

The Impact of Aliyah on the American Jewish Community

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DURING THE LAST dozen years, only once did the annual number of American Jews who migrated to Israel—"made aliyah"—rise above 3,000. In all the other years, fewer than 3,000—and since 1985 fewer than 2,000—American Jews went on aliyah. Indeed, in the forty years since the founding of the State of Israel, there was only one year, 1971, during which slightly more than one-tenth of 1 percent of the American Jewish population, 7,364 American Jews, went on aliyah.¹

There seems no reason to doubt that the major determinants of the size of American Jewish migration to Israel are to be found in both the United States and Israel. Put simply, American Jews, individually and collectively, are rather comfortable in the United States materially, physically, and in terms of being able to express their Jewishness, and they do not feel impelled to sacrifice their comfort by migrating to Israel, where material conditions are much more restricted. American Jews are undoubtedly quite aware of both the significant numbers of American Jews who have gone on aliyah only to return to America and the large numbers of Israelis who have emigrated from Israel, many of whom have settled in the United States. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that there would be an increase in American aliyah if there were some fundamental changes in the ways organized aliyah efforts function, both institutionally and interpersonally.

THE ALIYAH SYSTEM

Institutionally, aliyah policies and efforts are designed and operated by the Aliyah Department of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). Although it may be argued that that organization represents the collective will of affiliated Zionists both in Israel and the world over, the fact is that the headquarters of the World Zionist Organization are in Jerusalem, the Zionist congresses and other bureaucratically important meetings take place in Jerusalem, Israelis are disproportionately represented in decision-making positions, and the heads of the organization's various departments are all Israelis. The Aliyah Department of the World Zionist Organization appoints directors for its aliyah departments in various countries, and appoints emissaries (*shlichim*) to service aliyah needs at regional and local levels. All of these appointees are Israelis who volunteer to serve in Diaspora communities for two or three years. One consequence of this arrangement is that, essentially, all of the policies and programs designed to stimulate and foster aliyah from the Diaspora to Israel are designed and implemented not by the communities of potential *olim* (immigrants to Israel) but by Israelis.

The sources of this arrangement are to be found both in Israel and in the Diaspora communities of the free world. On the one hand, both before the establishment of the State of Israel and during its early years, Jewish leaders in the Diaspora communities of the West were more than happy to leave the task of aliyah promotion to the WZO and Israelis. They, after all, were rather comfortable in their Diaspora communities and did not want to become involved in any activities that might have put their loyalty to their own countries and communities in question. Although there was greater receptivity to aliyah after the Six Day War, the situation concerning aliyah promotion did not change, because by then the WZO had grown suspicious of Diaspora leaders, did not believe that they would sincerely promote aliyah, and had become very protective of the element that it deemed to be the heart of Zionism, aliyah. The WZO came to believe that it had a rightful monopoly over aliyah promotion. All of this presented problems and complications on several levels.

Beginning with the emissary (*shaliach*) himself (or herself), the very fact that he is an outsider in the community to which he is assigned limits his ability to carry out his assignment productively. Israel and the United States are very different countries, and

Jewishness, including Judaism, is institutionalized and organized very differently in Israel than it is in the United States. All too often, the shaliach arrives in the United States with little knowledge of American culture and even less knowledge of and more disdain for the American Jewish community. It frequently takes about a year to acquire sufficient working understanding of these and another year to become acclimated to working within the American Jewish sphere. By then, the shaliach is already looking forward to his return to Israel and beginning to wind down his activities here. Obviously this is not always the case. When feasible, the Aliyah Department attempts to recruit American olim as shlichim, but such instances are the exception rather than the rule.

Not only are the shlichim often unfamiliar with important aspects of American culture and the American Jewish community, they are also frequently unfamiliar with important aspects of Israeli society and culture, such as specific regulations and procedures concerning housing, employment, education, and other matters important to potential olim.² As Gerald Berman found in his study of experiences with and opinions about shlichim,

A full one-half of the respondents complained about the information they received as being vague, inaccurate, insufficient, etc., and one-fourth referred to the indifferent attitude of the shaliach regarding the respondent's aliyah. Other areas of dissatisfaction mentioned somewhat frequently were poor handling of various types of arrangements (visas, housing, shipping, loans, and others), unavailability and inaccessibility of the shaliach, and personal qualities of the shaliach.³

Aliyah is not the only area in which the WZO utilizes shlichim. The Youth and Hechalutz Department sends shlichim to service local Zionist youth movements and to represent Israel in Jewish community programs. The WZO's education departments, both religious and secular, send shlichim to serve in Jewish schools. All told, the WZO sends some 277 shlichim to North America and another 455 to other countries. Providing shlichim is only one of the functions of the WZO. It has many others, both outside Israel and within. Inside Israel, the activities and programs of the WZO are carried out by its arm called the Jewish Agency for Israel.

