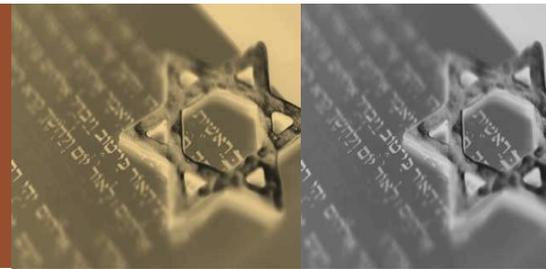


CHAPTER FIFTEEN: COMMUNITY NUMBER EIGHT THE JEWS OF AUSTRALIA



The Australian Jewish community is both sizeable and prosperous. It is rightly considered a strong community and there are those who suggest that it can serve as a model for a modern western diaspora community, balancing successful integration with a vibrant identity. Its system of day schools is considered extremely successful and it is no surprise that it has served as a magnet for tens of thousands of Jews from other communities, principally South Africa. Is this the Garden of Eden? Let's examine it. Welcome to Australia!

1. Who are the Jews of Australia? Where did they come from? How many are there? What is their geographical distribution within the country?

In 1778, England took possession of Australia, previously discovered in the 16th century and officially settled the land, despite the Aboriginal population living in the area at the time. England set up permanent structures, and created a new penal colony.

In 1788, the first fleet of convicts arrived in Botany Bay in Sydney. They had been sent there in punishment for petty crimes. At least eight, and possibly even fourteen, of these convicts were Jewish. This brief overview sets the background for the birth of the Australian Jewish community, which has subsequently grown into a strong, prosperous and successful Diaspora community of the 21st century.

Led by Joseph Marcus, a former convict, Jewish practice started in Sydney in 1817 along with the formation of the Jewish Burial Society. By 1844, the country's first synagogue had been built, and this inspired many other Jewish communities to formally establish their own congregations in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth.

It was only in 1821, however, that the first group of free Jewish settlers arrived in Australia. Reports estimate that by 1828, some 100 Jews were already living in the 'newly settled,' remote continent. By 1841, this figure had increased to 1083.

One significant event which attracted countless Jews to Australia occurred in 1850, when the gold mines were discovered. Ironically, these new Jewish immigrants were not directly involved in mining, as may have been expected. Instead, they excelled in commercial trade, setting up stores and acting as hawkers along the mining routes. Consequently, Jewish communities were established in these rural, country areas.

As the gold supplies began to decrease, these Jews decided to migrate to the cities. Sydney and Melbourne were the two major destinations. By 1861, 5486 Jews had



settled in Australia and this number greatly increased by 1901, when an estimated 15 000 Jews, namely British, were present.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the arrival of many other Jewish groups. Polish refugees in the 1920s, followed by Austrian and German Jews in the 1930s, preceded the arrival of Egyptian, Indian and Hungarian Jews in the 1940s and 1950s. In the pre and post Holocaust years many thousands of refugees from Europe arrived in the country. Furthermore, immigrants from Russia and South Africa have arrived in large numbers, greatly influencing the community's makeup in the last three to four decades.

It is estimated that 100,000 Jews currently live in Australia, divided between Melbourne (45,000), Sydney (38,000), Perth (7,000), Adelaide (1,000), Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Today's Australia Jewish community is often described as a post-Holocaust community, in light of the tremendously high proportion of Holocaust survivors and the attitudes and experiences which they have brought with them to Australia. Outside of Israel, there are more Holocaust survivors living in Melbourne, than any other Diaspora community.

2. How can they be defined economically? What are their professions and occupations?

A former Australian Prime Minister, Robert Hawke, was quoted in 1987 by saying that 'the whole of Australia has benefited from the work of Australian Jews, which has been incalculable and invaluable.'

Many of the pre and post war immigrants have contributed substantially in the development of business and the arts. These immigrants, who arrived in Australia with minimal material possessions, have developed valuable skills, which they have combined with a great drive and passion for success.

Australian Jews are generally found within the middle to upper class echelons of society. Their commitment to education has enabled them to attain much academic success, often far greater than that of the general Australian public. This in turn has enabled Australian Jews to utilize their entrepreneurial talents and excel in the fields of business and finance. In 1986 when a survey was compiled of the 200 wealthiest individuals in the country, twenty five percent of the names were of Jewish industrialists, of whom many were of Eastern European origin.

There are a multitude of success stories. The underlying factor however, is that in addition to providing many work opportunities, Jewish individuals have, and continue to be involved in the areas of business, law, medicine, textiles, academia and finance.



