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March 21, 2015: The Problem for Post-Netanyahu American Judaism

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Title: The Problem for Post-Netanyahu American Judaism

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3/21/2015—Let's assume that Netanyahu ran a racist campaign in which he revealed his true colors. He believes Arab Israelis have no place in Israel. He opposes creation of a Palestinian State. He wants the West Bank for Israel. He's willing to bomb Iran. Etc. Now what for American Judaism? Jews have been acting like supporting Israel through American power is a given and a good thing. That stance is now impossible for some American Jews because the policies above, which a majority in Israel voted for, do not deserve American support. So, support for Israel will have to end, or at least diminish. The Jewish vote in America is about to split. The Republican candidate in 2016 might get one-third of it. And maybe more than one-third of Jewish money. But that is just politics and might be reversed by a deal with Iran that would force Congressional Republicans and Netanyahu to back down. America is not in a mood for war with Iran. The Democratic nominee for President in 2016 would love to run on such an agreement. More difficult for American Jews is the religious question. Just what is Judaism apart from support for Israel? What is Judaism apart from identity? The pre and post-war period of Jewish thought looks now like a golden age that ended. Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel were widely read in America. Who is read now among young American Jews? And the religious current was so strong that it could fruitfully merge with secular thought, as in the work of the Jewish existentialist Victor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning*. This is no longer happening in America. The next step for American Judaism will have to be back to theology. Or, should I say, back to religious thinking. It is not clear that the resources are there for such a step.