In February 1981, the board of governors of the Jewish Agency met at the Dan Caesarea Hotel to deal with a number of organiza-

tional problems that had plagued the Agency for years. These problems were felt to be particularly acute by the Agency's "non-Zionist" partners, that is, the heads of community federations and other fund-raising institutions in the Diaspora, especially the United States. Among the complaints of the Diaspora leaders was that they were not true partners. They expressed a sense of powerlessness and decried Israeli domination in areas where they officially had decision-making powers. As a result of this meeting, the board of governors undertook a process of internal review that came to be known as the "Caesarea Process." The plan was to carefully review the operations of the Agency and to arrive at a systematic method of making changes in its overall governance, management, and budget, as well as in the ways it performed its functions of education and aliyah.⁴

One of the commissions established in the Caesarea Process, and the one that most directly bears on the subject of this paper, was the Commission on Aliyah. Cochaired by Irwin Field, who had served as general chairman and president of the United Jewish Appeal before becoming chairman of the United Israel Appeal, and Yosef Shapiro, an official of the WZO Aliyah Department and a political activist from Israel's National Religious Party, the commission declared that aliyah from all countries, free or not, "is of equal importance to individuals, to Diaspora Jewish communities and to Israel."⁵ It recommended that an interdepartmental committee be established within WZO to coordinate all aliyah resources and activities. Its major recommendation was for what might be called "maximum feasible participation" of Diaspora communities in promoting aliyah and in providing assistance to olim from their respective communities.⁶ Within that context, the Council of Jewish Federations undertook to help establish five aliyah pilot projects—in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Miami, Milwaukee, and Toronto—with the active participation of federation leaders in those communities. How much the WZO and federations will actually cooperate and the impact that these pilot projects will have remain to be seen. At the very least, the principle of mutual responsibility for aliyah has been established.

The Caesarea Process was not the only recent critique of the Jewish Agency and the WZO. Responding to the tremendous expense and the growing complaints in both the United States and Israel about the shlichim system, the chairman of the WZO executive, Arye Dulzin, in September 1984 appointed a commission,

headed by former Israeli chief justice Moshe Landau, to study the system and to recommend changes. The Landau Commission's report, submitted in December 1985, called for sweeping changes in the system of Zionist *shlichut* ("emissaryism").⁷ Many of the specified weaknesses in the system were related to factors other than aliyah shlichim. With respect to aliyah shlichim, the commission was critical of political pressures to have a particular candidate sent as a shaliach. The Americans on the WZO executive related the most common complaints about the system as it functioned in the United States, along with their recommendations. According to Bernice Tannenbaum, chair of the WZO–American Section, there was a consensus on nine points:

1. There are too many shlichim based at 515 Park Avenue (the headquarters of the WZO–American Section in New York City), and some of them do clerical work rather than working in the field.
2. Each shaliach may cost \$75,000–\$100,000 annually. Local personnel might be able to perform many of their duties at less cost.
3. Most shlichim are not sufficiently fluent in English when they arrive, and it takes many of them a full year to become effective linguistically. Fluency in English should be a basic criterion of selection.
4. Shlichim are not adequately briefed prior to their arrival and frequently have no chance to meet with their predecessors. They often have to start learning the job from scratch.
5. Political-party affiliation is not a sufficient basis for selection. Appointments should be based on personal and professional qualifications.
6. Whenever possible, shlichim should be used to represent all WZO interests within a community rather than a single interest.
7. Shlichim are often uninformed about the structure and style of the American Jewish community, and about the religious and cultural pluralism that exists in the United States. They come with religious and/or political biases that limit their effectiveness to others who believe as they do. Shlichim should be intensively educated about the totality of life in the United States prior to their arrival.
8. Meetings in Israel with American olim from the community to

be served would help the shaliach better understand the problems of that particular community.

9. Frequently, the number of shlichim is out of proportion to the numbers of people they will be serving.⁸

THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE

It is still too early to determine whether the recommendations of the Landau Commission will be implemented by the WZO. However, even if one were to forget the long history of that organization and assume that the recommendations will be implemented, it is doubtful that any or all of the changes will influence the rate of American aliyah. The reality is that many of the constituent organizations of the American Zionist Federation (AZF), the regional branch of the WZO, do not actively promote aliyah. Most pay only lip service to it, while some don't do even that. It is not mere coincidence that, in conjunction with the AZF's First Zionist Assembly in January 1987, the AZF produced a button that read "Real Zionists Pay Dues." Manifestly, this slogan was part of the rhetoric involved in the campaign to enlist new members in Zionist organizations, which was one facet of the political struggle that played itself out in the subsequent World Zionist Congress. But the slogan also revealed a basic truth of American Zionism, namely, that to be a "real Zionist" one need not go on aliyah nor even be committed to aliyah as an imperative; one need only pay dues to an American Zionist organization. As that assembly turned out, the direct involvement of such aliyah activist organizations as Tehillah, Telem, Hamagshimim, Tagar, and the North American Aliyah Movement, as well as the leadership of the Israel Aliyah Center, resulted in the AZF's coordinating one of the largest and most explicitly aliyah-oriented national conferences in its history. If it takes such pressure to move official Zionist organizations to clearly affirm and support aliyah, it would indeed be surprising if those that are not officially Zionist did so.

