). In contrast to the above findings, no differences were found in Germany, Israel, and the Netherlands between secular and religious individuals concerning interpersonal relations (Harpaz 1998). Since religious people tend to gather together for religious and community activities, they are more oriented to interpersonal relationships, intimacy, and a sense of belonging (Dor and Maslovaty). According to the above, I propose:

Hypothesis 3: The more religious Jews are, the more they will emphasize interpersonal relationships.

#### *Societal Norms: Obligations versus Entitlements*

These are a set of normative statements about what one should expect from work and working (opportunities or *entitlements*), and what one should expect to contribute through working (*obligations*) (see MOW). Jewish culture has a dual structure of norms and values related to rights and duties (Tzafrir, Gur and Kirschenbaum; Harpaz 1998). According to the first set, called *obligation norms*, individuals are expected to contribute to their organizations through increased efforts, conformity to organization goals, hard work, and improved productivity (MOW). Assuming that these norms come from cultural and religious frameworks, we may inquire whether they are related to religious predispositions. Studies on the Protestant work ethic are specifically relevant to the obligation norms. This ethic imposes on individuals a moral and religious obligation to work hard (Weber). In Germany and the Netherlands, individuals with high religious conviction showed a higher agreement with the obligation norms than individuals with no religious conviction; among Israeli Jews no differences were found between these two groups (Harpaz 1998).

The second set of norms is associated with individual rights and needs, which people are entitled to receive from organizations and society. These may include meaningful and dignified work, individual development, and opportunities for achievement and accomplishment. The Meaning of Work study termed this type of norm set as *entitlement norms*. One study of young women in Israel found a negative relationship between religiosity and entitlement norms (Gombo and Schwartz). Another study found no affect of religious conviction on entitlement norms in Germany and Israel, and in the Netherlands individuals with high religious conviction showed lower agreement with entitlement norms than individuals with low religious conviction (Harpaz 1998). Based on a review of the studies

regarding religiosity and obligation and entitlement norms, the final hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 4: There are no differences among respondents of varying degrees of religiosity in regard to entitlement and obligation norms.

The latest studies on the meaning of work and on the relationship between religiosity and the meaning of work in Israel were based on data from 1993 (Snir and Harpaz). Since then, Israeli society has experienced social, economic, and political changes. This paper tries to fill the time gap and the absence of recent studies in order to make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature.

## Method

### *The Sample*

Data for the present study were collected in 2006 via the Meaning-of-Working questionnaire, developed by the MOW-International research team. Respondents were selected randomly and interviews were conducted at the respondents' homes by trained interviewers. The average interview lasted 25 minutes. The study surveyed 1175 Jews who were participating in the labor market. The mean age was 39.9; 51.3% were men and 48.7% were women. 5.1% had primary school education, 30.6% had secondary school education, 33.7% had some college or vocational-technical education, and 30.6% had university degrees. 66.1% were secular, 27.7% semi-religious, and 6.2% religious.

### *Measurement of the Meaning of Work*

The scores of the 39 questions measuring the six meaning of work dimensions described above were subjected to a principal component factor analysis. Factors with Eigen values exceeding 1.0 were rotated to simple structure by the Varimax procedure. Factor loadings with an absolute value greater than or equal to .40 were used to define and interpret the factors (see MOW; Harpaz 1998). The analysis resulted in six major work-related indices or domains that represent dimensions of the meaning of work. The domains, the variables composing them, and the modified scales are the following:

1. *Work centrality* – (a) absolute importance of work, (b) relative importance of work. The range of scores: 1-7.
2. *Intrinsic orientation* – (a) satisfying work, (b) variety, (c) interesting work, (d) job-abilities match. The range of scores: 1-6.
3. *Economic orientation* – (a) importance of pay, (b) role of money, (c) good pay. The range of scores: 1-6.
4. *Interpersonal relations* – (a) interesting contacts, (b) type of people, (c) good interpersonal relations. The range of scores: 1-6.
5. *Entitlement norms* – (a) retraining responsibility, (b) ask for suggestions, (c) meaningful work, (d) entitled to a job. The range of scores was 1-4.
6. *Obligation norms* – (a) contribution to society, (b) saving for the future, (c) value any work. The range of scores was 1-4.

Degree of Religiosity

Measuring religiosity can be controversial, and different professional scholars suggest different measures. Parboteeah, Hoegl, and Cullen suggest three religiosity elements: cognitive, normative, and regulative. The cognitive element refers to the personal or private religious beliefs that reflect the existence of the divine (e.g., belief that God exists, belief in heaven or hell). The normative element is typically manifested through religious practice (e.g., participation in church/mosque/synagogue activities, praying in private). The regulative component element is related to the existence of a state religion (a country's religious institutional environment).

