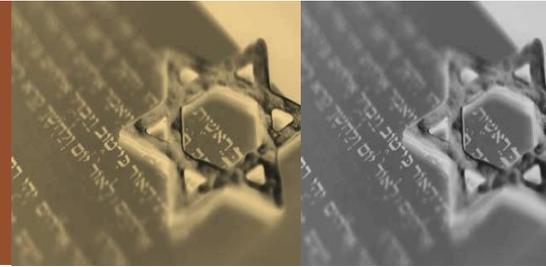


# CHAPTER SEVEN

## HOW DID WE GET TO BE US? CHANGES IN THE COMMUNITY AFTER MODERNITY.



### INTRODUCTION

There are four specific questions that will stand at the centre of our examination here.

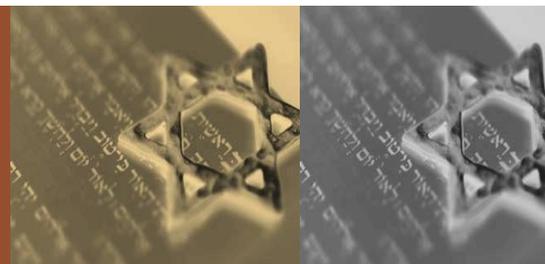
- a. What happened to the identity of Jews in the modern world and how did that affect the relationship to the community?
- b. What happened to the structure of the Jewish community after the entrance to modernity. In what ways did it change?
- c. How did the relationships between different areas and centres change as a result of the transition to modernity?
- d. How did the relation to Eretz Israel change as a result of modernity?

In the previous chapters, we have dealt with all four of these themes – Jewish identity and the relationship of the individual to the community, the structure of the community, the relationships between different communities and different centres and the relationship with Eretz Israel - in relation to the pre-modern world. Now we bring the story forward and turn to them, systematically, one at a time, to create an understanding of the Jewish community in the world surrounding us today.

Let us remind ourselves that change and modernity affected different areas of the Jewish world at different times. Since this whole session deals with Jews during and after the transition to modernity, we must emphasise that it is most relevant to the Jews of 'the west', certainly until other centres of Jewry begin to be drawn into the modern story, in Eastern Europe (late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) or the Arab world (mid 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Jews move to the west or to Palestine/Eretz Israel). When we talk here about the west, let us repeat what we mean. We mean Western Europe, parts of Central Europe (Germany, Austria, Hungary and others), the New World of North America and in time, other places such as South America, Australasia and South Africa.



## CHANGING! THE IDENTITY OF JEWS IN THE MODERN WORLD



We have already seen in chapter four that the entry to modernity by Jews in the west, had major effects on the ways that Jews started to identify themselves. Many Jews ceased to identify themselves according to traditional halachic criteria. In fact many stopped seeing the halacha as directly relevant to their lives. We start to get new streams of Jews developing, such as Reform Jewry that believed in a theological but non-halachic Judaism, Conservative Judaism (as it came to be called), that believed in a changing and evolving halacha, and Modern Orthodoxy, a traditional halachic Judaism but one that believed very strongly in the simultaneous embracing of modern life.

In addition there were many Jews who simply shrugged off any call of theology and God on their lives and began to define themselves as essentially secular Jews. These formed no movements at the time but rather tended to shrug themselves free of all Jewish theological movements. These Jews on the whole looked for minimal connection with the Jewish community as a whole even if they stayed consciously Jewish.

What we want to emphasise here is what allowed such Jews to redefine themselves and to start belonging to different types of Jewish movement or to no type at all. In order for this to happen, certain changes must have happened in the outside society. Perhaps the easiest way to explain it (without going into the details of every society and state) is as follows. In the previous period, we have already noted, all Jews were seen as belonging legally to a collective body of Jews. The societies and states tended to relate to each Jew, not as an individual, but rather as part of a collective. The collective, with its own leadership was responsible for regulating the life of the Jew in all the spheres that the outside society delegated to it. It was the collective that was responsible for the Jews paying taxes (to the collective) and it was the collective that was responsible for Jewish behaviour. The collective had its own laws and its own methods of law enforcement. It also had its own leadership and its own demands on the individual. For example, it could enforce attendance at synagogue and what was felt to be suitable behaviour on all Jews within the community (and remember, all Jews **were** within the community)!

As a small example of this, let us look at the constitution of the tiny community of Sugenheim in the area of Bavaria, Germany from 1756. It is true that it was easier for very small communities to impose strict norms on its members than larger ones. Nevertheless these clauses show us accurately the norms that communities tried to impose on their members. The charter was written in German since it had to be accepted by the nobles to whom the community belonged. We bring only part of it.



### **1. SYNAGOGUE WILL BE HELD ON MONDAYS AND THURSDAYS**

*Inasmuch as one must go to the synagogue on Mondays and Thursdays [because these are the days of the Torah reading], every one who remains at home on such days and does not go to the synagogue must pay a fine of one Kreuzer to the Jewish treasury.*

### **2. THE PUNISHMENT IF ONE DOES NOT COME TO THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE MINOR DAY OF ATONEMENT**

*If a member of the community does not come to the synagogue on the Minor Day of Atonement [the day before New Moon], and cannot prove either that he was dispatched somewhere by our gracious master, or that he had some other business duties outside of town which could not be postponed, then he shall either be fined a quarter of a pound of wax for the benefit of the communal treasury, or he shall not be called up [to the Torah reading] for a month.*

### **3. THE CANTOR SHALL CALL [PEOPLE] TO THE SYNAGOGUE REGULARLY**

*Whenever there is to be a religious service the cantor shall call people to the synagogue regularly so that no one may excuse himself because of ignorance. If, however, the cantor forgets this and does not call people on the appointed days, he is to be fined ten Kreuzer the first time, and if he blunders frequently he is to be fined fifteen to twenty Kreuzer, or mayhap even dismissed...*

