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The Israeli Corner of the American Jewish Community

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FOREWORD

Few groups evoke as wide a range of emotions and perceptions among American Jews as do Israelis in America. For some American Jews the sound of spoken Hebrew in the streets automatically signals intensive Jewish identity -- for who else but highly committed Jews have mastered the Holy Tongue? For others that same sound of spoken Hebrew raises the specter of Israeli assimilation -- those who deny any relationship between Israeli identity and Jewish identity. On a communal level, the presence of Israelis in American society evokes fundamental concern as to the success of the Zionist vision. Does Israel in fact represent the fulfillment of Jewish dreams if its native-born citizens can be found in large numbers in the streets of New York and Los Angeles?

Among Israelis too the encounter with Jews of Israeli origin provokes mixed reactions. A. B. Yehoshua, among others, has condemned *yordim* as exemplifying the "neurosis" of Diaspora Jewish life in an age of Jewish sovereignty and independence. Other observers counsel greater understanding of the varied choices and circumstances of these individuals and emphasize that for many Israelis their stay in America will represent only a transient stage within their life cycles.

Finally, the reactions of Israelis in America themselves have been quite diverse. Some, indeed, have removed themselves from the Jewish community and deny any connection between Israeli and Jewish identities. Others, however, report that their stay in America has in effect taught them the importance of leading a Jewish life.

To probe these varieties and complexities of how Israelis in America view themselves and how they are viewed by the Jewish community, the Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations commissioned Dr. Sherry Rosen, research associate at the American Jewish Committee, to review the literature, interview key informants, and construct a portrait of the "Israeli corner of the American Jewish community." Dr. Rosen's paper distinguishes between the many myths concerning Israelis in America and their actual demographic and sociological realities. She notes the subtle yet significant shift in communal policy toward their presence in America and surveys a variety of communal programs of outreach to them. Most importantly, she documents research suggesting that their levels of Jewish identity and religious observance are actually considerably higher than is commonly believed. Finally, Dr. Rosen sets forth a research agenda detailing the questions to be answered if American Jewry is serious in its desire to integrate Israelis living here into our own communities.

Many individuals contributed to making this project a reality. The original concept for a study of Israelis in America was the brainchild of Bert Gold, founding director of the Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations. His leadership in marshaling support for the project and directing its initial stages is warmly acknowledged. Ayala Samuels, a doctoral student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, prepared an initial outline for the project. She also shared with the author a chapter of her dissertation which dealt with this subject. Finally, several Federation executives and Jewish communal leaders provided perspective and guidance on the project's policy direction. We are indebted to all of them and to the large numbers of Israelis across the United States who shared their personal stories and insights. It is our hope that this paper will stimulate a far more nuanced understanding of Israelis in America and careful assessment of their relationship to American Jewry.

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THE ISRAELI CORNER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

The demographic history of the American Jewish community in the twentieth century is popularly thought of as a gradual transition from European immigrants to native-born Americans, from co-religionists who arrived with many different languages and cultural references to American Jews who eventually came to share a secular culture as well as a common religious and communal identity. In reality, however, Jewish immigrants of all ages and backgrounds and from many diverse points of origin have continued to appear throughout the decades in slow but steady streams, augmenting, accentuating, and perhaps even subtly altering the ethnic and religious face of American Jewry.

According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, there are in the United States some 505,000 foreign-born Jews among the Core[1] Jewish population, with origins in the former USSR, Western and Eastern Europe, Israel, Canada, Latin America, and elsewhere. While some of these individuals are indeed European refugees who arrived as children or adults in the aftermath of World War II, it is important to keep in mind that from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s 8,000 Jews continued to immigrate each year -- from Cuba and Argentina as well as from Hungary and Romania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe -- and to establish homes and enclaves in various U.S. urban locations (Goldscheider 1982). But as the face of the immigrant group changed, so did the communal policies and programs established to meet their needs.

Since the 1970s, Jewish immigrant-refugees from the former Soviet Union, Iran, and Syria have been the focus of national and international attention, requiring the creation of several agencies set up specifically to meet their resettlement needs as well as committees and political-action groups formed to exert pressure to keep the doors open for their relatives and friends. Jews opting to leave behind the politically and ethnically tense climates of South Africa and Canada in the '70s and '80s, while needing less in the way of resettlement assistance, have also been welcomed into the U.S. community and have added their unique voices and perspectives to the communal mosaic. Though there is sometimes tension among immigrant groups competing for scarce community resources or between immigrants and their American Jewish neighbors, always there has been an awareness of the desirability and the inevitability of integrating the newcomers as smoothly as possible.

One group, however, has been largely absent from the programs and processes set up to welcome Jews newly arrived in America, in spite of the fact that this immigration has

trickled in regularly since 1948. To be sure, the exclusion of the Israeli Jews from the communal welcome has been consistent with their perception of themselves as anything but immigrants: temporary "sojourners," described by Kass and Lipset (1982), or students, or emissaries in the service of commerce or diplomacy, or even as tourists -- anything but Jewish settlers seeking to build new lives for themselves and their families in the United States. The elaborate collusion to define them as other than what many of them actually are has its own roots, both in the history of modern Israel and in the ongoing relationship between the State of Israel and the American Jewish community. Their very existence has been called a "Zionist anomaly" insofar as it challenges the most fundamental tenet of that ideology: the ingathering of the exiles *(kibbutz galuyot)* from the enforced Diaspora to the Zionist homeland. But the passage of time creates its own ingathering, and in addition to the Israeli sojourners themselves a new generation has come of age in America, one that includes tens of thousands of their children born or at least reared here.

Official Perspectives

Another change that time has wrought is the breakthrough that occurred within the Israeli governmental/organizational establishment in 1985 and the related ripples within the American Jewish communal world that were variously the cause or the effect of that breakthrough. Prior to that time, official Israeli concern for this errant population was either strictly in the hands of the Jewish Agency and its emissaries (*sh'lihim*) or, in some U.S. communities, dealt with quietly within consular offices. It is freely acknowledged that the underlying attitude was one in which Israelis abroad were seen as cowards or even traitors to the Zionist enterprise. This "ideology of anger" was tempered only by an equally official sadness at what was perceived as the loss of educated second- and third-generation "nation-builders." This hard line became linked to an official policy of ignoring them altogether and expecting the American Jewish establishment to do the same. The strongest public expression of the essentially scornful stance occurred in 1976, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in a television interview, made headlines by referring to Israelis abroad as *nefolet shel nemushot* (the fallen among weaklings). There is hardly an Israeli in America over the age of 35 who does not still refer bitterly to that phrase when discussing the deep feelings surrounding emigration.

But the drop-off in *aliyah* (Jews moving "up" to Israel) that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to a public reexamination of the *yerida* phenomenon (Israeli Jews moving "down" from Israel) and to widespread discussion of how to deal with it in a way that might be more constructive. Much media attention was focused on the subject, in both Israel and the United States. American television viewers can still recall a *Sixty Minutes* segment in which an Israeli woman cast her eyes lovingly and possessively over the beautiful interior of her lavish suburban American home, even as her lips reiterated for the interviewer her firm intention to return to Israel as soon as possible. This reassessment led to a high-level decision to make the Israeli government more directly responsible for policy regarding the *yordim*. Through the Ministry of Absorption at home and via consular offices around the world, a special department was created to determine future policies regarding this population. This new department was further empowered to produce materials designed to "educate" the so-called *yordim* and to help them return to Israel.

Yossi Kucik of the Jewish Agency remembers well the 1985 meeting at which it was

agreed that the State could no longer afford to ignore these citizens abroad. In an interview held recently in his New York office, he pointed out additionally that while there was no change in the underlying ideological position, which was still one of moral outrage, there was a new acknowledgment that "anger is not a policy." To this day, the Jewish Agency still officially views "re-*aliyah*" as being in the best interests of Israelis and their children and absolutely necessary for the future of the State. Kucik credited the programs that flowed from this policy change with having been very successful in bringing many Israelis back home, and bemoaned the fact that current bureaucratic procedures no longer provide the enthusiastic encouragement that flourished for a time.