It is difficult to imagine that aliyah will ever be a high priority on the American Jewish communal agenda. It also seems highly improbable that there will be any radical increase in the number of American Jews who go on aliyah. Most American Jews probably agree that a strong aliyah orientation entails—as Israel's senior sociologist, S. N. Eisenstadt, said of immigration in general—a sense of dissatisfaction with one's present setting.⁹ They do not feel

any inadequacies in the United States or, at least, any that would not be at least equally present in Israel. Moreover, the heads of most American Jewish organizations probably resist publicly professing support for aliyah lest they be accused of being less than completely loyal to the United States and lest their organizations lose their tax-exempt status.

Another cause of the lack of communal involvement in aliyah promotion has been the fear that aliyah might weaken American Jewry by helping Israel siphon off the best of the future leadership of the American Jewish community. That fear was based upon a number of presumptions, the first being that Americans who go on aliyah possess greater leadership potential than others. To determine the plausibility, let alone the validity, of that fear, it is pertinent to review the available empirical evidence relating to the social characteristics of American olim.

PROFILING THE AMERICAN OLIM

Regional Origins

American immigrants to Israel tend to be representative of the American Jewish population as a whole in terms of the regions from which they come (see Table 1). Although Antonovsky and Katz, in

Table 1
Regional Origins of American Olim

Region	American Jewish population, 1981 (%)	American olim, 1969-70 (%)	American olim 1970-74 (%)
Northeast	56.9	66.2	56
North Central	11.6	12.8	10
South	16.3	9.7	6
West	15.1	11.3	20
Total	99.9	100.0	92

Sources: For the American Jewish population, *American Jewish Year Book 1982* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1982), p. 169; for American olim, 1969-70, Calvin Goldscheider, "American Aliyah: Sociological and Demographic Perspective," in M. Sklare, ed., *The Jew in American Society* (New York: Behrman House, 1974), p. 359; for American olim, 1970-74, Gerald S. Berman, *The Experience of Aliyah Among Recently Arrived North American Olim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Work and Welfare Research Institute, 1977), table 1, p. 19. The 1970-74 figures total 92 percent because they do not include the 8 percent of Berman's sample who were Canadians.

their study of pre-1967 American olim, reported that they came disproportionately from the New York City area,¹⁰ Goldscheider compared the regional origins of 1969–70 olim with the regional distribution of the U.S. Jewish population at that time and found them to be “remarkably” similar, about 65 percent of the olim coming from the northeast, 12.5 percent from the north central region, 10 percent from the south, and 12 percent from the west.¹¹ In 1976, Gerald Berman conducted a study of North Americans (about 8 percent of whom were Canadians) who had arrived in Israel between 1970 and 1974, and found a significant increase in the percentage of those from the west—20 percent—and decreases in the percentages of those from other regions of the United States.¹² Comparing his findings with the regional distribution of Jews in the United States in 1981, we notice that the percentages of American olim from the northeast and north central regions are almost exactly the same as the percentages of the Jewish population living in those regions. On the other hand, the west is overrepresented and the south is underrepresented. The reasons for this are unknown. Perhaps because the west is a newer region for American Jews, those who live there are less tied to it and more likely to contemplate moving. Similarly, because the south is generally regarded as more conservative than the west, southern Jews may be less likely to venture on aliyah. The different rates of aliyah may also reflect regional differences in what Antonovsky and Katz termed Zionist and Jewish variables. All of this, of course, is speculation.

Generational Status

Data from a number of surveys suggest that the vast majority of American olim are American-born, and that the size of that majority is increasing. Thus Goldscheider found 30.4 percent of the American immigrants in his 1969–70 study to have been “first generation,” that is, not native-born Americans.¹³ Harry Jubas conducted a study of olim in 1967–71 using a much larger, though not necessarily more representative, sample than Goldscheider’s, and he found that 25 percent were not “native-born American men and women.”¹⁴ Kevin Avruch, surveying American olim in Jerusalem in 1968–76, found that 14 percent were not native-born.¹⁵ Berman’s study of 1970–74 olim found that 9 percent were not native-born.¹⁶ According to Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics, there were 74,775 immigrants and potential immigrants between 1948 and 1986 whose last

country of residence was the United States. Of those, 57,564, or about 77 percent, were born in the United States. Of the North American immigrants and potential immigrants who arrived in 1986, 84.6 percent were born in North America.¹⁷ The high percentage of American-born among these olim is understandable, given their relatively young ages, as will be indicated shortly. Also, the increasing size of the native-born group probably reflects the growing percentage of the American Jewish population that is native-born.