In this study, respondents were asked "how do you define your degree of religiousness: (a) secular, (b) traditionalist, (c) religious?" Generally, traditional and religious Jews believe in God (cognitive). Typically, religious Jews pray and attend the synagogue on a daily basis (normative), and traditionalist Jews pray and attend the synagogue less frequently. Secular Jews generally do not attend synagogue at all or attend only on holy days (e.g., Yom-Kippur) or special events (e.g., Bar-mitzvah, wedding, mourning ceremony). Therefore, these categories reflect the respondents' degree of religious observance and how closely they associated with their religion.

Results

Table 1. Correlations of the Meaning of Work Indices and Religious Conviction

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Religiosity	1.40	.60	–					
2. Work centrality	4.05	.82	-.12**	–				
3. Intrinsic orientation	3.21	.67	-.12**	.11**	–			
4. Economic orientation	3.88	1.08	-.06	-.04	-.36**	–		
5. Interpersonal relations	2.91	.82	.06*	-.09**	-.24**	-.23**	–	
6. Entitlement norms	3.22	.45	.11**	-.05	-.03	-.05	.03	–
7. Obligation norms	3.09	.50	.14**	.06*	-.04	-.02	-.01	.27**

\*P < .05; \*\*P < .01

Data pertaining to the sample characteristics and correlations among domains are presented in Table 1. Religiosity was found to be correlated positively to interpersonal relations and obligation and entitlement norms and negatively to work centrality and intrinsic orientation. There were low positive correlations between work centrality and obligation norms, and between work centrality and intrinsic orientation. There was a relatively high positive correlation between obligation and entitlement norms. In addition, there were negative correlations between economic orientation, intrinsic orientation, and interpersonal relations and between interpersonal relations and work centrality.

Table 2 presents an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) comparison of each of the meaning of work domains related to each of the three religiosity degrees. A significant multivariate

difference was found for the meaning of work domains ( $F_{(5,1168)} = 30.73, p < .001$ ). This analysis leads to the following conclusions concerning the hypotheses. The first hypothesis about work centrality was supported. As expected, secular Jews had the highest work centrality, it decreased among traditionalist Jews, and it was the lowest among religious Jews ( $F = 9.03, p < .001$ , means: 4.12, 3.95 and 3.78 respectively). The assumption in the second hypothesis is that there will be no differences between secular, traditionalist, and religious respondents concerning intrinsic and economic orientation was refuted ( $F = 8.07, p < .001$  and  $F = 2.95, p < .05$  respectively). Religious Jews had the lowest intrinsic and economic orientation (means: 2.96 and 3.65 respectively), it increased among traditionalist Jews (means: 3.15 and 3.85 respectively), and it was the highest among religious Jews (means: 3.26 and 3.91 respectively). The third hypothesis regarding interpersonal relations was mostly supported. The importance of interpersonal relations was highest among religious Jews and lowest among secular Jews; the orientation of traditionalist Jews was similar to that of secular Jews ( $F = 4.98, p < .01$ , means: 3.21, 2.89 and 2.89 respectively). The fourth hypothesis was not supported. Findings revealed that religiosity was related to higher agreement with entitlement and obligation norms ( $F = 7.43, p < .001$  and  $F = 11.19, p < .001$  respectively). Secular Jews had the lowest agreement with entitlement and obligation norms (means: 3.19 and 3.05 respectively), it increased among traditionalist Jews (means: 3.27 and 3.15 respectively), and it was the highest among religious Jews (means: 3.34 and 3.28 respectively).

Table 2. ANOVA of Religious Conviction and Meaning of Work Indices for Jews

	Secular		Traditionalist		Religious		F
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Work centrality	4.12	.81	3.95	.81	3.78	.89	9.03***
Intrinsic orientation	3.26	.68	3.15	.65	2.96	.59	8.70***
Economic orientation	3.91	1.07	3.85	1.10	3.65	1.11	2.95*
Interpersonal relations	2.89	.82	2.89	.81	3.21	.83	4.98**
Entitlement norms	3.19	.45	3.27	.45	3.34	.32	7.43***
Obligation norms	3.05	.51	3.15	.47	3.28	.44	11.19***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Discussion