A slightly different tack was taken by an Israeli consul for information in a major U.S. city. In the words of this official, there was never a change of policy, but rather just a growing realization that "ignoring the Israelis won't bring them home." He went on to say that re-*aliyah* was not even necessarily the goal of new activities taking place within several consular offices around the country. He preferred to talk instead about "being in contact" and "channeling the goodwill" of American-based Israelis in a direction that was helpful to Israeli government efforts. Stressing that this did not constitute official recognition, much less approval, of their presence here, he pointed out that there is a delicate balance to be observed between "using" Israelis abroad as employees or junior partners and letting them be of help in the larger enterprise. "I would rather see them return home," he said, "but while they are here they can help." He indicated further that it is preferable to see these Israelis participating in American Jewish life rather than for them to be isolated Jewishly. In this he was backed by Yitzhak Rabin himself, who came full circle in 1991 with an interview in the Hebrew-language newspaper *Los Angeles Hadshot* in which he asserted, "What I said then [1976] doesn't apply today. . . . The Israelis living abroad are an integral part of the Jewish community and there is no point talking about ostracism" (cited in Golan 1992).

In this fashion, the ending of what many view as a "conspiracy of silence" also opened the way for a new atmosphere in which American Jewish Federations, Jewish Community Centers, and other organizations have felt freer to engage in outreach projects, attempting to treat these Israelis and their families as members, or at least "associate members," of the American Jewish community with a shared stake in its future. It must be noted, however, that there is still an aura of controversy and even of mystery surrounding these *de jure* changes and the *de facto* realities. Officially, for example, the Jewish Agency is still unalterably opposed to the new waves of Federation activity among the Israeli population on the grounds that it interferes with what the Agency views as the Israelis' moral obligation to return home. (The consular official threw up his hands altogether at the oxymoronic aspect of an "Israeli Division within an American Jewish Federation").

And while American Jewish organizations legitimately report a significant policy change that enables them to take new and unprecedented steps, it is also the case that the national offices of the Council of Jewish Federations, the Jewish Community Centers Association, and the Jewish Educational Service of North America, as well as the major synagogue movements, generally gather no data whatsoever that actually document the many activities in which their local institutions are currently engaged or the degree of Israeli participation in them. Similarly, only anecdotal information exists about Jewish organizational resettlement assistance offered over the years to Israelis, the very secrecy of which underscores its official nonexistence. In yet another example of fragmentation and decentralization, one Federation

professional learned of Israeli-oriented activities taking place on his turf only when this author, whose office is located hundreds of miles away, told him what she had learned from the Israelis in his community! Clearly, there is still a tacit but mutual understanding that this new "ingathering of the Israelis" to the American Jewish communal bosom is to proceed quietly and with minimal fanfare, perhaps with the exception of programs that promote Israelis' financial contributions to communal coffers earmarked for Israel. Therefore, we shall present this drama as it is unfolding in several localities across North America, not only to provide local flavor but also to underscore the decentralized and unofficial nature that is an important part of the story.

Demographic Profile: Myth and Reality

Since 1948, the number of Jews who have left Israel has risen significantly, and now easily surpasses the 1982 estimate of 340,000 Israelis emigrating from the State to other countries between 1948 and 1979 (Sobel 1986).[2] (Even that low figure translates into 225 emigrants for every 1,000 immigrants *to* Israel, and in some years there were actually more emigrants than immigrants.) The number of Israeli Jews who emigrate to the United States in particular has climbed slowly but steadily since 1948. In the early years of Israeli statehood, the rate of immigration to the United States stood at 1,000 Israelis per year. By 1986 the number had reached 5,124 for that one year alone, in addition to another 141,449 Israelis who entered the United States in 1986 for "nonimmigrant purposes" such as tourism and short business visits (Herman 1988). Currently, the total Israeli immigrant population in the United States is most reliably estimated at 100-116,000;[3] and analysis of the newest data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey yields a number closer to 89,000 Israeli migrants.[4]

Who are these "reverse" Jewish migrants, and how has their demographic profile changed over time? Until 1966, Israelis in America were likely to be European-born Israeli nationals; since then and especially since the 1967 Six-Day War, they are predominantly Israeli-born. Indeed, by 1986 the proportion of Israeli-born *sabras* among them was estimated at 89 percent (Herman 1988). They are also disproportionately male (56 percent vs. 44 percent female) and disproportionately young (three-quarters are under age 30, and the modal age is 20-29). Whereas from 1948 to 1967 the majority were families with children, since 1967 there has been a preponderance of single young adults and couples without children. They reside primarily on both U.S. coasts (especially in New York and in Los Angeles) with sizable communities elsewhere in North America: in Miami, Chicago, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Toronto).[5]

To understand the current profile of the Israeli-American population is to relinquish a number of myths that have grown up around them. Demographers now generally agree that there are fewer Israelis in America by any definition of the term than have been "guesstimated" over the years by the Israeli government and others. Moreover, there is evidence that periods of military or economic crisis in Israel precipitate a remigration back to Israel and a drop in the migratory flow from Israel (of those with U.S. immigrant status), at least temporarily. This contrasts not only with the popular belief that Israel's wars increase emigration, but also with the assumption that only economic incentives provided by the Israeli government can attract emigrants back to the homeland. Secondly, the majority of Israelis in America are of Ashkenazi (European) ethnicity and identity, despite the stereotype of the Sephardi-Oriental immigrant. (This is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that

Sephardi-Oriental Jews now predominate in the Jewish population in Israel.) The same false stereotype further labels the typical immigrant as a taxi-driver or similar worker, an assumption belied by the wide range of actual occupations and professions held by Israelis in the United States.

At this point, the literature diverges somewhat in terms of the descriptive data and in terms of the myths and realities. Most researchers now agree that as a group the Israeli-Americans are more educated and more economically secure than popular belief would have it, and that they are more organized and more connected to one another than is generally known or seen. Sociologist Natan Urieli (1991) concurs that at the formal level there tends to be little Israeli communal activity, but he points out that beneath that level there exists "a well-developed informal ethnic orientation." It takes the form of extensive social interaction within the group and is reinforced by regular contact with "home" via making frequent visits to Israel, receiving frequent visitors from Israel, and staying informed on a weekly or even daily basis with Israeli politics, popular culture, and social developments. Many researchers also now agree that, in spite of the high profile of the "secular Israeli," there is a tangible Jewish religious identity held by many if not most of this immigrant population, though it is expressed in ways that are not familiar to American-born Jews.

There is also much variation and stratification among and within the Israeli-American population. Knowledgeable observers of the New York "Israeli scene," for instance, can readily describe and rank the Israeli communities of each city borough in terms of the relative status of each; in smaller enclaves elsewhere, Israelis tend to perpetuate the same socioeconomic, religious, or ethnically based distinctions maintained in Israel. (A skit that aired in May 1992 on *Saturday Night Live* suggests that by now even the broader New York public is aware of one particular socioeconomic/ethnic stereotype, that of the swarthy Israeli salesman of discount electronics, readily identified by his open shirt and oversized gold star or *hai* medallion.) Still another basis for differentiation within the population is sojourners vs. settlers (defined variously by intent, length of residence, or even acquisition of the precious "green card"); some also make distinctions between Israelis married to Americans and those married to other Israelis. Finally, there is widespread consensus that underneath the stereotype of the aggressive, self-confident Israeli is an individual who lives with a "spoiled identity," both in Israel and in Jewish America. Yet the opportunity to experiment in what Sobel (1986) calls "an arena of the second chance" compels many to take on the challenge of overcoming a stigma that is both externally and internally imposed.

The "Psychology of Ambivalence"

It has become almost a cliché to describe Israeli-Americans in terms of the nearly universal "psychology of ambivalence" that is both the cause and the effect of this stigma. Having been pulled to these shores out of a complex yearning for opportunity, education, and adventure, and having been pushed by the need for relief from the political, military, and economic tension in Israel, they typically deal with the dissonance this creates by clinging to the myth that they are sojourners who will soon return home. But they do not, packed suitcases notwithstanding, and the years of denying their *de facto* immigrant status take a toll. Calling themselves "Israelis who live abroad" (heard in Chicago) or "downers" (heard in Los Angeles, a literal but joking translation of the pejorative Hebrew *yordim*) underscores the self-deprecation and probably reinforces the ambivalence.

In this they are unlike most other immigrants to the United States, who recognize and delight in their "newcomer" status. This ambivalence separates them also from earlier waves of Jewish immigrants, who generally felt great pride and achievement at having reached America. Anthropologist Moshe Shokeid (1988) notes that, unlike most immigrants to America, many Israelis arrive with considerable financial resources, though in some cases they voluntarily forgo economic advantages and the high occupational status that could be theirs in Israel to come here. Finally, as sociologist Steven Gold (1992) points out, the Israelis are unlike most present-day Jewish immigrants from other parts of the world in that they are uniquely free to return to their country of origin at any time. Yet they not only do not return, they rarely even develop specific plans to do so.