Age

As Goldscheider points out, immigrants to Israel, in general, tend to be young, and there is hardly any difference between the average ages of the American and other immigrants. Thus the American olim are usually under 35. The median age of the 1969–70 American olim was 25.9, compared to the median age of the Jewish population in the United States in 1957, which was 36.7.¹⁸ Since then, the disparity has grown considerably wider. In 1984, 68.6 percent of the immigrants and potential immigrants from North America were younger than 35, and the median age of all immigrants and potential immigrants was 23.4, whereas the median age of the American Jewish population in 1982 was 49.¹⁹

Sex

Antonovsky and Katz reported a majority of females in their study of pre-1967 American immigrants.²⁰ In Berman's survey of 1970–74 North American olim, the majority, 60.1 percent, was male.²¹ However, since he was studying olim who were employed full-time, his was a purposive rather than a representative sample. The special nature of his sample accounts as well for the variances in his findings with respect to other demographic characteristics. Most post-1967 studies have found female majorities. Goldscheider found that in the younger age groups, those in which American immigrants tend to be concentrated, there were more women than men, but that among immigrants in early middle age and those 65 and older, males predominated. Recent data from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that, among young immigrants and potential immigrants through age 9, there are also somewhat more males than females.²²

The persistence of female predominance in all except the youngest and oldest age categories would seem to call into question the view of Antonovsky and Katz that American Jewish males are less likely than females to undertake aliyah because they are engaged in studies and careers. In recent years American Jewish females have been no less engaged.²³ The educational and career activities of American Jewish males and females do not seem to be sufficiently different today to account for the overrepresentation of females among American olim.

Alternatively, the overrepresentation of females among the American immigrants to Israel may be related to the possibility that American Jewish women are more supportive than men of the policies of the government of Israel. As Jay Brodbar-Nemzer found in his analysis of Steven Cohen's data from the 1981–82 National Survey of American Jews.

. . . in groups in which we would expect this sex difference to disappear (the highly liberal, the nonobservant, the young, the highly educated, full-time participants in the labor force), we *still* find that a higher proportion of women than men profess attitudes that are consistent with current Israeli government policy. . . .

The women in this sample were more likely than men to manifest a fundamental insecurity over the status of American Jewry. Women were less likely than men to agree that "there is a bright future for Jewish life in America" (66 percent versus 75 percent), and that "virtually all positions of influence in America were open to Jews" (28 percent versus 38 percent).²⁴

If American Jewish women are in fact more supportive and less critical of Israeli government policy, and if they are in fact less optimistic about the future of Jewish life in America, Brodbar-Nemzer may have provided an explanation for the greater receptivity of American Jewish women to aliyah.

Marriage and Family

As might be expected from the relative youthfulness of American olim, there is a greater proportion of singles among them than there is in the Jewish population of the United States. Even with the increasing rate of singles in the American Jewish population, they

are still a relatively small minority.²⁵ Among American olim, however, according to the 1986 data of the Central Bureau of Statistics, more than half of North American immigrants and potential immigrants 20 and older that year were single.²⁶ The high proportion of young and singles among American olim, according to Goldscheider, reflects the fact that the young and single have the greatest freedom of movement. Greater freedom of movement also explains why there is a larger proportion of widowers than of widows among American olim.²⁷

In view of the fact that the current birthrate of American Jews is low compared to what it was in the past and to the overall U.S. birthrate,²⁸ it is interesting that the average family size of American olim is larger than the average for all olim. While the average family size for all olim is 3.0, for North American olim it is 3.6.²⁹

Education

If the educational attainment of pre-1967 American olim was high compared to the average of Israeli society, the educational attainment of post-1967 olim is even larger. We know that American Jews have achieved high levels of education,³⁰ but it does not follow that the educational attainment of American olim would be as high as that of the overall Jewish population since, according to Antonovsky and Katz, young American Jews committed to education and careers would seem least likely to emigrate. As Goldscheider points out, "the relatively small number of olim from United States precludes any real quantitative impact of educational and occupational selectivity on the American Jewish community."³¹ Nevertheless, we can compare the educational attainment of American olim to that of the American Jewish population and of the Jewish population in Israel, as well as of other olim. When we do so we see that, in 1970, the percentage of the adult Jewish population in Israel that graduated college was 5.6; among all adult olim it was 17.7; among the adult Jewish population in the United States it was 32.5; whereas among adult American olim it was 41.7.³²

The educational attainment of American olim does not seem surprising when we compare it to that of segments of the American Jewish population similar to the olim in age and generational status. While there are no recent national Jewish educational data broken down by age and generation cohorts, such data are available from the Boston Jewish community in 1965 and 1975. They reveal

that, in Boston in 1965, the percentage of college graduates among those 21–25 and 25–34 was extremely high, some 90 percent. Precise comparisons with 1975 are difficult since the age cohorts are not identical (in 1975 the cohort was 18–24), but the 1975 data suggest increasing educational attainment.³³ The trend manifested in Boston may reflect that in the national Jewish population.