3. What is the religious orientation of the community?

Until the 1930s, Australian Jewry made every effort to minimize any outward differences between themselves and the non-Jewish population. Large, highly decorated synagogues resembled churches and were seen as symbols of an assimilated or highly acculturated community. Jews were reluctant to observe many of the external Jewish customs such as the wearing of a kippah outside of a ritual context: these were seen as symbols of difference. However, non-Orthodox forms of Judaism were rejected in Australia for many years. Instead, this Anglo-Jewish community developed its own 'modern Orthodoxy' which remains predominant until today.

Hitler's ascent to power and the horrors of World War II brought large numbers of refugees from central Europe and from the mid-1930's Temple Beth Israel in Melbourne became the basis of a Reform community because of its newly arrived German members. The Temple's German-born rabbi also played an integral role in promoting the movement and in 1938, when visiting Sydney, he established Temple Emanuel, which also attracted many German and other Central European Jews, who arrived in Sydney prior to the outbreak of the war.

The 1940s and 1950s witnessed the birth of ultra-Orthodox Judaism in Australia, with the rise of Habad or Lubavitch communities in Sydney and Melbourne.

For the vast majority of post-Shoah Jews who arrived in Australia, religiosity and belief in God had perished in the death camps of Europe. A popular trend is developing today however, with the return of many of these survivor's children and grand-children to a more religious life. Whilst statistics are only available for the Melbourne community, it is believed that they are representative of other Jewish communities around the country. In Melbourne, 6% of Jews label themselves as 'strictly orthodox,' 33% as 'traditionally religious' and 15% are 'Liberal or Reform.' 43% consider themselves as 'Jewish but not religious,' whilst 1% are 'opposed to religion' altogether. Interestingly, the average age of those who consider themselves as 'strictly orthodox' is much younger than any of the other categories.

As Dr. Suzanne Rutland explains, 'most Australian Jews can be best described as non-practicing orthodox.' Interestingly many of the Jews, who consider themselves 'Jewish but not religious,' still send their children to Orthodox Jewish Day Schools and are members of Orthodox synagogues.

Australian Jews tend to have a strong Jewish identity. Even if this does not necessarily express itself in religious expression, 58% of Melbourne Jews recognize their Jewish identity as being 'very important,' against a mere 2% who feel that it is 'not important at all.'



4. What Jewish educational and cultural life is there in the community?

The emphasis on Jewish education is one of the most striking characteristic of Australian Jewry. This is largely expressed in its Jewish Day Schools system, which offers an excellent academic, religious, Zionist, sporting and social experience.

In 1942, the first Jewish Day School and Kindergarten were formed in North Bondi in Sydney. Yet it was only just after the war years that in Melbourne, the first communal Jewish Day School, Mount Scopus College, was founded. In its inaugural year, the school had 120 students, and has today become one of the largest Jewish Day School in the Diaspora, with a peak of 2800 students in the 1980s.

In the last generation many other schools have developed. Some cater for specific groups in the community such as the Orthodox or the Reform. Others are general community schools. All in all, there are 19 Jewish Day Schools in Australia. It is estimated that in Melbourne 70 to 75 percent of all Jewish students attend a Jewish school. In Sydney, this figure is 62%. In 1996, over 10 000 Jewish students attended a Jewish school in Australia.

Across the board, Jewish Day Schools in Australia are much more expensive than the government/state schools. Therefore, a number of state schools, especially in Sydney, have a large Jewish population. Boards of Jewish Education attend to the Jewish educational needs of such students. As a result several state schools offer Hebrew or Jewish Studies as elective courses. Further, the numerous education boards also attend to Jewish students in the smaller centers of Adelaide, Brisbane and Canberra.

In addition to Jewish education at a school level, Australian Jewry opportunities for Jewish higher education. The University of Sydney and Monash University in Melbourne both offer full Jewish Studies departments, allowing students to study Jewish Civilization, Hebrew (Modern and Classical), Holocaust Studies, Yiddish and Zionism. Adult Jewish learning is also very popular in Australia, with the Melton Adult Education Program offering a variety of popular programs linked to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

This all-encompassing approach to Jewish education has allowed Australian Jewry to become in this respect a model Diaspora community.

Multiculturalism as an ideology developed in Australia during the 1970s. During this period, Jewish cultural life expanded and was in some cases assisted by the government.

Melbourne, housing the majority of Australian Jewry, is more commonly referred to as the cultural center of Jewish life. Yet across the board, Jews enjoy a deep, colorful and enriched sense of cultural life and identity, wherever they may be. There are numerous cultural and social organizations, Jewish radio shows and newspapers, and Jewish museums in both Melbourne and Sydney.