### **6. PENALTY FOR WRANGLING IN THE SYNAGOGUE**

*He who fights with another in the synagogue and acts shamefully must pay a fine of twenty Kreuzer, half of which goes to the civil authorities and the other half to the Jewish communal treasury.*

### **7. PENALTY FOR QUARRELING, FIGHTING, AND STRIKING ONE ANOTHER IN THE SYNAGOGUE**

*If, however, anyone should quarrel with, fight, or strike someone in the synagogue, he is without fail to be fined a florin, half of which is to go to the civil authorities, and half to the Jewish treasury. If the two communal leaders and the treasurer should ignore the matter, for reasons of personal friendship, then each one of them is to be fined a pound of wax should the other householders report their partiality.*

*Jewish Constitution of Sugenheim Community, Germany 1756*



With the transition to modernity, the rules of the game changed. To put things most simply, the state started to relate to Jews as individuals. Especially after Emancipation, the process by which Jews became accepted legally as citizens in the countries of the west, the situation totally changed. No longer were Jews seen in the same way as members of the Jewish community which the community could control by virtue of its own laws, backed up by the authority of the outside society. Each Jew was now part of that outside society. There was no need for Jews to belong to the society indirectly through the community institutions. The Jew was now a direct member of society. Each Jew could now belong to the society if he (or she) wanted but it was an individual decision. The Jewish community no longer had power over its members. We will come back to the implications for the community as a whole in a moment. For the present let us stay with the situation of the individual Jew.

What we get as a result of this process is the fact that individual Jews could now pick and choose their own Jewish identity. Up to now, as we have emphasized, there had certainly been variations between different types of Jews. For example Rabbenu Gershom in Ashkenaz and Maimonides in Egypt were very different kinds of Jew, but they were variations on a certain basic model of Jew who accepted the basic Rabbinic model for life. For thousands of years – since the time of Yehuda HaNasi – the Mishnah and the halachic literature of the Rabbis had served as the centre of the Jewish world of almost every Jew.

If Jews had refused to accept it for one reason or other, they would have been taking themselves out of the Jewish collective. Most of them would become Christian or Moslem. But now, it was possible to move past and out of the traditional Rabbinic agenda and still remain a Jew if you so wanted. In other words, the way was clear for Jews to define themselves in a much more varied series of ways, across a broader spectrum, than had been the case previously. Jews could remain halachic Jews according to the traditional model if they so desired. Many did and would continue to do so. But – at least in the west – far more broke away over time from the traditional model and started to define themselves in new ways.

It should be pointed out that it was not only the change in the way that the Jews were perceived by the society and the different way that society came to organise itself that was responsible for the different ways that Jews defined themselves. The world surrounding the Jew was definitely changing. Science and technology were advancing by leaps and bounds and nature's secrets were being unlocked one by one. There was a sense that all sorts of things that were felt to be so mysterious that they could only derive from God, were now understandable by resort to science and that there was no need for God. Religious thought was changing and the idea of a God, active in the world, was losing ground.

The more Jews became involved in outside society, the more did many become attracted by the new ideas. For the first time we encounter new kinds of Jew. Not just Jews who accepted the Rabbinic idea but distanced themselves from the performance of mitzvot for whatever reason, but Jews who completely rejected the

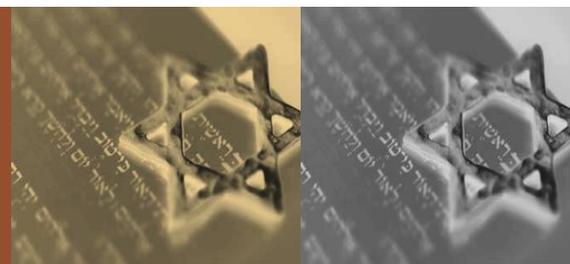


Rabbinic agenda and who understood the world in secular terms without the need for God.

The Jew was living in two worlds and trying to maneuver between those two worlds. One foot in the "old" Jewish world and one foot in the "new" outer world – that was the task. And it was very hard. It was a balancing act and the problem for so many Jews in these first generations was that the outer world – the world that had been denied to them for so many centuries - was proving irresistibly attractive. For many Jews, the balancing act became a high-wire act that they simply could not manage. In attempting to balance, so many of them over-balanced and ended up with two feet squarely outside the Jewish world – total assimilation often expressed in conversion to Christianity. It is hardly surprising that the Chatam Sofer believed that the only solution was to push back against the outer world with all his strength and create an act of what he saw as cultural and spiritual resistance – for the sake of heaven, לשם שמיים.



# CHANGING! THE STRUCTURE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE MODERN WORLD



We have mentioned two changes. The outer world related to the Jew as an individual, at least in legal terms. No longer was the Jewish community the legal intermediary between the Jew and the state. And many Jews were relating to Judaism in different ways. The Rabbinic outlook and agenda were no longer taken for granted. These two things formed the basis for the next major change - the change in the role and the structure of the Jewish community.

Up to now, all Jews had had to belong to the community. Communities had had the power to impose their norms on their participant members. No longer was this the case. From now on, not only did nobody have to belong to the Jewish community, many people no longer desired to.

Let us recall the traditional reasons that Jews felt that they needed a Jewish community. We mentioned six reasons.

1. PHYSICAL SECURITY
2. ECONOMIC SECURITY
3. RELIGIOUS LIFE
4. EDUCATION
5. NEEDS OF THE LESS FORTUNATE
6. EMOTIONAL NEEDS

We saw previously how this cluster of needs supplied the internal reasons that Jews desired to belong to the Jewish community. In addition to the fact that the Jews had to belong to the community, they wanted to. Let us examine how these six needs fared in the modern world, once the Jews had been emancipated and given equal rights in their countries. We quote in italics statements that we made about the needs of the Jews from the traditional community.