Occupations

Along with high educational attainment, American olim come to Israel with high occupational status (see Table 2). In 1970, there was a considerably higher percentage of both male and female professionals among American olim than among all olim and among the Jewish population in the United States in 1970. While figures for the American Jewish population in the 1980s are not yet available, those for all olim in 1986 are, and they indicate a continuing if not growing high percentage of professionals among the North American olim (see Tables 3–4).

Table 2
Occupational Distribution of American Olim, 1970

Occupation	American Jewish population (%)		American olim (%)		Total olim (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Professionals	29.3	23.8	62.5	66.9	39.0	47.3
Managers and proprietors	40.7	15.5	4.1	0.7	1.8	4.7
Clerical	3.2	41.7	5.1	27.2	11.1	29.0
Sales	14.2	8.3	10.3	1.1	16.0	2.9
Blue-collar	11.0	7.6	17.9	4.1	32.1	16.1
Unknown	1.7	3.1	—	—	—	—
Total	100.1	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: Adapted from Sidney Goldstein, "Jews in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book 1981* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1981), table 9, p. 54, and Calvin Goldscheider "American Aliya: Sociological and Demographic Perspective," in M. Sklare, ed., *The Jew in American Society* (New York: Behrman House, 1974), table 11, p. 372.

Table 3
Continents of Origin and Occupations Abroad, Olim Aged 15 and Over, 1986

Occupation	Latin America	North America	Europe	Asia-Africa	Total
Scientific and academic	157	364	630	112	1,267
Other professional, technical, related	147	366	458	146	1,118
Managers, clerical	81	127	283	133	627
Sales, service	82	77	136	119	414
Agriculture	2	9	18	4	33
Skilled	38	58	200	112	408
Unskilled	2	1	24	4	31
Unknown	74	161	219	275	731
Total employed	583	1,163	1,968	905	4,629
Total unemployed	535	603	1,146	752	3,046
Unknown	1	7	9	20	43
Total	1,119	1,773	3,123	1,677	7,718

Source: Adapted from Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Immigration to Israel 1986*, Special Series No. 808 (Jerusalem, 1987), table 21, p. 26.

Political Behavior

That the majority of the American immigrants in the 1970s were Democrats is also not surprising, given the political patterns of the Jewish population in the United States.³⁴ However, the extremely small size of the Republican minority is surprising. In his 1972 and 1975 studies of American olim, Zvi Gitelman found that 57 percent had been Democrats; about 41 percent had been independents, the majority tending toward the Democrats; and only 2 percent had been Republicans. Almost 40 percent stated that they had participated in peace or antiwar demonstrations.³⁵

While America's Jews have had a tradition of liberal-to-left political behavior, there was an overrepresentation of such politics among American olim. Gitelman's are the only studies available of the political beliefs and behavior of American olim, and it is difficult to determine whether the patterns he found were typical. One reason they might not be typical is that these olim probably made their aliyah decisions during the 1960s, when there was widespread criticism, especially among the young, of American society, and when identification with the Republican party among young, urban, highly educated American Jews was very low.

However, that does not seem to explain the very low rate of

Table 4
Occupational Distribution of North American Olim and Israeli Jewish Labor Force, 1984

Occupation	North American olim (%)	Jewish Israelis (%)
Scientific and academic	33.3	8.7
Other professional, technical, related	33.4	15.9
Administrators and managers	1.5	5.1
Clerical and related	9.2	19.8
Sales	6.2	7.9
Service	1.2	12.0
Agriculture	1.0	4.4
Skilled blue-collar	6.1	23.3
Semiskilled and unskilled	0.3	2.9
Unknown	7.8	—
Total	100.0	100.0

Sources: Adapted from Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Immigration to Israel 1984*, table 18, p. 22, and *Statistical Abstract of Israel 1984*, no. 35, table XII/17, pp. 348–349.

affiliation with the Republican party, since most of the American olim in Gitelman's surveys were not radicals. On the contrary, they tended to have somewhat conservative political views. For example, the vast majority agreed that "blacks in America have gone too far in their demands," and most of the 1972 respondents agreed that "everything considered, life in the U.S. was better ten years ago."³⁶

Also, there is some evidence that the patterns Gitelman found were not unique to those years. In my own study of Americans who immigrated to Israel up to early 1984 and who settled in Judea, Samaria, or the Gaza Strip, not one stated that he or she had been a Republican; virtually all had been Democrats, liberals, independents, or unaffiliated.³⁷ It appears that American Jews affiliated with the Republican party are much less likely than Democrats to go on aliyah. Why this is so, if in fact it is so, remains to be explained.