"Israeliness" vs. "Jewishness"

Even bigger than the gap between Israeli immigrants and other Jewish immigrants, however, is the gap that separates them from American-born Jews, who are indignant at the Israelis' refusal either to embrace American culture and citizenship wholeheartedly or to return to Israel. The Israelis' apparent reluctance to live exactly as their American-born cousins do is based in part on stereotypes they learned in Israel: a dismissive attitude toward American Jews that combines envy and disdain for the Americans' "checkbook support" of Israel and for what at least secular Israelis view as the Americans' perpetuation of the "ghetto mentality" of religious observance and tribal cliquishness. (These same Israelis generally choose to live in American Jewish neighborhoods, or at least to congregate in neighborhoods newly abandoned by American Jews on their way out to ever-farther suburbs.) The Israelis are also wont to criticize the overall culture and values of the American host society, even as their own children become more closely bound to that culture every day. This is of course the inevitable outcome of the process the parents have begun.

Similarly, the stance that has developed among American-born Jews toward the Israelis in their midst has been labeled by Steven M. Cohen (1986) as "part denial and part outrage." For some, Israelis evoke American-Jewish guilt at having rejected *aliyah* for themselves, as well as embarrassment at the public display of flaws in the Zionist dream that have led many of its children to abandon it. This in turn feeds their ambivalence at helping Israelis to resettle here. As Shokeid has suggested, at a deeper level the Israeli presence challenges the American definition of Jewishness altogether by substituting Hebrew culture for Jewish tradition and Israeli nationalism for rabbinic religion. While many American Jews struggle to maintain a Jewish identity in the absence of strong adherence to the religious commandments, Israelis confound by relinquishing the guilt and by refusing even to pose the question of Jewishness. Yet their reliance on "Israeliness" is similarly problematic, in that emigration from Israel confers a certain hollowness or hypocrisy on that identity, making it difficult to pass on to one's children, who may never have lived in the land of their parents' memories. So the very characteristics that underlie the distancing and mild suspiciousness which many Israeli immigrants and American-born Jews feel for one another are gradually giving way to increasingly similar concerns for their children: how to transmit an identity that will ensure a next generation secure in its Jewishness, however defined, in its rootedness in Jewish family, and in its spiritual and emotional connection to Israel.

In contrast to the presumption that "Israeliness" and "Jewishness" are mutually exclusive identities, however, there are also some researchers and chroniclers of the Israeli-Americans

who tell us that most of them actually have a strong Jewish religious identity and, perhaps to a lesser degree, a standard of Jewish affiliation. In New York, sociologist Paul Ritterband (1986) found that, compared to the overall New York Jewish population in 1980, the Israelis were more likely to report that most or all of their closest friends were Jewish; that they identified with one of the religious denominational branches, especially with Orthodoxy; and that they maintained high levels of Jewish ritual observance. Moreover, they were as likely as other New York Jews to belong to Jewish organizations other than synagogues (though elsewhere refusing to affiliate appears to be a crucial component in maintaining the "sojourner" myth). Similarly, a Los Angeles survey of Israeli-born naturalized immigrants analyzed by Pini Herman and David LaFontaine found that being a Jew was "important" or "very important" for 85 percent of the respondents, and that over 90 percent of them engaged in Jewish ritual behaviors (Herman 1988). The Los Angeles study also found that Israelis often increase their level of Jewish observance when they come to the United States in all aspects except synagogue attendance. This contrasts with the general impression that, for most Israelis, the ways by which most American Jews express their Jewish identity -- synagogue membership or attendance and affiliation with Jewish organizations -- are neither feasible nor meaningful.

The Second Generation

Whether religiously identified or not, Israeli parents are like parents everywhere in their desire to give their children as much as possible. Here too there is irony and ambivalence, however, for Israelis are unique among immigrants to the United States in their guilty feeling that they have come here *in spite of* the best interests of their children. Most Israeli immigrants are convinced that it is better to be a child in Israel than in America, and they often pass this conviction along to their children. In addition to fond memories of a sunny, unpolluted climate and a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, they speak lovingly of their recollections of an education comprised of a broad international and cosmopolitan curriculum, of a society characterized by strong family solidarity and community cohesiveness, and of the lifelong ties developed in the small groups of youth (the *hevre*) who virtually grew up together from kindergarten through army service (Yanover 1992). They see the cultural fabric of their children's lives, by contrast, as excessively focused on the individual -- causing them to be isolated, dependent only on themselves, narrowly educated for materialistic goals, and highly ethnocentric as Americans.

It doesn't matter whether or not Israel, its physical environment, and its social institutions have changed since the days when most adult immigrants were children; it doesn't matter what the reasons -- marriage to an American, or career opportunities, or just plain wanderlust -- that have obliged those "children of circumstances," to borrow Shokeid's title, to raise *their* children in the United States. The bottom line for most Israelis is the transmission of "Israeli identity" to the next generation, and they go about it with diligence and with surprising success. Many speak only or primarily Hebrew to their children, enroll them in the North American Zabar network of Israeli scout troops or in an Israeli-oriented supplemental school, and send them "home" for reinforcement of language and extended-family bonds as frequently as possible.

In some U.S. communities there are reported high enrollments of Israeli children in Jewish educational institutions -- in Los Angeles, one estimate is that 80 percent of all Israeli-

American children are enrolled, compared to only 20 percent of all American Jewish children. Other researchers have also found high levels of Israeli participation in Jewish education, but still others suggest that these numbers are inflated and overly inclusive. There is the previously mentioned problem of defining who is an Israeli child, given the numbers of children with one Israeli parent and one American parent, and given the numbers of children who by now are the vanguard of a new generation of "Americans of Israeli descent." In general, more Israeli children are believed to be enrolled in yeshivot and day schools than in supplemental or congregational schools, presumably because of the greater emphasis on modern Hebrew language study in those institutions and because of most Israelis' lack of connection to synagogues. (One New Jersey congregation has made headway here by offering a limited period of free membership to religious-school faculty members, many of whom are Israelis.) There are probably also more Israeli children at the preschool level than in higher grades, on the theory that Israeli parents may view Jewish preschool as providing an appropriate transitional environment for their children as they move from Hebrew-speaking homes into an English-speaking American peer society. But there appear to be no data whatsoever gathered by the schools, their umbrella organizations or movements, synagogues, or national educational bodies such as CAJE or JESNA. Nor has anyone apparently looked at Israeli participation in Jewish schools of a nonreligious or nondenominational nature -- secular/humanistic, Workmen's Circle, and so on. The only information on the subject of Jewish education comes from surveys and studies of Israelis themselves, who may be motivated to exaggerate their participation.

The attempt to find appropriate schools for these children is itself a complex and revealing story. The Israelis seek to teach their children "Israeliness," which they understand to mean knowledge of Hebrew language and literature, appreciation of Jewish history (especially the biblical period and the modern Zionist era), and observance of Jewish holidays insofar as they fit into a nationalistic framework. Most American Jewish education, however, consists of teaching the Jewish religion: knowledge of Hebrew liturgy, ritual observance, and Jewish history as the preservation of a religious heritage. Compromises have occurred over time in both directions, with the establishment of special day schools and supplemental schools that teach "the Israeli identity," on the one hand, and increased numbers of Israeli parents who send their children to "American Jewish" schools, on the other. However, the content of American Jewish education continues to be a source of conflict for Israeli parents. They are uncomfortable sending their children to acquire religious practices and beliefs which they themselves may never have had, and they complain that in these schools modern Hebrew language study does not go beyond the elementary level.