## 1. PHYSICAL SECURITY

*"In an often hostile environment, the Jew had a paramount need for physical security. The most likely guarantee of security - and no less important than real security, the feeling of security - would be found within the Jewish community."*

One of the major changes for many modern Jews was a feeling of security in the modern western world. This was connected with a deep seated sense of belonging to their new countries - as citizens - that developed among hundreds of thousands, ultimately millions of Jews. It was not that they had the illusion that suddenly everybody loved them. They knew that in many places it was still dangerous to be a Jew. The change came in the agency from which they felt they could expect help in



times of physical needs. In the past there had been many rulers who had come to the aid of the Jews when they were physically threatened. But there were just as many who had not. The Jews could often count on the help of the ruler if they were felt to be useful. But if they were not useful, or if the ruler was fanatical and anti-Jewish, no help might come from the ruler.

Ultimately, then, in the last resort, Jews had learned to rely on themselves and their community for support. Even if the best thing they could do was often to petition the ruler for help, at least that was better than total impotence. But now the state was there to protect them, neither because they were useful, nor because it pitied them but rather because they belonged to it and it belonged to them. They were a people with rights in the modern state – such is the way that they felt entitled to define themselves in the modern state after emancipation. They were citizens: the state had a duty to help and protect them. Here, then, this function of the traditional community was almost completely replaced, for many Jews, by the modern state.

## 2. ECONOMIC SECURITY

*In the lands of the Diaspora, the fortunes of the Jews were largely tied up in the economic role that they played within the framework of the outer society.*

Here, once again, there was a major change. The fortunes of the pre-modern Jew were tied up with his or her usefulness to the society. If the Jews were not useful in a particular time and place, they could be thrown out or humiliated and placed right at the bottom of the social ladder. They were only as lucky as they were useful. A large part of the pre-modern story of the Jew is the constant effort to prove that he plays a useful part in society. In the modern world, the Jew had a place because he belonged not because he was useful. So ran the theory of human rights that lay at the basis of the modern state. If those rights were infringed, the place to go would be the courts of the outside society – institutions which as we heard were, as far as the majority of Jews were concerned, out of bounds in the traditional society.

## 3. RELIGIOUS LIFE

*Jewish religious life was predicated on the existence of a Jewish community. A Jew needed a minyan to meet prayer needs, a shochet to meet kashrut needs, a cemetery and burial society to provide for the needs of a bereaved family.*

This one stayed. But it was only true for those Jews for whom traditional religious needs were important. If many Jews in the west stopped synagogue attendance on a regular basis, the needs of a minyan were meaningless to them. If many Jews stopped eating according to the rules of kashrut, the need for a shochet simply passed them by. Thus for a minority of Jews in the west, this need was as real as ever, but the numbers for whom this was true was smaller, proportionately, than ever.



#### 4. EDUCATION

*At the centre of Jewish life was education. Life was constructed around a series of texts. A Jew was expected to know the texts and to understand how to apply them to everyday life.*

Education too was rapidly shrinking as a Jewish need – at least traditional Jewish education. Education perhaps was just as important as ever to parents of children, but it was a different sort of education. This was the sort of education that was needed in order to advance in society, and that, by definition, could best be provided by the educational institutions of outside society. Traditional Jewish education was required by ever smaller numbers of Jews.

The truth is that there had long been felt a need in parts of the traditional world to improve the standards of education in that world. Now, judged by the increasingly rigorous standards of that world, the traditional system seemed very lacking to many. And so many Jews started running headlong into the external educational system and Jewish education shrunk – often at best – to a supplementary education, often looked down on by the parents and disliked by the children as a waste of time.

#### 5. NEEDS OF THE LESS FORTUNATE

*This was always central for Jews. The traditional Jewish community was a veritable beehive of activity as it attempted to meet the needs of the poor and the infirm.*

This remained important. The reason was clear. The Jewish community had always been streets ahead of its non-Jewish counterpart in supplying help as a principle. The non-Jewish world would take generations to develop a strong welfare system. People who needed help would be far more likely to find it in the Jewish community than in the outside. However, if the traditional Jewish system was one in which both sides – those who needed help and those who wanted to give help – were both eager to play their part (potential givers desired to store up credit in a heavenly bank account of good deeds), that changed with the entry to the modern world. The physically needy still needed. But the potential givers no longer necessarily felt themselves to be spiritually needy. So once again, despite remaining an important function in the general world, not as many Jews felt this as a direct need that they could only satisfy within the Jewish community.

#### 6. EMOTIONAL NEEDS

*Perhaps above all other needs, a Jew needed support. Living in a land which did not ultimately belong to Jews, Jews would need the support of other Jews to feel that they were not alone.*

But now they were not alone. Many Jews felt themselves to be at home in their state. They might feel a subgroup but they did not feel the deep existential need that comes out of a sense of exile. They felt that they were home and they



desperately wanted to prove to themselves and to others how at home they felt. The support they needed was from the other citizens of their countries. They wanted to be accepted by others. Even if, on a deep level, this last need must have remained intact for many, they would not necessarily have recognised it and certainly there are many whom, we might suspect, never even confessed it to themselves.

Thus we see that the old factors that held the Jew close to his or her community for thousands of years were all breaking up. Not only did the outside society no longer enforce membership in the community but many Jews rejected it internally. It meant very little to many of the new Jews living in two worlds because it did not answer the needs that they had as members of a new mixed society. The old community had indeed done a good job of meeting the needs of the vast majority of Jews in the traditional pre-modern world. Now however, the traditional community had lost its meaning for many Jews in the west. And with this we come to a new phase in our community story – the Jewish community in search of a meaning, a reason to exist.