5. What is the situation of assimilation and intermarriage in the community?

Prior to 1933, some 30% of Australian Jews were intermarried. This high percentage potentially threatened the future of the community. However, the arrival of Jewish refugees prior to and following World War 2, changed the pattern of assimilation. Demographic research indicates that the intermarriage rate dropped immediately after the war and that by 1971, almost 90% of Jewish men and over 90% of Jewish women were married to Jewish partners. Numbers varied from place to place, being predictably higher outside of the main centres. Nevertheless, overall numbers for intermarriage were strikingly low.

However, the arrival of Jewish European refugees was not the only factor accounting for the low intermarriage rates. The postwar communal restructuring also played a part, creating a deeper sense of awareness and unity.

The debate today is more complex. Intermarriage rates seem to be rising. Some demographers prefer to analyze the entire Jewish population on a whole, whilst others are convinced that studying the younger generations is more accurate. The 1996 census showed that the intermarriage rate for all Australian Jewry was 15%. Once again, the smaller Jewish communities appear to have a higher rate of intermarriage, with Melbourne's rate far lower than that of Sydney.

A similar investigation conducted in 1999 by Sydney's Jewish Communal Appeal, caused great concern within the community. Analysing the younger generation of Jews, it concluded that one third of that generation have a non-Jewish partner.

Along with intermarriage comes the physical relocation of many Jews, who prefer to leave the densely populated Jewish areas. In the rural areas of New South Wales for example, where only 5% of the State's Jewry reside, intermarriage sits at 84%. Even in the larger towns, assimilation and intermarriage vary from area to area.

Of the two most recent waves of immigration to Australia between 1986 and 1991, Jews from the Former Soviet Union seem to have a considerably high intermarriage rate, in contrast to the South African immigrants, for whom intermarriage is almost entirely unknown.

6. Are there any major historical circumstances that affected the inflow or outflow of Jews to and from the community?

Australia is predominantly an immigrant community. Of all historical events, the Holocaust is possibly the single most significant event to shape and influence Australia's Jewish community. In many respects, Australia's Jewish community is often referred to as a 'Shoah community.'

Among survivors in post-world War 2 Europe, there were many who wanted to put as large a distance as possible between themselves and Europe. For these, Australia was a popular option. The problem however, was that Australia had migration policies which heavily controlled and limited immigration to the country. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry fought the status quo, lobbying the government strongly to allow Jewish refugees from Europe to come and restart their



lives in Australia. In 1945, the government relented, allowing 2000 close relatives of Jews already living in Australia to come and settle in Australia on a humanitarian basis.

The government's decision was much criticized. New limitations were imposed, including a percentage quota on the amount of Jews allowed to board passenger ships coming to Australia. As a result of further lobbying and pressure from the Jewish community, the quota was lifted in 1947 – once again on humanitarian grounds.

This constant ebb and flow of concession and tightening of the law, continued for several years. However, between the years of 1947 and 1954, Australia received tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants.

The 1980s saw the arrival of thousands of South African Jews to Australia. These migrants, in search of a safer and more secure future was offered by their country of origin, chose Australia, largely for its similarities in climate, language and culture.

Many of the new South African immigrants have risen to the challenges of immigration and assumed many leadership roles within the wider Jewish community. They have likewise, expanded the community numerically, especially in places such as Perth, in which the Jewish community has grown from 3000, in the 1980s, to 7000 at the latest count. Similarly, Jews from the Former Soviet Union have arrived en masse to Australia. In many cases, these South African and FSU immigrants have formed their own sub-communities, within the wider Jewish communities.

7. Are there welfare problems within the Jewish community? Are there welfare organizations within the community?

By the early 1950s, when an entirely new network and structure of communal organizations had emerged, welfare concerns were high on the agenda and were catered for through a number of Jewish organisations and institutions.

These include the Jewish old aged homes and hospitals in Sydney and Melbourne, the Sydney based 'Jewish Care' organization which deals with children and families of broken homes and/or financially distressed backgrounds.

8. What is the feeling of physical security of the Jewish community? Has there been and is there today a problem of anti-Semitism?

Anti-Semitism was first experienced in Australia in the late nineteenth century. Until then, Australian Jewry enjoyed full political equality and was in no way oppressed or persecuted. The nineteenth century gave rise to Australian nationalism. The much-characterized racist nationalist movement, did not only target the Asian community and the Aboriginal people but also the 'foreign' Jews. The *Bulletin*, was one such nationalist newspaper that published many a caricature portraying Jews as foreign, stout and with large, hooked noses.