Even without these ideological differences, Israeli parents usually find themselves at cross-purposes with American-Jewish educational goals, both in the supplemental programs and in the day schools.[6] The belief that they will someday return encourages them to view "Jewish education" as merely filling in the gaps that their children will have developed in their mastery of the Israeli governmental-secular curriculum, especially in language and history. American-Jewish parents, by contrast, view Jewish education as the means by which their children acquire a Jewish identity, a goal that goes well beyond the specifics of ritual practice, a modicum of religious faith, and enough Hebrew to enable them to read the prayer book. In this regard, it is particularly ironic that the teachers who are hired to inculcate this American Jewish identity are, in many urban communities, increasingly likely to be Israeli sojourners or immigrants who were themselves schooled in the "Israeli identity."[7]

How successful is the transmission of Israeli identity to the children of Israelis? Urieli has drawn some interesting conclusions from his research among "secular" Chicago-area Israelis, both first and second generations. Like most other researchers, Urieli describes the immigrant generation as highly identified as Israelis first, Jews second. (They call themselves "Americans" not at all.) They speak Hebrew as much as possible, follow current events in Israel on a regular basis, and express their "Israeliness" as a form of nationalism. Their stated feelings about Judaism as a religion are either neutral or negative. The second generation, by contrast, has a "complex self-identity" that supports them in two different worlds: living in America and expressing themselves most comfortably in the English language, yet retaining a strongly positive Israeli identity, visiting Israel often, and upholding what Urieli calls their parents' "strictly rhetorical commitment" to Israeliness. Born into the dissonance and ambivalence that is their parents' lot, the children of the second generation strive to balance the two identities and even sometimes to add a third "Jewish" dimension to the juggling act. But for the first generation, it is the very absence of religious ties that simultaneously defines them and complicates both their own search for a strong ethnic attachment and their attempts to bridge the generation gap with their American-born children.

Critics of this analysis of successful two-generation acculturation point to the small but growing numbers of American-born Israeli children who choose to make *aliyah*, a subtle yet telling phenomenon which suggests that, for some, the inherited ambivalence is resolved only when they recapture the "lost" identity for themselves. Future studies might well focus on this group of American-Israeli children who are often in the forefront of Zionist youth groups or who make personal decisions to serve in the Israel Defense Forces or to attend Israeli universities. To be sure, in some cases these may be viewed as successful career decisions which draw sensibly on an individual's strengths; for example, in the IDF young Israeli-American soldiers are often sent for special diplomatic training and service that makes use of their English-language skills and their binational cultural fluency. For others, the chance to reenter a foreign-born parent's native culture is an important step in their own psychological process of identity-formation, a rare privilege among American-born children of immigrants.

In still other cases, the phenomenon is the fulfillment of one expressed goal of the Zabar youth movement, now in its fifteenth year. That movement, which claims some 1,800 members aged 10-19 in twelve "tribes" across the United States and Canada,[8] is unabashedly Israeli in a way that is different from other Israeli-inspired movements that are "Jewish movements first." Quoted in a newspaper interview (Yanover 1992), Yossi Patael, the former *shaliah* in North America, went on to acknowledge that the Zabar movement initially addresses the needs of conflicted Israeli parents more than of their children, who most likely are already fast on the way to becoming Americans. But the program is very effective at promoting and sustaining Israeli identity among those youngsters, whether they stay in America or make *aliyah*.

The Zabar program closely parallels the Israeli scouts program with its emphasis on Israel-oriented activities: study of Israel's history and geography and celebration of Israeli culture -- its holidays, foods, songs, and games. One of its most successful new programs for senior scouts (ages 16-19), called Garin Hozer, prepares the youth for a four-month stay on a kibbutz, followed in most cases by service in the IDF. In its first three years, some seventy-one "American-Israeli" teenagers have gone to Israel on this program. Many not only stayed

for army service but also later joined the kibbutz to which they were initially brought. Current *shaliah* Shlomo Dushi acknowledges that these young people have to overcome the irony of a marginal identity that works in both directions: feeling American when in Israel, but feeling Israeli when in the United States. Additionally, while parents are often quite enthusiastic about sending their *young* children to Zabar activities, parents of teenagers are sometimes forced to confront more complex psychological feelings over children who may make *aliyah*. Still, Dushi emphasizes, the goal of preserving Israeli identity is especially important for the many children whose roots are in the language and culture of Israel rather than in the religious tradition of Judaism.

Zabar also represents Hetz Vakeshet in the United States, a summer program sponsored by the Israeli pre-army Gadna division. Last year, 240 younger Israeli-American teenagers spent six weeks in Israel alongside Israeli youth participating in this experience, which combines elements of summer camp, Outward Bound, and army training all in one.

Israeli Communities in America

The public face of the Israeli-American presence emphasizes "Israeliness" more than "Jewishness" for individuals of all ages. This impression is reinforced by the existence of barely visible but "institutionally complete" communities across North America which allow many Israelis to function almost entirely within a Hebrew-Israeli cultural, social, and linguistic framework. They are able to procure most goods and services from Hebrew-speaking vendors and professionals in Israeli-owned businesses and practices. They can read the Hebrew-language newspaper *Yisrael Shelanu*, which is distributed coast-to-coast, often in addition to local Hebrew publications which several communities have established on their own. Frequent and more direct contact with Israeli news and culture is also an important part of the package, via radio and television broadcasts and Friday editions of *Ma'ariv* that are printed in New York. There is even a "900" telephone number well known to most Israelis that provides Hebrew-language news bulletins from the Middle East. For some, frequent and lengthy telephone contact with friends and relatives is crucial but sufficient; for others, actually floating back and forth between the two continents is a necessary way of life. As one reporter describes it, there are Israelis who are familiar with international flight schedules and telephone rates in the manner of suburban commuters memorizing train schedules (Gann 1985). In short, many Israelis live with "one foot in the Land of Promise and the other in the Promised Land" (Gary 1985).

Given this reality, it is small wonder that, for many if not most Israelis of the immigrant generation, the goal of establishing a connection with American Jews, much less with the organized American Jewish community, is of very low priority. One anecdote conveys the attitude: An Israeli woman, when asked by this writer in a face-to-face meeting about her ideal kind of relationship between Israelis and American Jews, answered sharply in Hebrew: "I'm not interested in having any kind of relationship with them!" Then her eyes widened in embarrassment and she apologized, confessing, "I would never have said that if we had been talking in English."

But whether recognized or not, this goal is understood by community leaders as the next priority of Israeli-born and American-born Jews, and there are several localities in which such steps are already underway. The rest of this report presents descriptions of key Israeli

communities in the United States, showing similarities as well as variations, and an evaluation of policies and programs which have been initiated to create closer ties for the future. Just as with American-Jewish communities coast to coast, there are clearly different needs and different strengths associated with each local *yishuv*; however, beyond the diversity there are also a number of characteristics and concerns that are common to the Israeli-American experience overall.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles, where sojourners or settlers can lead a separate and totally Israeli way of life, is believed to contain the largest or second-largest Israeli community in North America. Typical of the wildly fluctuating numbers routinely offered by various local observers, the Israelis in Los Angeles have been officially and unofficially estimated at anywhere from 20,000 to 200,000. More precise data from demographer Pini Herman (1988) suggest that the figure is probably 10-11,700 for the Greater Los Angeles area.[9] They read two local Hebrew newspapers, patronize many Israeli restaurants and clubs, see entertainment and sports programs direct from home, and have Israeli friends exclusively -- all in a climate and topography that closely resemble Israel's.

Somewhat more problematic has been their relationship to the American Jewish community. As elsewhere in the United States, it has long been understood in Los Angeles that the Israeli government would not appreciate American Jewish efforts to integrate Israelis into the local community on the grounds that it might prevent their return to Israel. But thirty years after the beginnings of the migration to Los Angeles and ten years after the most intensive influx, there was dramatic change in the *status quo* that originated in the Jewish Federation Council.

It began with the reactivation in 1988 of the Federation's Commission on Israelis of the Council on Jewish Life, originally established in 1981. Two co-chairs were carefully chosen -- Nissan Pardo, a well-known Israeli long active in the Israeli community, and Rabbi Robert Wexler, a Hebrew-speaking American newly appointed president of the University of Judaism. The Commission developed a list of projects that they wanted to see implemented, including a change in the formal position of the Israeli consulate toward Israelis in Los Angeles.

The cool reaction of consular officials toward this idea warmed only with the arrival in late 1989 of a new consul-general, Ron Ronen. Ronen was interested in the concept and open to receiving a position paper on it from the Commission. He was enthusiastic about the paper that was submitted to him, to the point of having it translated into Hebrew and sent back home to the Foreign Ministry.

Throughout that year, the Commission had also been actively involved in establishing a leadership-development program for Israelis as well as a series of top-level dialogues between Federation leaders and leaders of various local Israeli organizations. In January 1990, just as the Federation was on the verge of issuing a formal invitation to the Israeli community to become part of Los Angeles Jewish life, Ron Ronen appeared before the Federation board and announced a change in the Foreign Ministry's long-standing policy toward Israelis. This was followed by a joint statement from Ronen and Federation president George Caplan that appeared in both the English-language and the Hebrew-language Jewish press.