Zionist Organization Membership

Even among pre-1967 American olim, there was evidence of a decline, from prestate to early-state years, in the rate of membership in Zionist organizations while in America. Up to the mid-1960s, the majority of olim had been members of Zionist organizations.³⁸ For the post-1967 olim, there is conflicting evidence, some

studies indicating that those who had been members of Zionist organizations were in the minority. Among those in Goldscheider's 1969–70 survey, only 50.7 percent stated that they had previously been members of Zionist organizations, 11.4 percent of them nonactive. The rate of Zionist-organization membership decreased generationally to a point where, among third-generation American olim, 60.4 percent had been nonmembers.³⁹ For the 1967–71 olim studied by Jubas, the decline was even sharper, with approximately 60 percent indicating that they had not previously been members of Zionist organizations.⁴⁰ By the 1970s, in surveys by Gerald Berman of 1970–74 and 1976 North American olim, only about a third had been members of Zionist organizations.⁴¹

On the other hand, Kevin Avruch, in his study of American olim from the years 1968–76 who were residents of Jerusalem, found 61 percent to have been either active or not-so-active members of Zionist organizations and only 39 percent to have been nonmembers.⁴² However, it is fair to assume that Americans residing in Jerusalem are not representative of all American olim in Israel. If nothing else, the Jerusalemites tend to be older, and one would expect a higher rate of Zionist-organization affiliation among them.

The declining rate of Zionist-organization affiliation among American olim is probably a reflection of both their youth—there has been an overall steady decline in Jewish organizational affiliation along generational lines in the United States—and the decline of Zionist organizations in the United States. Young American olim who did not see their futures within the American Jewish community probably saw no reason to formally affiliate with a Zionist organization. They didn't need the organizational affiliation to operationalize their Zionism; they did that by planning and making aliyah.

Jewish Education

A common finding of all studies is that American olim arrive in Israel with more extensive Jewish education than is typical of the Jewish population in the United States. About 60 percent of American Jewish children receive no formal Jewish education, whereas less than 20 percent of American olim had none. On the other hand, 26.3 percent of that 40 percent of American Jewish children who received some formal Jewish education in 1974–75 were enrolled in

day schools, while more than a third of the olim had at least a day-school education.⁴³

Denominational Affiliation

In analyzing the denominational affiliations of America's Jews in 1971, Bernard Lazerwitz found that 11 percent identified with the Orthodox, 42 percent with Conservative, 33 percent with Reform, and that 14 percent had no denominational affiliation. By contrast, both Goldscheider and Jubas found that 37–42 percent of the American olim in their surveys identified as Orthodox. The percentage of Orthodox among these American olim is also higher than among those in Engel's 1950–66 sample and much higher than among prestate American olim. The reasons for the high proportion of Orthodox among American olim relate to the condition of Orthodox Judaism in the United States, but that is beyond the scope of this article.⁴⁴

There is also an overrepresentation of persons self-defined as "other" (neither Conservative nor Reform) or nonaffiliated among the American olim—20 percent, compared to the 14 percent nonaffiliated in the American Jewish population. On the other hand, there is an underrepresentation of Conservative and, especially, Reform Jews among the olim (see Table 5).

In their study of older immigrants in Israeli society, Sheldon Lache and colleagues found that almost three-fourths of the middle-aged and retired North American olim they interviewed classified themselves as "religious." However, these researchers used the prevalent Israeli categories "religious," "traditional," and "nonreligious."⁴⁵ This categorization is inappropriate for American Jewry, among whom Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform might identify themselves as "religious." On the other hand, since it is doubtful that an Israeli researcher would classify most Conservative and Reform Jews as "religious," the data of Lache and colleagues confirm that a disproportionately high percentage of American olim are Orthodox.

Goldscheider found that patterns among the American olim "of overconcentration and selectivity among religious and Orthodox Jews relative to the American Jewish population"⁴⁶ also manifested themselves in their patterns of synagogue attendance and ritual observance. Specifically, among the olim the rate of synagogue

Table 5
Denominational Distribution of U.S. Jewry and North American Olim

Denomination	U.S. Jewry, 1971 (%)	U.S. olim, 1969-70 (%)	U.S. olim, 1967-71 (%)	North American olim, 1970-74 (%)
Orthodox	11	42	37	37.1
Conservative	42	24	29	26.2
Reform	33	14	12	10.5
Other/nonaffiliated	14	20	20	26.1
No answer	—	—	2	—
Total	100	100	100	99.9

Sources: U.S. Jewry, from Chaim I. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), pp. 184-185; 1969-70 olim, from Calvin Goldscheider, "American Aliyah: Sociological and Demographic Perspective," in M. Sklare, ed., *The Jew in American Society* (New York: Behrman House, 1974), table 14, p. 380; 1967-71 olim, from Harry Lieb Jubas, "The Adjustment Process of Americans and Canadians in Israel and Their Integration into Israeli Society," (Ph.D. diss., Department of Secondary Education and Curriculum, Michigan State University, 1974, table 4.13, p. 105; 1970-74 olim, from Gerald S. Berman, *The Work Adjustment of North American Immigrants in Israel* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Work and Welfare Research Institute, 1978), table 3, p. 30. Berman's sample includes 8 percent Canadians. Also, 4.9 percent who identified as "traditional" are here included among "other."

attendance and observance of such rituals as fasting on Yom Kippur and dietary regulations was disproportionately high when compared to the rates for the Jewish population of the United States.