During the period of the great, global depression of the 1930s, the first organized acts of anti-Semitism occurred in Australia. The 'New Guard' and the 'Australia First Movement' were two right-wing organizations that aligned themselves with Hitler's Nazism. In this light, and with the arrival of many Jewish refugees from Europe, a large-scale anti-refugee feeling was created. The new fad was colloquially called 'anti-refo.' Yet for the most part, this was only the start of a much greater anti-refugee sentiment which caused the government to limit Jewish immigration after the war.

The Australian League of Rights, founded in 1945, is possibly the most threatening anti-Semitic organization in Australia. The League, which markets Jewish conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial and anti-Zionism is most active in rural Australia.

Two hundred and forty six anti-Semitic incidents which were reported in 1997. This figure represents an 18% decrease in incidents of this nature, from the previous year.

In recent years however, two political parties have been formed causing concern, the Australia First Party (which has close connections with Australians Against Further Immigration) and the One Nation Party, headed by Pauline Hanson which is under scrutiny for its racial and extremist perspectives.

In 1990, leaders of a neo Nazi group under the name of 'Australian Nationalist Movement,' were brought to trial in Perth. It was reported that many of their wrongdoings were outright anti-Jewish and pro Nazi. A year later, in 1991, in the wake of the Gulf War, escalated fears were met with the bombing of 5 synagogues in Sydney.

Violence, vandalism and threats are some of the more common acts of anti-Semitism experienced in Australia. Whilst vandalism has somewhat diminished over recent years, as a result of increased vigilance and investment in security in the part of the Jewish community, graffiti - bearing Nazi swastikas and offensive slogans - has been seen covering Jewish cemeteries, synagogue premises and private homes of Jewish communal leaders.

University campuses across Australia, are arguably the most affected in terms of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. The Australian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) is actively involved in counter-acting the anti-Israel perceptions espoused by the media as well as the blatantly anti-Semitic slogans often plastered around campuses.

9. What are the major problems on the agenda of the Jewish community?

The 1991 Melbourne report, which has been previously referred to in this chapter, indicates that 30% of the respondents are primarily concerned about assimilation, intermarriage and the loss of Jewish identity.

The growing rate of assimilation, particularly among young individuals, mixed couples and marriages, continues to serve as one of the foremost problems on the community's agenda.

Relative to other Diaspora communities, Australian Jewry experiences limited anti-Semitism. The concern is still great however, because of the nature of these attacks and because of the great security costs that it has incurred.



Meeting the needs of the youth is another concern of the community. Traditionally, the vast majority and funding, attention and resources have been invested into the Jewish Day Schools, though students themselves do not necessarily graduate from these schools with the much desired motivation and enthusiasm that they set out to create. A new approach is thus needed in terms of meeting these needs and inspiring the youth to continue the community's legacy.

The 'black hole' which commonly refers to the post-university age group, causes much concern about the stability of the community. A gap – of communal organizations and initiatives - exists among this age group, thereby allowing many young Jewish adults to lose touch with the community, only to regain a connection when they themselves are parents and wish to send their children to a Jewish Day School, for example.

The religious divides within the community is an ongoing concern, with considerable tension and little co-operation between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox sections of Australian Jewry. Lastly, deep concern has been expressed by Jewish religious women who are concerned about their role within Orthodoxy, and the Halachot regarding marriage and divorce.

10. How do they affect the demographic trends within the community? Can anything be said about the future of the community?

The future of Australian Jewry looks rather positive. Assuming that the concerns, as listed above, are monitored and attended to, this remote community may in every sense of the word continue to flourish and to go from 'strength to strength.'

Australia's Jewish population continues to grow in size, activity and importance. Many believe that the large Jewish Russian presence in Australia, which has yet to be entirely catered for, may change the community's makeup in the near future, while at the same time, there is potential for this educated community to take more of a lead in international Jewish academia.

It seems likely that the growing modern Orthodox community will continue to attract many new and young individuals, whilst the community's non-Orthodox movements may well start to increase significantly as a result of continued immigration to the country, especially in Sydney. Lastly, it is believed that the unique nature of Jewish concentration, cultural activity and lifestyle, in all of the major centers around the country, has the possibility to further counteract assimilation and intermarriage rates.