The official Federation Council policy, which had been set forth in 1984 in the Report of the Commission on Israelis, called also for a number of other measures intended to educate Israelis about the American Jewish community and to encourage them to participate in communal life. Toward this end, there was a series of lectures in Hebrew on political, social, and cultural topics that was attended by more than a thousand Israelis. There was a day-long tour of Jewish Los Angeles for Israelis, and a forum on mutual perceptions and stereotypes held by each group. Graduates of the leadership-development and dialogue groups were placed on boards and committees within Federation and in the broader Jewish community (including the Jewish Community Centers and the Jewish Community Relations Council).

Additionally, independent Israeli organizations were assisted to conduct fund-raisers, including an art exhibit and sale, on behalf of Operation Exodus. Following the success of the first all-Israeli group trained in Hebrew to make calls for an Operation Exodus phone-a-thon, an Israeli division of the United Jewish Fund was also created. Its goal is to run programs of leadership development, to educate Israelis about fund-raising, and even to organize "missions to Israel" among local Israelis. On a recent Super Sunday in Los Angeles, phone solicitations were officially made in Hebrew and Russian as well as English. (In this context, it is appropriate to note the growing numbers of other Jewish immigrants to the Los Angeles area, most significantly from the Soviet Union, Iran, South America, and South Africa.)

Outreach activities which also emerged from the same recent opening of the door include the designation of the Jewish Community Centers Association network as the site for formal programming for the Israeli community. For this purpose, a grant was awarded by the Jewish Community Foundation of the Federation to fund such programs at $180,000 for three years and to hire Israeli staff to run them. Posters, calendars, and brochures for all of these events use a mixture of Hebrew and English type to announce the activities. As a result of effort at the highest communal levels, there is in Los Angeles today a significant network of Israeli-focused and Hebrew-speaking Jewish communal organizations and agencies. The Jewish Family Service now conducts Hebrew-speaking parenting groups, and there are also Hebrew branches of Jewish Big Brothers. Discussion groups (sponsored by the JCRC) have been set up to deal with inroads made by Scientology cults among the Israeli population. B'nai B'rith, ORT, and Hadassah all have Hebrew-speaking lodges or chapters as well (B'nai B'rith is particularly active, involving some 400-500 families); Israelis are also very active in the local chapter of AIPAC. Several new independent groups initiated by Israelis themselves have also emerged recently from this process, including a political-action "single-issue group" and an association of former Israeli Air Force pilots.

As noted by Elaine Albert, director of commissions for the Council on Jewish Life, a major goal of the new activity has been to bring Israeli and Israeli-American children closer to Jewish education as well as to bring their parents closer to the Jewish community. A pilot program was established by the Council in 1990 in the form of the AMI School, a Hebrew-speaking afternoon religious school for Israeli children aged 6-11 that is sponsored by all four denominations. In the first year, fifty children were enrolled; in 1991-92, enrollment virtually doubled. The school is now under the jurisdiction of the JCCA. The appeal to the target audience is a familiar one: a recent flier for the school features the "golden arches" alongside the tablets of the Ten Commandments, and the text asks "Which symbol is more familiar to your children?" According to a recent report, AMI administrators have begun meeting with

synagogue officials to develop further programs such as Shabbatons and a bar/bat mitzvah school for AMI graduates. Beyond the AMI school, there is also a large group of Israeli scouts (200 children) in Los Angeles and some smaller groups representing such Israeli movements as Hashahar, Betar, and B'nei Akiva.

Albert observes that the same fear of assimilation and the desire for Jewish grandchildren that is captured so well in the "golden arches" cartoon has made Israeli parents more willing to engage in dialogue over this issue with American-born Jews. At the same time, other observers of the Los Angeles "Israeli scene" suggest that the Jewish identity of Israelis is already quite strong. In either case, it is hoped that this concern will motivate Israelis to take the next step of affiliation by joining local synagogues and participating in other community activities. However, a recent local news story indicated skepticism on the part of some, who are not so sure that they can make the transition from "Israeli Jewishness" to a religious identification with Judaism. For them, joining a JCC still comes more easily than joining a synagogue.

Hopes for increased affiliation are based in part on the fact that the Israeli community in Los Angeles is believed to include large numbers of newly affluent individuals with the time and money for Jewish-oriented community life. Real estate and construction, the security business (attractive to Israeli army veterans), the fashion industry, jewelry, import-export, and sales, especially of diamonds, have all attracted large concentrations of Israelis. In recent years, however, numbers of Israelis in construction-related industries have experienced economic problems, and it remains to be seen whether this will have a significant effect on their participation in American Jewish life. Even so, in the last few years there have been a number of local news articles and features describing this population and focusing Jewish communal attention on the kind of exemplary Israeli-American identity that may yet emerge in this metropolitan area.

Chicago

While the size of the Chicago-centered Israeli community is not large, it encompasses many of the paradoxes and contradictions of Israeli life in America and of the interaction between it and the organized Jewish community. The Israelis in Chicago, who represent the largest Israeli contingent in the Midwest, seem to prove the assertion that Israeli-Americans are frequently more "organized" than is generally recognized by the official Jewish community. In Chicago such organization is largely self-initiated and includes informal groups as well as more structured networks. In addition, there appear to be growing numbers of Israelis who choose to identify with and join existing Jewish organizations such as Na'amat and Hadassah, even playing active roles. Israelis also utilize JCC's and Jewish Family and Community Service extensively. More recently, a branch of the Va'ad Lema'an Hehayal (Committee in Support of Soldiers) was formed to engage in fund-raising for the Israel Defense Forces, linking their activity to that of Committee branches elsewhere in the United States.

As elsewhere, Chicago Federation officials do not "publicly acknowledge" the existence of the Israelis, in contrast to their formal and highly organized absorption programs for Soviet Jewish immigrants. (Of course, as elsewhere, this stance is largely a response to the perceived attitudes emanating from the Israeli government.) Thus there are no official estimates of the size of the Israeli population (unofficially, the numbers given range from

5,000 to 10,000) or of their areas of residential concentration or other demographic characteristics. As elsewhere in the United States, the Israeli population in Chicago is believed to be relatively young, consisting of two generations only. Observers also believe that, compared to the Israelis in parts of New York and Los Angeles, the Israelis in Chicago are more middle class in terms of their professions and incomes, and are likelier to live in nuclear-family units. While many live in Chicago itself, large numbers are concentrated in suburban Skokie.

Prior to a recent trip to Chicago, I asked to be put in touch with groups of Israelis. Through informal connections, I learned of the existence of a women's discussion and support group that meets on weekdays and of a Zofim scout troop and an "Israeli School" that meets on Sunday afternoons. Arranging to meet with the parents of these children while classes were in session, I found an institution that has existed quietly for ten years. It now serves sixty-three children, and is supported and maintained by the Chicago Board of Jewish Education with funding from Federation (though these institutional connections are not widely publicized).

The Zabar School involves some forty families and offers Israeli children training in what parents call "education in Jewish tradition without an emphasis on religion." The "cultural curriculum," as the parents and teachers also described it, is similar to that provided by the Israeli governmental-secular school system. It offers Hebrew-language instruction in what they call "Israeli values": Bible, Israel history and geography (*yedi'at ha-aretz*), language and literature, songs and holiday celebrations. Classes meet once a week at a suburban synagogue, space that is rented for them by the Board's Division of High School Jewish Education. (The Board also pays teachers' salaries, presumably subsidizing the school beyond what tuition covers.) The same location is also host to the weekly gatherings of the Zofim scouts, whose activities are geared more specifically toward Israeli children who are in the United States for a limited time only. As with Israeli children elsewhere, the Zabar pupils I observed understand Hebrew but tend to speak in "Henglish," a wondrous language that mixes Hebrew and English syntax, morphology, and vocabulary with abandon.

The school satisfies parents' perceived need to strengthen their children in two areas of primary concern: knowledge of Hebrew language and support for what they call "Israeli identification," which they told me is something that gets eroded with time spent in the United States. (By way of contrast, the parents did not use the phrase "Jewish identification.") Parents worried aloud about their children becoming exclusively American, and while most of them consciously choose not to offer their children Jewish religious training, they explained that they are eager to have the tradition passed on in an atmosphere which they feel "discourages both religiosity and antireligiosity." One set of parents from among the scout families had begun to send their children to a Solomon Schechter day school "so they'll know they are Jews as well as Israelis." Still another couple referred to "love of Israel" as an educational goal for their children, by which they clearly meant something other than identity as Israelis.