Orthodox and ultra Orthodox Jews would make their peace with the community. Even though there was nothing forcing them to be a member of a community, far more of the reasons mentioned earlier still held for them than for non-Orthodox Jews. But the further "leftwards" you moved, towards full blown secularism, the more the traditional community model became irrelevant. Here, there were only two choices. Either the community would fade away or it would have to find a new role. If it was to find a new role, it would have to understand and answer the needs of these Jews. So what were their needs? And what are their needs today?

Let's hear a witness. This is Michael. He's 55 years old and he lives in Chicago.

*"I'll tell you what I think. My grandfather in the old country was an important member of the community over there. He believed in everything. Everything he did, everything he believed and everything he felt, all came together. He was a Jew through and through. There were no question marks for him, only exclamation marks.*

*He knew why he was on earth, to bear witness to God's truth which was enshrined in the Torah. For him the Mishnah and the Talmud were his guidebook to daily life. He knew them better than he knew his own wife! And he probably followed what they said much more closely than what she said. He accepted it all, and he lived in his own world conscious that a Jew only needed two kinds of companion – other Jews and God. His community was his whole world! Anything outside the four walls of his community couldn't be worth anything. All the value was inside those walls. In a sense it was so simply sweet for him.*

*That's the way I see him at least. I only knew him a little when I was a little boy and he was an old, old man. At that time the world was changing around him. He was living in America – he'd come over near the end of his life – and he didn't know what*



*hit him. So he used to sit in our house all day dressed in his black coat with a book in front of him, a volume of the Talmud I guess, trying to keep the world at arms' length. He was horrified by the world we lived in. He thought he was in Egypt or Babylon or somewhere. Our world was simply un-Jewish by his standards, and I must tell you, my father was a regular Shul-goer. Week in, week out, he'd go. I'm telling you we kept Shabbat – we never went out over Shabbat to any parties or anything. And we had a kosher home. That was Jewish to my parents – but not to my grandfather. He died without ever making peace with it.*

*My parents were modern Jews. As I say, my father was a Shul-goer. I don't know what relationship he had with God while he was there – he talked stocks and shares through most of the service, but he was there. I think he probably went because he liked it, getting together with his friends and all that. It was like going to a club, but **his** club was his Shul. I don't think he had any friends that were not Jewish although he came into contact with plenty of them through his business dealings. Ma too. She was always volunteering for this good cause and that, but once again everything was Jewish.*

*From one point of view they were a million miles away from my grandfather's world, but from another point of view they were actually like him. They too only really moved inside the Jewish world. At least that was where their meaningful contact was. I'm not sure they ever completely trusted anyone who wasn't Jewish. It was like tribalism. Either you were a member of the tribe or you weren't. And if you weren't, then they thought that you were probably against them.*

*I'm next on the list. I see myself as a good Jew, but I live in a totally different world to that of my grandfather and my parents. I have a mixed social group. I have many good friends that I totally trust who aren't Jewish, and I've been to lots of different experiences that my parents – let alone my grandfather – would never have thought possible. I've been in many churches, for example. Not to pray of course. The fact is that I don't pray anywhere but certainly not in a church. But I go to hear concerts, to see the architecture. There's nothing like a church for beauty, I believe and I don't need to ignore the statues of Jesus all over the place. To me that's just art, beautiful art.*

*I go to Shul too but not regularly like my father. Prayer doesn't speak to me – at least not formal prayer from a book. The irony is that I probably understand the prayers better than my father. In Jewish terms I'm simply better educated. I go to a fair amount of courses at the Jewish community centre. I've even taken a couple of courses through the internet. I know quite a bit of Hebrew too. Why not? It's my culture. I'm interested in culture and history and things like that. It'll never be my whole world and the Jews will never be my only people either. I'm an American Jew and both words, American and Jew are important to me. I'm also a universalist. I'm interested in Black causes and Asian causes. I'll as willingly give to the victims of tribal violence in Africa as I will to a Jewish cause. Why not? Their tribes are my tribe in a sense. Yes. I'm a member of the Jewish tribe but that's just one little piece of the whole human tribe and **that's** where I really belong."*



Michael is just one example. He's not typical but there are lots like him. The truth is that you can't really talk about 'typical' any more. What characterizes a 'Michael' is that he is open to the Jewish experience but it does not rule him. It is an important part of his identity – he doesn't deny it although there are plenty of others that do – and he's happy to strengthen it if there are aspects that appeal to him. To a Michael, he will buy into things Jewish, if and as they appeal to him. He will never buy into it as a 'package deal' the way his grandfather, and in a different way and less completely, his parents. There are other parts of his identity which he recognizes and he will nurture. He won't ignore their calls on him.

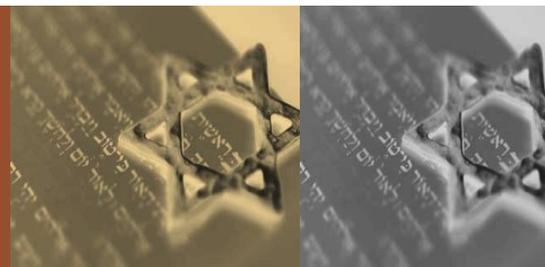
Michael and Jewish community? Absolutely, if it appeals to him. If it offers him something that speaks to him and appeals to him. But it has to be worthwhile. It has to appeal to him more than the other million and one possibilities that his world offers him. He mentions courses that he takes in his Jewish Community Centre. He will go to them if they are more appealing than other courses he may want to take. He may favour them a little more and give them the benefit of the doubt over other possibilities because he accepts that they are part of his 'small' tribal story. But they will have to be good nevertheless.