Data from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics likewise indicate the disproportionate religiosity of American olim and the increasing proportion of the religiously observant among them. Of the 1978-80 North American olim, a majority, 54.0 percent, identified themselves as "religious," 20.8 percent as "traditional," 11.3 percent as "not very religious," and only 13.9 percent as "not religious at all."⁴⁷

It has been reported that "of the [approximately] 1,900 [olim] who arrived from the United States [in 1986] more than 1,200 are Orthodox Jews and the remainder defined themselves as somewhat religiously observant, etc."⁴⁸ This report is consistent with estimates of the assistant director of the Aliyah Department of the World Zionist Organization-American Section,⁴⁹ and others connected with that department, that about 60 percent of current American olim are Orthodox.⁵⁰

A CHANGE OF HEART?

In sum, we see that American olim are relatively young; highly educated, both Jewishly and secularly; and have very strong Jewish commitments. We can thus understand the fears of the American Jewish communal leadership that this emigration was depriving the community of future leaders, not unlike the "brain drain" of British doctors to the United States during the 1950s and 1960s,⁵¹ and the more recently discussed "brain drain" of Israelis who study in the United States,⁵² although the evidence suggests that the impact of these "brain drains" was much less than initially anticipated.⁵³

With the Caesarea Process and the launching of the five aliyah pilot projects by the Council of Jewish Federations, the situation changed significantly. For the first time, aliyah was officially defined as strengthening rather than weakening American Jewry. And the available evidence indicates that this new definition of aliyah is in fact correct. American Jews who go on aliyah tend to retain their ties with friends and relatives in the United States. They also tend to retain and even strengthen their self-identification as Americans. As an elite group in Israel, they have the potential for introducing American norms and values into Israeli society, thereby reducing the culture gap between American Jewry and Israel. In a variety of other ways, they increase the ties between American Jews and Israel, which, in turn, tends to increase the Jewish identification and communal involvement of American Jews. And, if and when American olim return to the United States, they become assets to the Jewish communities where they live.⁵⁴ Whether the expressions of support for aliyah by American Jewish communal leaders are sincere remains to be seen. If the past is any indication, their new support may be based on their awareness that aliyah from the United States will probably remain small in any event.

Even with the most sincere of intentions and the strongest moral and material support of aliyah, it is reasonable to predict that there will not be any dramatic changes in the patterns of American aliyah. American Jewish communal support will not convince anyone without the strong desire to do so to undertake aliyah. And most American Jews do not have that strong desire, both because of their structural and cultural ties to American society and because of the structural and cultural realities of Israeli society. Nevertheless, even if communal aliyah supports do no more than enable those who do wish to undertake aliyah to realize their dreams, they are more than worthwhile.

NOTES

1. The figures for American aliyah from 1950 through 1987 may be found in table 1 in my book, *American Aliya: Portrait of an Innovative Migration Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989). In fact, virtually all of the data and analyses in this article are derived from that work, which was inspired by Yehuda Rosenman, A.H.

2. Gerald S. Berman, *The Experience of Aliyah Among Recently Arrived North American Olim: The Role of the Shaliach* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Work and Welfare Institute, 1977), table 15, p. 35.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

4. For a detailed analysis of the Jewish Agency, see Daniel J. Elazer and Alysa M. Dortort, eds., *Understanding the Jewish Agency: A Handbook* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1984).

5. *Report and Recommendations of Caesarea Commission on Aliya* (Jerusalem, October 1983), p. 3.

6. *Ibid.* I borrowed the term from Title II, Part A, Section 202 (a) of the U.S. Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

7. "Report of the Public Committee for the Examination of the Emissary System of the World Zionist Organization," draft English translation (Jerusalem, December 1985), typescript.

8. Synopsis of letter from Bernice S. Tannenbaum, chair of the World Zionist Organization—American Section, to Judge Moshe Landau, Mar. 4, 1985.

9. S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Absorption of Immigrants* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), pp. 1–2.

10. Aaron Antonovsky and Abraham David Katz, *From the Golden to the Promised Land* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1979), p. 26.

11. Calvin Goldscheider, "American Aliyah: Sociological and Demographic Perspective," in M. Sklare, ed., *The Jews in American Society* (New York: Behrman House, 1974), pp. 358–359. Actually, Goldscheider's findings are not that different from those of Antonovsky and Katz. The latter indicated that the olim were disproportionately from the New York area and other big cities because they incorrectly assumed the American Jewish geographic dispersion and, especially, de-urbanization to be greater than it actually was at the time.

12. Berman, *Experience of Aliyah*, table 1, p. 19.

13. Goldscheider, "American Aliyah," p. 361.

14. Harry Lieb Jubas, "The Adjustment Process of Americans and Canadians in Israel and Their Integration into Israeli Society" (Ph.D. diss., Department of Secondary Education and Curriculum, Michigan State University, 1974), p. 98.