This study found substantial differences between secular, traditionalist, and religious Jews in Israel regarding work and its meanings, and it was found that degree of religiosity affected all six domains of the meaning of work. Religiosity seems to have a negative effect on how Jews view the centrality of their work. Secular Jews had higher work centrality than traditionalists, and especially higher than religious Jews. This unique phenomenon among Jews in Israel was found in several previous studies (Harpaz 1998; Levy and Guttman 1981, 1985; Snir and Harpaz). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, work held an important and central place in the Zionist ideology of the founders of modern secular Israel. The ideologists and founders, like A. D. Gordon, Haim Arlosoroff, and David Ben-Gurion,

tried to form a value system that laid the foundation of a new Israeli society that reflected both an altruistic perspective and an aspect of self-realization through work, emphasizing hard and heavy physical labor. Work became a major value in the individual's life (Sharabi and Harpaz 2011b), and was so central that its ideology was even preached as the "religion of work" (Harpaz 1998). This could explain why secular Jews attribute higher importance to intrinsic orientation than religious Jews do. Possibly, religious Jews fulfill most of their intrinsic needs by religious studies, whereas secular Jews might fulfill most of their intrinsic needs through work. The negative relationship between religiosity and the centrality of work might be explained by the fact that religious Jews may view work as less important than their practice of religion and might even perceive it as interfering with it.

Harpaz (1998) indicated that since early times there was ambiguity among religious Jews about the relationship between work and religious studies in daily life. One religious approach focused on work as a source of one's identity and status if religious studying did not interfere with work (that approach was adopted by the traditionalists), while another approach claimed that Jews should dedicate their faculties to the spiritual work of serving God, mainly by practicing and studying the holy books (that approach was adopted by orthodox and especially by ultra-orthodox Jews). Additional support for this conclusion may be found in the results of the "lottery question" (the non-financial commitment to work), which asks whether or not an individual would continue to work if the individual won a large sum of money in the lottery. Several studies found that a higher percentage of religious Jews than secular Jews said they would stop working (Shamir; Harpaz 1990; Levy and Guttman 1981). These findings reveal that religious Jews had lower commitment to work than their secular counterparts. This was also reflected by occupational behavior; religious and traditionalist Jews worked fewer hours than secular Jews (Snir and Harpaz).

These findings support the finding of Parboteeah et al. that a country's regulative aspect is negatively related to its work obligation. In Israel, which is a religious institutional environment, religious political parties have succeeded each year in creating coalition agreements to transfer money from the state budget to religious institutions and activities. They have also implemented religious laws and rules that have been forced on secular Jews (e.g., prevention of operating businesses and public transportation on Saturdays and holy days) and benefit the religious population (e.g., they receive stipends if they devote all their time to religious studies and can be exempt from army service).

The negative relationship between religiosity and intrinsic and economic orientation can be explained by an increasingly Western orientation, which internalizes the values of individualism, hedonism, and materialism of secular Jews compared to the orientation of traditionalist and especially religious Jews (Sharabi). The transition of Israeli society, especially secular Jews, towards materialism was reported in earlier studies (Harpaz 2008; Sharabi and Harpaz 2011a, 2011b). Interpersonal relations orientation was the highest among religious Jews, similar to previous findings (Levy and Guttman 1981; Dor and Maslovaty), but traditionalist Jews did not have a higher interpersonal relations orientation than secular Jews. That is probably because the traditionalists do not live in communities as do the religious groups in Israel (belonging to noticeably consolidated groups) and do not gather together on a daily basis around studying and praying activities (a normative aspect of religiosity

according to Parboteeah et. al.) Moreover, traditionalists and secular Jews live together in the same neighborhoods and share almost the same social life (Levy and Guttman 1981, 1985).

Another notable finding was the role of obligation and entitlement norms in the life of Jewish individuals. Agreement with obligation and entitlement norms was significantly higher for all religious respondents than for their secular counterparts. Harpaz (1998) found no differences in the agreement level with obligation and entitlement norms between the two Jewish groups using data from 1981; our current data is from after 2006. Obligation and entitlement norms were perceived by MOW (1987) as peripheral values that tend to change quite easily, unlike core values (e.g., work centrality and intrinsic orientation). Normative changes among groups could be produced over a period of 25 years.

Several research findings show that employees who have high work centrality, also have higher job performance, are more involved in their work, are more committed to their organization, and work longer hours than employees who have low work centrality (see Sharabi and Harpaz 2010). The relationship between lower work centrality among Jews and higher religiosity is reflected by the lowest contribution of the religious growing population to the Israeli economy. For example, only 40.4% of orthodox men ages 25-64 work compared to 81.7% of the other Jewish men (Tamir). Lowering the governmental religious institutional environment (see factors described by Parboteeah et. al.) in Israel and implementing new policy regarding the employment of orthodox Jews could change attitudes of religious Jews toward the labor market and their participation in it (see suggestions by Tamir).

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal that higher religiosity is not necessarily related to a higher Israeli work ethic and work centrality; actually, it depends on the translation and implementation of the religious rules and virtues in each ethno-religious group into work life. Future research could consider the effect of key demographic factors, such as gender, age, education, marital status, and children to better understand the influence of religiosity on each of the meaning of work domains. Another direction of study could examine the affect of religiosity on the meaning of work among religious sub-cultures, particularly Muslims, Christians, and Druze in Israel.

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