And this perhaps is the key to understanding Jewish community and its role in the lives of those who are living "with one foot in and one foot out". Jewish community has to make a conscious effort to win those who are capable of being won. Membership will depend to a large extent on the effectiveness of the marketing. Since membership in a community is voluntary, the community must come to the individual Jew and give her or him a good reason to want to be part of it. It is not a lost cause by any means. But it has to offer something special. For some it's culture, for others its warmth and a sense of belonging, for yet others it will be spirituality and a chance to seek some depth in a shallow world, and for others still, the appeal will be purely social. The growth of the Jewish Community Centre all over the Jewish world is symptomatic. Most such centres do not have a synagogue. In fact they are more likely to boast an exercise room and a swimming pool than anything formally connected to religion. Dancing is more likely to be an activity there than prayer. On the other hand, they supply a forum for Jews who want to get together for any good purpose, whether social or scholarly.

There are lots of consumers. There are lots of needs to answer. There are lots of opportunities. Lots of different strategies are needed. That, it seems, is the name of the game. The Jew in the modern world.



## CHANGING! THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN JEWISH COMMUNITIES AND CENTRES IN THE MODERN WORLD



Another change took place in the ways that Jews in the west related to Jews in other countries. We stated in the previous chapter that generally, in the pre-modern world, Jews in one place saw Jews in another place as members of the same nation. All were members of עם ישראל. As such, they felt that the general rabbinic guideline Kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh - כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה - all Jews are responsible for one another – applied to them. We saw a number of examples of such behaviour.

But in the modern world of the west, that feeling of solidarity began to disappear. It was hardly surprising. Many Jews felt much closer to their non-Jewish countrymen – or at least desired to feel that way and did all that they could do to promote such a feeling. As their feeling for their fellow countrymen went up – their feeling for their co-religionists in other countries went down. As part of the change in Jewish identity that we have talked about, most Jews in the west started to define themselves as members of the Jewish religion rather than as members of the Jewish nation. They were French or German by nationality now, so how could they also be members of a Jewish nation? When they downplayed their nationality, they also downplayed their connection with Jews in other countries. As long as they had identified themselves as part of an 'international' Jewish nation, they had seen themselves as part of the same nation as their fellow Jews in other places. But not any longer. Now their loyalties had changed.

Simon, a German Jew of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*"I have heard of the problems of the Jews in Morocco. I know it can't be easy for them, but if I were asked to help them, I have to say that I wouldn't. Don't think of me as a heartless person and don't think of me as a bad Jew. But I have to say that I feel nothing for the Jew in Africa. Historically we once belonged to the same nation. His ancestors and mine both came out of Egypt. But that was thousands of years ago. What possible connection do I, a German citizen of the modern west, have with an Arab speaking Jew of North Africa. We can't talk to each other. We inhabit totally different worlds. He wouldn't recognize me as part of him and I don't blame him. I can't see him in me! What possible connection could there be? I have a great deal in common with other Germans – we speak the same language, we share the same culture, the same way of life. I can talk to my German brothers about the things that are important to me, art, literature, politics. But what on earth would I say to a Jew from Morocco?"*

*Not all the Germans see things like I do, I know. I want to talk to them, but they don't all want to talk to me. They don't yet completely trust me or see me as their brother.*

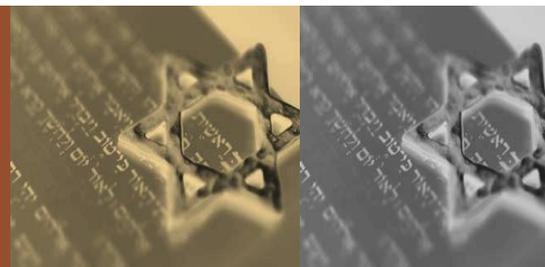


*But they will, they will. It's just a matter of time. It's obvious. We're all Germans and we all feel strongly for Germany. I'm just as German as anybody else. My family has lived in German lands for close to 800 years. I love the land, the earth, the forests, the fields, the villages and I feel that all of this is mine. The differences are merely religious and why should that get in the way of what we really all have in common, nationality and a deep patriotic feeling. There are German Catholics, there are German Protestants, and now there are German Jews too. My religion is Judaism but my nationality is German, deeply German. And as such, even though I wince a little when I hear of the trials and problems of Jews in other places, I cannot feel that I am in any deep way connected to them. I am connected with the people here with whom I share a land and a language."*

Simon's position is clear, but it is interesting to note that while this position has continued to characterize some western Jews till today, many Jews changed their attitudes over time. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century there were a series of terrible outbreaks of anti-Semitism which had the effect of prodding some of the western Jews into trying to help their co-religionists (as they saw them) in other places. The feeling of being part of the same nation – the same עם – had gone, but the feeling of responsibility, it seems, had not been totally wiped out. One of the first Jews to respond in this way was a rich and well-born English Jew, Moses Montefiore. Montefiore, a deeply religious man, was galvanized into action by events in Damascus in 1840.



## RETAINING CONNECTION MONTEFIORE AND DAMASCUS



*"The whole thing was quite simple. There was this dreadful story of Christian monks who disappeared from their monastery in Damascus and the Jews getting blamed for the murder. Jews were tortured until they confessed and the tortures were so strong that one of them died in the process. I heard about it in England and thought that the whole thing was utterly barbaric. This was the blood libel all over again, the accusation that Jews seek out Christian children to kill in order to use their blood for sorcery or for matzot or something. It was absolutely outrageous! I thought that such nonsensical accusations had gone out centuries ago. They **had** in England of course, and the whole huge lie was born in England hundreds of years ago! Anyway, to cut a long story short, I got in touch with some of the leading Jews in France and we started to make a huge noise about the story. In the end we went out to the East, to Egypt as it turned out – as British and French citizens – to talk to the Syrian sultan, and got the poor wretches off the hook. Well, the whole thing made my blood boil and I realized something. I realized that we Jews of the west were extremely lucky. How unbelievably lucky I was to be born where and when I was born and to have the fortune to be part of the greatest empire in the world, the British Empire and to serve my great queen, Victoria. But what were the Jews of Damascus to blame if they had been born in the same era but in a situation that was centuries behind my situation as an English Jew? It wasn't their fault at all. And I made up my mind to do whatever I could, as a proud English Jew, to help my fellow Jews throughout the world wherever they needed help. We must show that the feeling of solidarity is still there among Jews. כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה. Still! And I am determined to get other Jews involved with this. We are the lucky ones. No Jew should be penalised for being unlucky!"*