In 1991-92, the school community was much encouraged by staff changes at the Israeli consulate which have led to hopes for increased support for local Israeli activities. In particular, there is now more formal recognition of the Zabar School, and the consulate now includes information about the school in its mailings to Israelis in the area. This is

particularly welcome, since concerns for security as well as for mailing costs and for appropriate mailing lists have in the past limited the school's ability to reach potential students and their families. It is hoped that this will help the school grow, and will also lead to further cooperation from consular officials for such programs. In 1991-92, the school's enrollment actually decreased slightly.

Miami

The South Florida area encompassing Miami, Hollywood, and Fort Lauderdale, as well as all of Dade and Broward counties, is home to what may be the third-largest American Israeli community, though here the repeated figure of 30-50,000 is once again an overly high "guesstimate." Most live in the North Miami Beach area, where there are a number of Israeli restaurants and even an Israeli supermarket featuring all sorts of imported items from the homeland. A minority are students, but many are long-term established residents or more recent arrivals, living singly or in family groups. In contrast to Cuban Jewish immigrants, who organized themselves immediately upon their arrival, the Israelis in South Florida are variously described as being not at all organized or organized into several small communities. As elsewhere in the United States, there has been in the last few years a change in consular attitudes toward the local Israeli population. In Miami, this has had the effect of giving Jewish communal agencies and organizations greater freedom, if not an actual green light, to move forward with attempts to organize among them.

The Greater Miami Jewish Federation has established an Israeli Committee, chaired by a veteran Israeli Miamian, to spearhead the effort toward outreach aimed at integrating Israelis into the Jewish community. The core group that is at the heart of this Committee has so far developed a roster of a few hundred contributors to the local Federation campaign, and has also taken part in the planning of some fund-raising dinners. During the Gulf War, some 500 Israelis were brought together for an event that featured fund-raising as well as Hebrew speakers. (The fund-raising portion of the program was only moderately successful.) They have also held a number of well-attended social events, including Hanukkah parties. Israelis have been brought into the Federation's Planning Committee and the Women's Division as well as the Miami Community Relations Council. The Israeli Committee is currently engaged in a five-part joint program with CLAL, designed to encourage Israelis to create Jewish identities that are compatible with their new lives as U.S. citizens in a country that has no state religion but only voluntary religious and cultural affiliations.

Israelis in the area have also expressed plans to establish on their own an "Israeli-American organization" that would harness the political power of these immigrant citizens to influence U.S. policies that affect Israel. Toward this end, local activists are looking for potential leaders and are making contact with communities of Israelis elsewhere in the United States for examples to follow or to build upon. (Ironically, the visible model for such an organization that already exists is the Arab-American League.) In May 1991, this group of Israelis held a symposium, cosponsored with the University of Miami, which drew a crowd of over 700 to hear high-profile guest lecturers discuss Middle East political issues in Hebrew. Among the speakers were Benjamin Netanyahu, a representative from AIPAC in Washington, and the most famous Israeli Miamian, millionaire Ted Arenson, whose recent "re-*aliyah*" has drawn considerable local attention. Enthusiastic participants frequently ask when the next gathering will take place.

Israeli and Israeli-American children in the area apparently have not yet been offered an Israeli-style supplemental school, but there is an Israeli scout troop in Miami Beach and a representative (*shaliah*) from the B'nai Akiva youth movement.

San Francisco Bay Area

Although there are Israelis in San Francisco and in Marin County to the north, the bulk of the Bay Area Israeli community is concentrated in the East Bay (especially Oakland and Berkeley) and the South Bay (in the Peninsula communities of San Mateo, Sunnyvale, Palo Alto, and San Jose). Observers and informants cannot stress enough what they believe to be the difference between this Israeli community and those of Los Angeles, New York, and Miami: the Israelis in the Bay Area, they say, are predominantly male academicians and scholars or professionals and technicians along with their wives and children. The vast majority of them are affiliated with the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, and the Silicon Valley biomedical and high-tech computer industries. The preponderance of middle-class professionals is also the reason, they say, that their community has none of the Israeli-style stores, restaurants, and nightclubs found in those other enclaves.

The larger South Bay Peninsula community of Israelis maintains a strong "Israeli culture" built around such activities as folk dancing, *shira be-zibur* (group singing), and *hugim* (clubs). Their children -- more than 100 of them -- are actively involved on weekends in the activities of Israeli scouts under the auspices of Zabar. Many of these activities are held at the Palo Alto Jewish Community Center. The Israelis who work with their children on behalf of Zabar are well aware of the differences they see between the older children, who tend to have a stronger Israeli identity, and the younger ones, who are "more American," even to the point of preferring to join Young Judea, which has a more American Zionist focus.

The Palo Alto JCC is also the location of the Bayit Yisraeli (Israeli House). The goal of this project, sponsored by the Absorption Ministry of the Israeli government, is to provide a place where Israelis can come for information about Israel. Here they can find Israeli newspapers and books, television news broadcasts, concerts, and other kinds of cultural activities. It is one of a larger network of Israeli "houses" which can be found in Europe and Canada as well as in several U.S. cities. As a member of the consular staff recently explained, the long-term goal is to encourage Israelis to return home to Israel. Toward this end, Israelis can come here and get help from the Israeli government in obtaining loans, employment, and assistance in other aspects of their re-*aliyah*. In this particular community, it has also succeeded in a relatively short time in providing better channels of communication between local Israelis and their government representatives, a subject that had previously been somewhat of a sore spot.

The East Bay community, especially Berkeley, is undergoing much growth and has recently reorganized separately from the South Bay community. Two new groups have very recently sprung up, both initiated by Israeli volunteers but both of which can now claim some Jewish community involvement as well as Israeli consular interest. The Gesharim group, based in Berkeley, reaches out to "Israelis, American Jews, and friends," reports one of the cofounders. (In Berkeley as elsewhere there are large numbers of marriages across those three categories.) Its goals are multipronged: to connect Israelis to the American Jewish community, to expose American Jews to Israeli culture, and to foster in Israelis a renewed

interest in their Jewish heritage. The gatherings, which occur monthly, include holiday celebrations and other social activities in addition to sessions focused more specifically on contemporary cultural and even text-based learning experiences. Now in its second year, the program has become part of the Cultural Arts Department of the Berkeley-Richmond JCC, and the Israeli consulate assists in advertising the gatherings.

A very different agenda motivates the founders of the Mishpahot Dovrot Ivrit (Hebrew-Speaking Families) group. Originally a circle of friends, many of whom are Hebrew teachers in the community, this group has grown by word of mouth into a "quasi-public" organization of some thirty or forty East Bay families with young children. Again, many are "mixed" Israeli-American couples, but they also attract Israeli families and Americans with experience and interest in Israel. Their explicit purpose is "supporting and encouraging the use of Hebrew in their daily lives." Their focus on family education is carried out via holiday celebrations and other sorts of informal programming. There is a loose affiliation with the Federation-based Agency for Jewish Education, and even the consulate, originally very cool to the idea, has begun to express more interest.

New York

More appropriately considered a cluster of communities, the very large Israeli community of Greater New York (comprising New York City, Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties) numbered 35-40,000 in 1980; and more recent estimates (by Pini Herman) put the figure at 43-50,000. The UJA-Federation 1991 New York Jewish Population Study estimated that 22,000 Israeli-born Jewish adults reside in the "eight-county" area -- a figure which represents approximately 30-35,000 people (adults and children), according to Bethamie Horowitz, who directed the study. (Horowitz notes further that these figures are not very different from Herman's, given that the NYNJPS counted only Israel-born *sabras*.) They reside primarily in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, with smaller numbers in Manhattan and the outlying counties.[10] Working largely from 1981 data, sociologist Paul Ritterband described them as younger than New York Jews in general, more likely to be married, and with larger households. They work in a variety of services and trades, among them car and taxi services (including moving services) and the diamond trade, and in retail enterprises such as photo and electronic goods. Some are professionals with advanced degrees, but self-employment is found primarily among those in trades and crafts.