15. Kevin Avruch, *American Immigrants in Israel: Social Identities and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 40–41.

16. Berman, *Experience of Aliyah*, p. 19.

17. State of Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, *Immigration to Israel 1986*, Special Series No. 808 (Jerusalem, 1987), table 5, p. 9, and table 11, p. 15.
18. Goldscheider, "American Aliyah," pp. 362–363.
19. State of Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, *Immigration to Israel 1984*, Special Series No. 773 (Jerusalem, 1985), p. xi and table 10, p. 13; Neil C. Sandberg, *Jewish Life in Los Angeles* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1986), p. 22.
20. Antonovsky and Katz, *From the Golden to the Promised Land*.
21. Gerald S. Berman, *The Work Adjustment of North American Immigrants in Israel* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Work and Welfare Research Institute, 1978), table 1, p. 19.
22. See Goldscheider, "American Aliyah"; *Immigration to Israel 1984*, table 9, p. 12; and *Immigration to Israel 1986*, table 12, p. 16. The designation "early middle age" is used because there is some question about those 30–35. Goldscheider's age cohort that shows an overrepresentation of males, 54.2 percent, is 35–44. The Central Bureau of Statistics age cohorts showing an overrepresentation of males run from 30 to 44.
23. Chaim I. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), p. 14.
24. Jay Y. Brodbar-Nemzer, "Sex Differences in Attitudes of American Jews Toward Israel," *Contemporary Jewry* 8 (1987): 55; emphasis in original.
25. Steven M. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity* (New York: Tavistock, 1983), pp. 116–117.
26. *Immigration to Israel 1986*, table 13, p. 17, and table 18, p. 22.
27. Goldscheider, "American Aliyah," pp. 365–366.
28. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*, pp. 166–173.
29. *Immigration to Israel 1986*, table 18, p. 22.
30. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*, pp. 144–146.
31. Goldscheider, "American Aliyah," p. 367.
32. Ibid. and Sidney Goldstein, "Jews in the United States: Perspectives from Demography," *American Jewish Year Book 1981* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1981), p. 49.
33. Cohen, *American Modernity*, table 4 (1), p. 81.
34. For the political patterns of America's Jews, see Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*, pp. 98–103, 147–151.
35. Zvi Gitelman, *Becoming Israelis: Political Resocialization of Soviet and American Immigrants* (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 209.
36. Ibid.
37. Waxman, *American Aliya*, chap. 10.
38. Ibid., chap. 5.
39. Goldscheider, "American Aliyah," p. 377.
40. Jubas, *Adjustment Process*, table 4.11, p. 102.

41. Gerald S. Berman, "Why North Americans Migrate to Israel," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 21 (December 1979): 135–144.
42. Avruch, *American Immigrants*, pp. 50–51.
43. For American Jewry, see Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*, pp. 187–189. For the American olim, see Goldscheider, "American Aliyah," pp. 377–379; Jubas, *Adjustment Process*, table 4.17, p. 108.
44. Waxman, *American Aliya*, chap. 8.
45. S. Y. Lache, Dorota Teczniczek, Beatriz Mann, and Ron Lahav, *The Absorption Problems of Older Immigrants in Israeli Society* (Jerusalem: Henrietta Szold Institute, 1976), pp. 48–51.
46. Goldscheider, "American Aliyah," pp. 381–382.
47. State of Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, *Survey of Absorption of Immigrants: Immigrants of the Seventies—The First Three Years in Israel*, Special Series No. 771 (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 14–15. Also see Sergio DellaPergola, "Demographic Trends of Latin American Jewry," in Judith Laikin Elkin and Gilbert W. Merkx, eds., *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 126.
48. Barkai: *A Journal of Rabbinic Thought and Research* (Hebrew), no. 4, Spring 1987, p. 408.
49. Interview with Bobby Brown, Dec. 30, 1986.
50. The fact that these reports suggest a rather big jump in the percentage of Orthodox among American olim is not altogether surprising when considered along with Steven Cohen's findings of a clearcut intensification of attachment to Israel during the years 1983–86 among Orthodox American Jews, and a sharp detensification of attachment to Israel among Reform American Jews, with the level of attachment among Conservative American Jews remaining more or less the same during those years. See Steven M. Cohen, *Ties and Tensions: The 1986 Survey of American Jewish Attitudes Toward Israel and Israelis* (New York: Institute on American Jewish–Israeli Relations, American Jewish Committee, 1987), pp. 19–21.
51. See, for example, F. Bechhofer, ed., *Population Growth and the Brain Drain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969).
52. Paul Ritterband, *Education, Employment, and Migration: Israel in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 120–122.
54. Chaim I. Waxman and Michael Appel, *To Israel and Back: American Aliyah and Return Migration* (New York: American Jewish Committee, Institute on American Jewish–Israeli Relations, 1986), and Waxman, *American Aliya*.