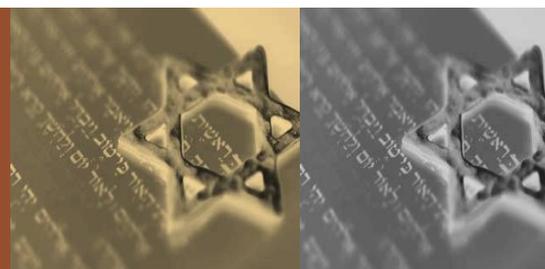
It was Montefiore and the publicity that he and his French colleagues managed to create around the Damascus Blood Libel, that persuaded many Jews in the west, that they could not abandon responsibility for their fellow Jews. Many realized that they had money and influence and they decided to use it. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the twentieth century were particularly difficult times for Jews all over – apart from the west – western Jews had plenty to do. But two things should be noted from Montefiore's speech. He makes his pitch as an English Jew. He saw himself as a proud citizen of England. And together with that he referred to the Jews in other countries as his 'co-religionists'. They were not members of the same nation – how could they be? He was British and they were not. Seeing them in these terms, as co-religionists whom he as a British Jew could help, he was happy to do what he could and he did a great deal.



The terrible horrors of the Shoah and the rise of the state of Israel did even more for a feeling of Jewish solidarity. Many Jews today feel connected with Jews in other places. Not perhaps to the extent that Jews tended to feel when there was the strong consciousness in the pre-modern world, that the Jews were part of one nation, but nevertheless, the feeling of being part of something larger, world wide, is certainly not totally dead.



## CHANGING! THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ERETZ ISRAEL IN THE MODERN WORLD



We come now to the last major change that we wish to discuss here. This concerns the relationship with Eretz Israel. As we saw in chapter five, the central Rabbinic attitude towards Eretz Israel was an interesting and complex attitude which drew from earlier strands of thought. It was an attitude which saw Eretz Israel as the eternal homeland of the Jews from which they had been exiled. Jews should settle in the lands of the Diaspora, but always remember that their land was somewhere else. Exile was exile. Homeland was elsewhere.

However, together with that, it emphasized that it was forbidden for the Jews as a collective body – as a people – to try and return to the Land on their own initiative. That could only be done by Divine intervention, when God had decided that the time was right. Galut was seen as a punishment for the sins of the Jews and the Divine sign to return to Eretz Israel would come as a sign of forgiveness that would usher in the Messianic Age. Before that time, individual Jews could certainly settle on their own or in family groups. It was collective mass action that would be forbidden, being seen, like the Tower of Babel, as an affront to God and an attempt to take away God's authority.

Both of these strands of Rabbinic thought, namely that Israel was the homeland and elsewhere was exile, and that it was forbidden for Jews collectively to return to the land, would be challenged by modernity but by different groups of Jews.

The idea that the Diaspora was Galut would be challenged by many Jews who began to feel that the lands in which they lived were their real homelands. One of the major changes in the modern Jew was the belief that he was no longer in exile. The tension of exile – of living in one place and feeling that it was the wrong place - collapses in the modern period for many Jews. Jews start to feel that they belong in the lands where they reside and that those lands belong to them as part of the native population. Could the traditional idea of Eretz Israel possibly survive a revolution in thought such as that? The answer of course is no!

As many Jews began to experience *haskalah*, human and civil rights, partial or full emancipation and legal equality, they tended to sever their ties with the land of Israel. They did not necessarily deny the historical connection but they saw it precisely as that – as a historical connection that had been changed radically by the arrival of modernity. Eretz Israel was their homeland of the past. Their homeland of the present and future was France or Germany or Argentina or the United States or wherever they began to feel themselves a part of society.



However, the idea that it was forbidden for the Jews collectively to return to their land would be challenged from a totally different direction. The idea that it was purely a Divine decision to allow the Jews back into Eretz Israel was challenged by the Zionist movement that began to develop at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Different parts of the Zionist movement challenged this idea in different ways. Let us hear two different voices, both of which challenged the previous viewpoint. We can hear both of these voices, loudly and clearly, in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### The first voice:

*"Shalom to you all. I am Menachem. I grew up in Russia and I recently left there to come up to Zion, to the Land of Israel. Why? Russia was not my home and it had never been home to the Jews. It was clear that there were many national movements in Russia and indeed throughout Europe. The only group that didn't have a national movement was us. We had a homeland but it wasn't under our control. We had a people but it was scattered all over the world. So we started to think, why should we of all peoples, be the only ones not allowed to live in our homeland as a separate people? Logical, no?"*

*And then we found that we had two types of opposition, from the non-Jews and the Jews. The non-Jews who had controlled the Land – our land – for thousands of years weren't inclined to let us come back. That was where Herzl came in with all of his diplomatic activity. That struggle is still going on. Slowly, slowly, we are working to persuade the world that we need a Jewish state and that indeed it will be good for the world. The other opposition came from those Jews who said that it was some kind of a rebellion against God to actively try and create a collective return of the people to Zion. This was an old superstitious position that had developed over thousands of years. As far as I'm concerned this is total nonsense. There's only one thing that can keep us from going back and that's lack of will power. If we want to do it enough, it'll happen. Enough with this ridiculous idea that we have to trust God to do what's best for us. We've been trusting God for thousands of years and what did it ever get us except pain and persecution?"*