In spite of the apparently ever-growing numbers, some observers claim that the current level of organized community activity is lower than it was in the late 1970s and 1980s, when New York was more of an immigrant gateway to the United States than it is today. At that time, there was a thriving commercial radio program broadcast four nights a week and two local Hebrew newspapers of considerable quality. These either do not exist anymore or are of reduced stature and popularity. A similar story is told about the Israeli nightclubs and restaurants (see description in Shokeid 1988) that used to attract not only large numbers of Israelis but also young Americans with affinity for Israeli popular culture.

More recently, however, the development of a community program to engage and include Israelis in broader Jewish concerns has become a template for educational outreach programs across the country. The discussions began in the late 1970s, with warnings to New York Federation leaders about the long-term effects of a sizable resident population of

Israelis who were totally unaffiliated with the Jewish community and who were raising children virtually without any kind of formal Jewish education. After much collective soul-searching, a decision was made to engage in limited outreach that would focus exclusively on Jewish education and Jewish identity, especially among children of Israelis. (This was in sharp contrast to other immigrant communities, for whom basic services centered on resettlement needs such as housing and jobs.) Even this limited focus required delicate negotiation between those who would assist Israelis in becoming Americans and those who were willing to assist them only in returning to Israel. It was of course also an accommodation to the position of the Israeli government of that time. The new perspective was codified and presented in a policy report submitted in 1982 by the newly created Subcommittee on Services to Israelis and approved in 1983 by the New York UJA-Federation's Communal Planning Committee. A grant from the Federation Fund for Jewish Education awarded to the New York Board of Jewish Education paved the way for the creation of "a secular experimental educational program."

The mandate from the subcommittee was to approach the problem from the perspective of Israeli identity, incorporating Jewish content into that familiar framework. The goal was to acknowledge and validate the "Jewish authenticity" of the ways in which New York Israelis already identified as Jews, in addition to exposing them and their children to other forms of Jewish identification and affiliation through innovative programming. Thus, for example, already existing Israeli social clubs, Hebrew-language resources, and public Israeli-style Jewish holiday observances were to be supported and encouraged even as steps would be taken to draw Israelis closer to synagogue life, Jewish organizations, and educational programs for their children. All of these steps together, it was hoped, would increase the Israelis' contact with the local Jewish service network, encourage "self-help" programs, and begin to develop avenues through which Israelis could make their own contribution to American Jewish communal life.

With the grant, the Board hired Chana Silberstein, herself of Israeli-American background, as project director for outreach to Israelis. The story of how Silberstein personally conducted "street research" in Queens to locate Israelis and to assess their educational needs is an example of grass-roots community organization in the best tradition. Silberstein visited pizzerias, pediatricians' offices, butchers, and *cosmetika'i* shops (beauty and cosmetic shops), identifying potential activists who could galvanize others to meet in private homes where they would discuss issues of Jewish identity as it affected them and their children.

In this snowball fashion, two groups were eventually formed, one to establish a day school and one to create supplemental schools. While the day-school project ultimately foundered, a number of supplemental schools emerged in Queens, Brooklyn, and Long Island from this initial outreach effort: Etgar, based at the Central Queens YM-YWHA; Nitzan, at the Hebrew Educational Society in Canarsie, Brooklyn; Oranim, at the Mid-Island YM-YWHA in Plainview, L.I.; and Shalhevet in Woodmere, L.I. All of these schools were modeled on the existing Gachelet School in Great Neck. Also a product of this effort is the Israeli Club at the Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. Similar outreach was later also undertaken in Manhattan and Staten Island, and a new school is likely to open soon on the East Side of Manhattan at the Sutton Place Synagogue.

While some supplemental schools, Israeli social clubs, nursery schools, and youth programs (Zofim, Hetz Vakeshet) were already in existence, the innovation of the BJE outreach project was to get parents to start thinking about their children's Jewish identity, and to address this by adding a traditional component to the schools' curriculum. Another innovative contribution was Silberstein's insistence that the Israelis themselves be required to plan and host an activity, usually an Israeli-style holiday observance, for the larger community. (In Brooklyn recently, the Israelis chose to organize a Holocaust Day observance.)

In this manner, fourteen new programs for Israelis were created throughout Greater New York in less than three years. They include, in addition to the supplemental schools, a variety of teen programs, folk-dance groups, lecture series, parent workshops, cultural exchange programs, summer camps, nursery schools, parent-toddler groups, and even bar/bat mitzvah training. Self-help is encouraged in the form of a program by which participating Israeli families are asked to adopt another Israeli family and involve them in program activities. Silberstein estimates that more than 2500 families have been drawn into programs offering Jewish education for their children, one of the key goals of the outreach effort.

Interviewed recently in her Board office, Silberstein reiterated her concern that Israelis living outside of Israel need to redefine their Jewish identity, making the necessary transition from being part of a Jewish majority to part of a Jewish minority. She pointed out that even in Israel there is growing recognition of the need for programs of Jewish identity. For the Israelis in the United States, she said, the five-year mark is often the turning-point in their awareness of the need to address these concerns for themselves and their children.

Policies and programs that focus specifically on religious needs have also been successful. Silberstein pointed to synagogues that have offered free High Holiday seats to Israelis or even services geared especially to them. Community day schools and yeshivot have conducted outreach to enroll Israeli children, and the bar/bat mitzvah program begun in Queens and replicated in Brooklyn has attracted many children who can then be recruited to continue their studies after they enter high school. Some families have begun to join synagogues, and even more have responded to incentives to join the JCC's and local Y's which house the outreach programs. The number of children enrolled in supplemental schools continues to increase (a recent estimate was that 1000 children have passed through), and Silberstein estimated that every year 10 percent of them move on to attend day schools.

Silberstein observed that the most recent Israeli arrivals are more comfortable than their predecessors in thinking of themselves as immigrants, and likelier to join the outreach programs at earlier stages of their families' development. The recent changes in government brought about by the 1992 elections in Israel may, however, serve to alter this course. Israelis who previously felt freer to say that they "had" to leave Israel for ideological reasons of disillusionment and despair may either need a new justification or may even feel freer to return; on the other hand, Israelis whose political heroes were voted out of office may become the next pool of migrants, or at least may have acquired a new basis on which to justify their migration. Whether and how this may affect the future of the outreach program in New York remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that this model will produce, among other things, a cohort of second-generation Israelis who have been challenged to integrate their "Israeliness" with their Jewishness and with their identity as Americans.

Conclusion

As we have seen from these brief community sketches, Israeli-Americans across North America are in many ways at an important crossroads. Increasingly located in an interim "fuzzy zone" that lies somewhere on the continuum between visitors from abroad and full-fledged immigrants, they appear to be newly open to concerns about the connection between their Israeli identity and their Jewish identity. For some, it is part of a larger trend toward spirituality and religion that can be seen around the globe. For others, it is a life-cycle phenomenon that they share with other parents of Jewish children as they watch their sons and daughters grapple with their own identities. (Indeed, it is only fair to note that raising children to have a strong but nonreligious Israeli identity may prove to be a better bulwark against intermarriage and assimilation than what many unaffiliated American-Jewish parents have transmitted to their offspring.) For still others, it represents a coming-to-terms with a homeland whose national character and purpose is less focused and less unified than it appeared to be thirty years ago. But for all of these Israelis, taking tentative steps to locate and define their Jewish selves is the beginning of a process that can ultimately bring them closer to Jews everywhere, including in Israel.

While we have presented here most of what is already known about Israelis in America, there is a great deal of research that needs to be done before the portrait is complete. Missing are more precise and updated demographic and social data on the Israeli communities of North America, as well as more information about the stages Israelis undergo as they make the gradual transition from thinking of themselves as visitors or sojourners to seeing themselves as long-term residents, immigrants, and parents of American-born Jews. Among the many specific areas and questions that need to be researched and understood more thoroughly are:

- What is the nature and degree of formal and informal contact and organization within Israeli enclaves, including variation by gender and age? Most importantly, what is the basis of this cohesiveness? Is it primarily common language and culture, common sense of outsider status, common approach to religion, business or professional ties, or other factors which such research may uncover?

- What is the extent and role of "intermarriage" (and subsequent divorces) between Israeli Jews and American Jews, and how does this affect the Jewish identities of both parents and their children?

- What is the process through which sojourners become settlers, psychologically and sociologically, and what implications does this have for Jewish identity and affiliation?

- How do Israelis perceive American Jews as individuals, and does this change with younger generations? Additionally and specifically, what is taught about American Jews and their Jewishness in the burgeoning "Israeli school" movement and, conversely, what is the current state of teaching about Israel and Israeli Jews in American-Jewish day schools and supplemental schools?