11. What is the general contribution of the community to Australia as a whole?

Australian Jews have grown up with Australia. They have played a significant role especially in the commercial and professional development of Australia. From the early 19th century migrant pedlars and small shopkeepers, they have been an important factor in the spread of trade and commerce within Australia and the international trade that Australia is involved in. With the move in the last generation towards professionalisation, they have played a role in all of the major professional spheres of Australian life, including the law, the media and the academia. We have



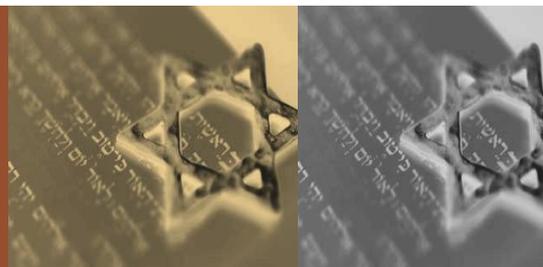
already quoted Robert Hawke, the ex-Prime minister of the country who said in 1987 that 'the whole of Australia has benefited from the work of Australian Jews, which has been incalculable and invaluable.' It seems to sum things up.

12. What is the relationship with Israel in the community as a whole?

Australia has long been a stronghold of Zionist activity and support for the State of Israel. Zionism plays a significant part in community activities. In fact, there are those who say that the vast amount of Zionist activity is overwhelming. It ranges from Zionist education, fundraising for Israel, successful Zionist youth movements and the promotion of Aliya. All of the Zionist organizations are affiliated with State Zionist Councils in each of the main centers, who in turn, are affiliated with the umbrella Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA). The ZFA acts as the Zionist community's voice with Israel and other Diaspora communities. The 6 Zionist Youth Movements, which represent all the different major religious and political positions on the Zionist spectrum, are united by the Australian Zionist Youth Council (AZYC). An extraordinary 79% of the adult Jewish population in Australia are believed to have visited Israel which is quite extraordinary for a country so far away geographically. And approximately 9,000 Jews are believed to have made Aliyah from Australia. s so



Introducing Australian Jewish voices.



Frank was born in Australia in the early years of the 20th century. He runs a successful garage and lives in Melbourne.

"The family joke is that we're all a bunch of Jewish convicts from England. It sounds like a great family history and I wish it were true! But the truth is a bit more prosaic. My grandparents came over from England in the 1860's. They came over because of the so called 'Gold Rush' but I'm sure they never saw any of the gold! My grandfather was a pedlar and used to visit the rough mining towns, selling whatever it was they needed there. Two generations later, here I am in Melbourne and I have to say that I'm happy the old folks came over when they did. This is a great place for everybody and I'm delighted to be part of it. We Jews have done well here and I expect things to continue in exactly the same way. It's a generous Jewish community here. Recently the refugees from the war in Europe have started to arrive in large numbers. Some came before the war and others are coming now after everything is over. They don't talk much. It seems that they all carry these terrible stories with them. But the community is really rallying round to do what can be done. Thank goodness we have our share of people who've done very well in Australia. We take care of our own. I'm proud to be Jewish – although I'm not a regular attender at synagogue I must confess. They say that Jews are citizens of the whole world, but I wouldn't want to be anywhere else but here. I'm not sure I believe in Gan Eden but this is good enough for me. I'm more than happy bringing my kids up here, I'll tell you that."

Beverley, Frank's granddaughter, still lives in Melbourne. She is a student of Jewish studies.

"Yes, my grandpa loved this country and I have to say, so do I. I'm not a hundred percent sure that I'll stay here because I'm very drawn to Israel which I've visited a number of times. I actually spent a year there just before Uni. on a youth leadership programme, and I think I have to go back there and try a life there. The truth is that like many of my friends here over the last few years I've got much more attracted to traditional Judaism and have started to live a Halachic lifestyle. I could do that very easily here. There's a full infrastructure for anyone who wants to live as an Orthodox Jew – it's an extraordinary community from that point of view but still the Israel thing has never really let go of me."



In that respect of course, I'm different to my grandfather. He was not a shul-goer at all. Well, he went occasionally, but more for social reasons than anything else. Even before I became Orthodox, I used to go a lot. I always felt that this was the thing that Jews need to do whether or not you accept all the ideas and follow all the texts. Now it's different. I've bought into the system and I'm happy to accept the general ideology that goes along with it. If my grandpa could see me now, he'd laugh and say I was going backwards jumping backwards over about five generations! It wouldn't worry him. I think he might be more concerned about me leaving Australia. He'd support Israel, of course, but he was such a great Australian patriot! But that whole subject is a bridge to be crossed in the future."