*We need to take our fate in our hands and stop listening to stupid nay-sayers who have been persuading the people to go against their better interests for the last two thousand years. Our interests lie in getting back to our land as quickly as possible and creating a society to take up the work that stopped thousands of years ago, the work that should never have been paused even for a moment. We need to create ourselves as a normal nation on our own land. And the sooner the better. It's time to stop talking of the Messiah. We are our own Messiah. God had his chance. Now it's ours."*



## The second voice:

*"I heard everything that Menachem said. He's right and he's wrong. I'll tell you what I mean. My name, by the way is Shulamit. I'm a follower of the great Rav Kook. Most of what I want to say, I learnt from him. It's absolutely true that the Jews need to get back to the Land and try and create a society of their own. Anyone who does that is involved in important work. The truth is that it is not just important work. It's holy work. It's part of God's plan. I would put it like this. We believe that the Messianic process is misunderstood today. It is not that once the people are perfect and God forgives us, we will then be able to come back to Eretz Israel with the Messiah. That's what people have believed for centuries, but it doesn't make it correct.*

*The fact is that we must make the Messianic process happen by taking things into our own hands and returning to Eretz Israel to build it up ourselves. That is what God is waiting for. The return to Israel will initiate the Messianic process. The process will happen because of the work of men and women like Menachem and myself. The difference between us is that he doesn't recognize that everything that he is doing and that he and his friends want to continue to do, building up the land and the society is God's work, part of God's plan. One day, they'll realize though. He talks secular, he thinks secular, but in reality he acts holy. We're not just any old people. We are chosen. We are God's servants and it's in that spirit, with that understanding that we must go and work our land."*

The secularists like Menachem, (the dominant groups from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) simply ignored the traditional prohibition and claimed that it was a human process rather than a Divine one. The building up of Eretz Israel and the creation of a Jewish state was essential to help the Jewish people, dying a death both physically and culturally. The religious Zionists like Shulamit, saw that the aim was to create a Godly society, in God's image, as a trigger for the Messianic process.

Both of these groups challenged the traditional idea of Eretz Israel as a place that needed to wait for God and the Messiah before the Jews returned. Together with those many Jews described previously who broke their links with the Land of Israel as their homeland, we see a series of changes in the way in which the Land was related to. There were still many Jews who kept the traditional relationship and who were thus opposed to Zionism without ever ceasing to see Eretz Israel as the **ultimate** homeland. Many of these were finally persuaded to move to the Land of Israel (without necessarily accepting Zionism) in the wake of the Shoah.

The Shoah also had a clear effect on many Jews who had broken any connection with the idea of Eretz Israel as a place for a modern Jewish homeland. Many Jews in the west had not only cut themselves off from the Israel seeing it as irrelevant to them, but had actually become ideologically opposed to Zionism. Any idea that the homeland of the Jewish People was in Israel (rather than in London, Paris or Berlin) was, perhaps, a threat that people saw as dangerous. They couldn't look Zionism in



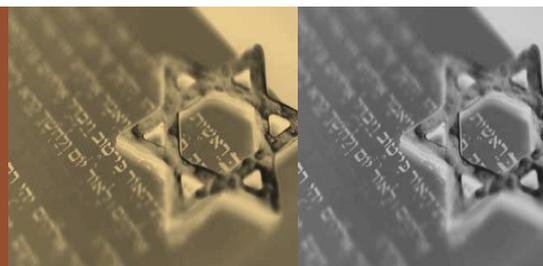
the eye. To do so would be to undermine their own position as good English, French or German citizens. So they opposed it.

But the Shoah shook up the ideas of a lot of Jews in many different ways. Things that had been unthinkable had become facts. Old positions changed, including opinions of Zionism.

Many Jews now became strong Zionists in their feelings for and support for a Jewish state. Most western Jews saw themselves exactly as that – western Jews, part of their society and loyal to it, but they were Jews who were more open to support of Jews in other places and to the idea of a Jewish state. Many - not all - Jews around the world today, who are strong in their local patriotism towards the place where they live, also feel deeply connected with Israel. They might not like everything that Israel does or approve of her every action. But they feel that it is something of deep meaning to them.



## SUMMING UP THE STORY ... HOW WE GOT TO BE US



We have seen how modernity completely transformed the Jewish reality that had developed over thousands of years according to the Rabbinic model. What started in the west, slowly spread to other parts of the Jewish world. As millions of Jews immigrated from more traditional centres into new centres where modernization had already taken place, (America, South America, Israel), they became part of this process too. It was not just the Jews themselves who were transformed but their concept of community too.

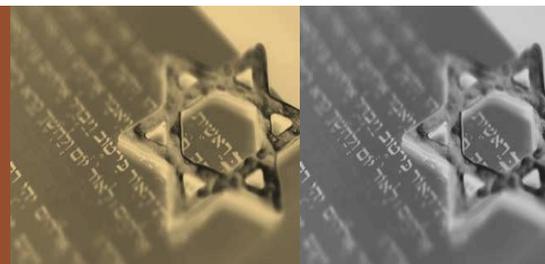
An interesting dynamic developed in Israel. Those who went to Israel found that they had entered...another modern state! In other modern countries, as we have seen, the state has taken on many of the roles of the traditional communities, so that Jews have no pressure on them to join communities. It has become a purely voluntary act for the individual. Israel has done the same thing. Perhaps ironically, in the new sovereign Jewish state, there is no pressure to join a community. There are thousands of synagogues all over the country, but very few of them have transformed themselves into anything resembling the basis for a community. There are some significant exceptions. Most Haredim are clearly parts of communities. Kibbutzim and moshavim form different kinds of community, and in fact many of these are going through changes in these respects, at this time. Some other communities exist, especially in settlements united by an organizing ideology. However essentially, for most Israelis, the modern western model is in place. Community is voluntary, for those people who feel that they wish to gain something that can be achieved within some kind of a community framework.