From the policy perspective, the changes that have already occurred must be followed by more discussion and more difficult decisions among Jewish community leaders. Nobody

knows, for example, which Israelis and what proportion are completely unconnected to any formal or informal programs and networks. It is also unknown whether this is by choice or due to lack of information. This leads to an echo of the same question that is frequently posed on behalf of unaffiliated American Jews:

- How much communal time and energy should be devoted to seeking out "unaffiliated Israelis" when there is still much to be done with those Israelis who have shown an interest in being part of the larger community?

Some other questions that need to be addressed by policymakers:

- The popular Zabar movement still encourages army service and *aliyah* for children of Israelis, whereas the American Jewish communal organizations promote support for Israel of a more diffuse nature and emphasize Jewish identity. If these goals are in conflict, how important is it that they be resolved so that parents and teachers, *shlihim* and rabbis, can speak to American-Israeli youth with one voice?

- Israelis themselves, and the American Jewish communal workers who deal with them, tend increasingly to compare the "treatment" and "absorption" of Israelis with that of Soviet and other Jewish immigrants. Is it possible to resolve this conflict in a way that does not further divide the Jewish community, yet continues to promote *aliyah* as an attractive option for all Jews in the Diaspora?

Dialogue between American Jewish leadership and the Israeli government must go even further in open discussion about the needs of this population and who shall provide them. A mere softening of the "hard line" is not sufficient if these Israeli-Americans are to become full participants in the American Jewish community and in its staunch support of Israel.

We need also to identify emerging leaders of the Israeli-Jewish community (as was done in Los Angeles), and to support them in the building of such a community, and especially to ensure that such a community is closely linked to the American Jewish world through common concerns and goals.

Current and future programming must take into account the conflicting goals and contradictory self-images that many Israelis bring with them, as well as the ambivalence and denial inherent in the American-Jewish perspective that has also long been a part of the encounter. It would appear that the most successful programs are those that are grounded in bilateral sharing of approaches and resources, and that focus ultimately on transmitting Jewish education and identity to the next generation. Those that call on maximal involvement of Israelis themselves in the planning and implementation stages are also most effective. A newly established example of such programming comes from Philadelphia, where a pilot class called Shorashim takes place twice a week at a local synagogue. The teacher and founder of the class, interviewed recently, noted the importance of holding the class at the synagogue, where Israeli families can become comfortable with the idea of synagogue involvement even as their children perfect their Hebrew and learn Israeli songs, dances, and games. Also important to this program is the fact that its support, financial and moral, comes not only from Israeli parents and from the synagogue's rabbi and educational director, but also from Federation, the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education, and the Israeli consulate.

Specifically, we need to move away from policies and programs that:

- ignore Israelis in America or pressure them to return home;
- focus on their *yerida*, speculating on its origins and monitoring its aspect of self-deception;
- view them solely as a source of language expertise for ourselves and our children;
- view their Israeli approach to Jewishness as a given that is not subject to reexamination and adaptation.

Instead, we must continue to introduce and develop policies and programs which:

- view them as equal partners and not as beneficiaries of our economic largesse and perceived greater wisdom;
- ascribe to them the same needs that all contemporary Jews have: for community, for sharing traditional values with their children, for a special connection to a common homeland, and for a role in the larger spiritual search for meaning in which we are all compelled to participate.

Future directions must incorporate an awareness of the diversity within the Israeli community -- in age, ethnic and socioeconomic background, political orientation, and religious practice -- and also a recognition of the fact that the Israel they come from is not the Israel of our American-Jewish communal nostalgia. They are not the "typical" Israelis of the old stereotype; nor indeed is the American Jewish community exactly what it once was. More open dialogue, more experimentation, and more fine-tuning of programs will be required, even as we face the prospect of less budgetary support for them.

It has already been noted that, in spite of the stereotypes about Israeli secularism and American Jewish "civil religion," many if not most American Jews now receive the bulk of their Hebrew-Judaic education from the hundreds of Israeli teachers staffing Hebrew schools and Sunday schools across the United States.[11] It is time, therefore, to extrapolate from the cultural confrontation that already exists in our classrooms and to move it out into the open so that we can all benefit from the interaction and the exchange. American-born Jews need Israelis to help open our eyes to the beauty of the Hebrew language and its ancient and modern literature, and to remind us of the original vibrancy of our national festivals. As some of these front-line Israeli teachers have begun to realize, Israeli Jews need to learn from the Americans how to develop a valuable and satisfying community life and how to retain the richness of our religious heritage that nourishes even when reworked into contemporary modes and experiences. By pushing beyond the stereotypes, we can work together to give all of our children a truly enduring heritage.

Notes

1. Core Jews are defined as either born Jewish (currently claiming Judaism as a religious or ethnic identity) or converted to Judaism.

2. This often-quoted figure comes from a study by R. Lamdany undertaken for the Kalk Institute for Economic Research. More recent figures from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics distinguish among individuals who have left Israel for one year, two years or more, and four years or more. Matti Golan (1992) cites a forecast from Mordechai Lipman, secretary-general of the Council to Combat *Yerida*, that by the year 2000 more than 800,000 Israelis will have left the country.

3. This range is based on the count of Israeli immigrants from 1951 to 1986 made by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, plus the estimated number of immigrants in 1948-50, plus U.S. Census Bureau estimates of illegal Israeli residents and legal nonimmigrants, and minus an estimated rate of Israeli emigration out of the United States. Demographer Pini Herman (1988) notes further that U.S. Census counts exclude Israeli nationals born elsewhere, but it includes such nonimmigrants as students, consular personnel, and other "long-term Israeli-born visitors," and also non-Jewish Israeli-born immigrants.

Israeli estimates of the number of Israelis in the United States (by Shmuel Lahis for the Jewish Agency) claimed an upper range as high as 500,000 by 1980 (Ritterband 1986). The *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (1980) estimated 300,000; Kass and Lipset (1982) claimed 350,000, based in part on estimates from a U.S. government official that took into account the 1970 U.S. Census Bureau report of 100,000 people in families for whom Hebrew is the main language of the home. Israeli estimates are usually the highest ones; no doubt, exaggeration for the purpose of maintaining high public awareness of the need to promote and financially support *aliyah* and re-*aliyah* has been the underlying impulse.

In addition to differences in methodologies of data-collection, there are also semantic difficulties behind the great disparity in estimates and ranges. "Who is an immigrant?" and "Who is an Israeli?" are questions every bit as vexing as "Who is a Jew?"

4. Pini Herman and Bruce Phillips, personal communication. This figure supersedes the figure of 65,000 cited in the original NJPS publication. It should also be noted that this represents an actual survey, and as such is different in nature from estimates based on analyses of administrative records.

5. According to the NJPS, 45 percent of the Israel-born Jews in the Core Jewish population live in the Northeast and 33 percent in the West, with only 2 percent in the Midwest and 19 percent in the South.

6. This was exemplified most recently by a letter in *The Jewish Journal* of Los Angeles (July 24-30, 1992), in which the Israeli author, a local Federation activist, resigned her position as an appointed member to the Bureau of Jewish Education because of her frustration and disappointment with day schools. She wrote: "[Israeli public schools] stress Jewish history, not ritual practice. Our schools taught us to respect our parents and their ways, not to criticize our parents for religious practices that might not meet the standards of zealots. . . But that is precisely what I have found in Jewish day schools in the Los Angeles community."

7. Future researchers may wish to focus on the complex process by which these Israeli teachers and their own families may ultimately be influenced by the American "Jewish identity" model, and how this may eventually come to be a conduit for the transmission of this model back to the Israeli educational system.

8. There are three in the Greater New York-New Jersey area. The others are located in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Miami, Houston, and Toronto.

9. This figure fits comfortably with the NJPS estimate of 21,450 Israeli-born Jews living in all the western states.

10. Just beyond the Greater New York area lies the New Jersey "MetroWest" area, which itself boasts a growing Israeli Division (375 families) operating within its Jewish Federation. According to a recent report, members of this Division were "outstandingly active" on a number of Federation Committees focused on economic development in Israel, "Zionist-Jewish education," and other kinds of Israel programming.

11. This reality has already led to the development of special seminars, workshops, etc. for conferences of CAJE and other educational organizations for this population of teachers, who often approach the classroom with different teaching styles and philosophies as well as different Jewish perspectives.

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