In the Jewish world as a whole, there are those who have continued the traditional model in one way or another, but the majority of Jews in the world have been transformed out of all recognition. Very few Jews in the world today live the same Jewish life as their great grandparents. Everything has changed for them, including their idea of Jewish community.



## PART THREE

### WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO HERE? INTRODUCING THE COMMUNITY SECTION



We have looked at the Jewish world in general and have attempted to show the significance and the dynamics both of the individual Jewish community and of the larger area centres that grew up in different periods in various places throughout the Jewish world. We have tried to sketch the developments from the earliest times to the modern period, emphasizing especially the developments and changes in the modern period. We have also tried to explain how the Jewish world came to be geographically and demographically what it is today.

Now we come to the next part of the booklet in which we examine the dynamics of some of the more significant national Jewish communities in the world today. By a national community we mean the Jewish community that lives inside a sovereign state (we are not talking about Israel here) as a minority within that country.

In this section we will bring ten Jewish communities in the contemporary Jewish world. They include seven of the largest communities according to the demographic estimates currently accepted in the Jewish world (in order of size, the United States, France, Canada, Great Britain, Argentina, Germany and Australia) and two others, Hungary and South Africa that we think are particularly interesting in the context of the Jewish world today. The expectation is not that anyone will study all of these communities but rather that a presentation of so many different communities will make it possible to focus on those elements of the modern Jewish world which are particularly interesting and significant to you. We also want to facilitate cross-community comparisons, so that it is possible to take specific aspects of Jewish community life and compare those aspects across a number of different places.

In order to make comparison between the communities relatively easy, we have decided to use the identical mechanism to analyse and describe each of the communities. We have compiled a list of twelve questions which we pose for each of the communities. These questions have been chosen since they provide twelve searchlights into different aspects of the life of a contemporary community and provide a good initial picture into the make up and the dynamics of each community. Collectively, they cover all major aspects of community life. We will ask the same twelve questions for each of the communities and in addition, we will bring two (fictional) voices to represent each community, one from the present and one from the past, in order to personalise the experience of the community for the reader.

The exception is the community of Great Britain where we have added an extra element. We wished to bring one community where we gave an organic picture of its development in the pre-modern and modern world, stressing continuity and gradual development rather than examining it only from the spotlight of the



community today. Thus here we have added to the twelve question model an extra chapter bringing a longer chronological description of the community.

Let us now briefly attempt to "organize" the ten communities, giving a very initial categorization to allow you to find your way to those communities that you wish to focus on.

## 1. The Americas: The United States, Canada and Argentina.

We start with three communities from North and South America, the United States, the largest of the diaspora communities, Canada, the third largest and Argentina, the sixth largest. We start with the U.S. not just because it is indeed far and away the largest Jewish community but because it is the community that is most often thought about when Jews the world over think about Diaspora Jewry. However, it should be noted that the concentration on the United States often masks the importance of Canada, which is a large community, with an important existence of its own, far too often underestimated in terms of its significance in the Jewish world today. As an examination of the Canadian community will show, there are considerable differences between the situation of the Jewish communities in the two centres. For example, almost double the percentage of Jews that have visited Israel from the United States, have come there from Canada. The reason is connected with some major differences in the structures and dynamics of the two communities. We suggest that there are important lessons that can be learnt from comparing the two "sister" states.

In the south, we meet Argentina. Argentina is home to over 50% of the half a million Jews in Latin America. In addition it is a community that has been in the news in recent years over the last few years, both because of some major terrorist outrages and because of the very difficult social and economic situation of large parts of the community (reflecting difficulties in Argentina as a whole). It is important to understand the community story there.

## 2. South Africa and Australia.

We bring these two communities for different reasons, but the fact is that they are in many ways complementary communities. Both are large and important English speaking communities, which developed to importance at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both developed vibrant and interesting community lives and thriving educational systems. However, for reasons which will become clear when you examine the community stories, South Africa is shrinking while Australia is growing. Moreover, the growth in Australia has come about largely because of the move of Jews from South Africa. The processes in both communities are interesting, and show certain parallel lines, despite the different directions in which the communities are developing.



### 3. East Central and Eastern Europe. Hungary.

This area is perhaps the most fascinating area of the Diaspora Jewish world today. Here we see communities that were basically destroyed by the combination of Nazism and Communism, beginning to come back to some kind of existence since the fall of Communism at the beginning of the 1990's. Our example here is Hungary, the only non-Soviet Union state in Eastern (or East Central) Europe, which survived the Holocaust with a large number of Jews intact. A fascinating Jewish story is developing there in front of our eyes and it is that story that we bring here.

### 4. Western Europe. Germany, France and Great Britain.

There are three large communities in Western Europe, Germany, France and Britain and we bring them all. We open with Germany which about thirty years ago, had no more than 30,000 Jews and now today has well over a hundred thousand. The reason for this enormous rise (it is the fastest growing Jewish community in the world) is almost completely the influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union, who have decided to move to Germany, which welcomes Jewish immigrants, in an effort to compensate for its recent terrible history. The dynamic developing there is particularly interesting.

France is the second largest Diaspora community in the world with around 500,000 Jews there. The community, which was largely built up in the 1950's and 60's by a huge immigration of Jews from North Africa, has gone through some very difficult times recently, as a tide of rising anti-Semitism has kept them in the news, both nationally and internationally.

Britain is also undergoing some very significant internal changes in recent decades. Like several other communities, it is developing a stronger and more vibrant centre to the community even while many drop out of meaningful contact with the community from around the edges of the Jewish population. A generation ago, even while it had well over 350,000 members, there were many inside the community itself who believed that it had no future. Today, however, despite the smaller size of the community (a little under 300,000), there would be many who predict a long and healthy future. To find out why, you'll have to read the story. As mentioned before, we have treated this community story differently from all of the others, to give a different picture of the slow and gradual development of a Jewish community until its present situation today.

*Welcome to the community section. Go out and explore!*

