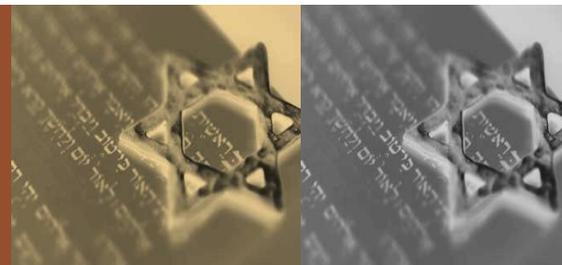


Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: WHY DOES THE MODERN JEWISH WORLD LOOK THE WAY IT DOES: WHERE ARE THE JEWS TODAY AND HOW DID THEY GET THERE?



INTRODUCING THE QUESTIONS

One of the most difficult series of questions in the Jewish world today concerns demography. How many Jews actually exist in the world today? What is happening to the Jewish population in different centres of the world? What are the relative shares of Israel and Diaspora in the overall Jewish population of the world? And as important as the numbers themselves are, the really crucial questions lie underneath the surface. What is the meaning of the numbers? What is the nature of the changing balance of demographic power between the State of Israel and the Diaspora as a whole? What trends do they suggest? What are the implications of today's numbers for tomorrow's future? And perhaps the most difficult question of Jews for those who spend their lives counting Jews: Who, exactly do you count? In other words, for the purpose of demographic calculations, who is a Jew?

In this paper, we will try and consider all of these questions which come out of today's Jewish world. But in order to appreciate them we will try and put them into a number of contexts – of Jewish history as a whole, of modern Jewish history specifically, and of contemporary Jewish sociology. Only that way, we suggest, is it possible to make sense of the meaning of the dry numbers and statistics.

There are few, if any, peoples, in the world today for whom geographic mobility has played such a large part in their story. The Jews have traditionally been a wandering people since the days of the Biblical patriarchs, and they have provided the archetype of the wanderer for much of humanity over the last millenia. Even a cursory study of the Biblical books will indicate to us that despite the idea that the roots of the Jews are so inextricably tied up with the land of Israel, the Jews are extraordinary travelers. The patriarchs wandered, the tribes wandered, the nation was exiled and well before the end of the second Temple period (70C.E.), despite the common misconception that it was only with the Temple's fall that the Jews left their land, more Jews lived in Diaspora than in the Land of Israel. At that time, around the turn of the millenium, Jews could be found throughout the Roman Empire, throughout Asia and throughout North Africa. The total Jewish population of the world at this point, is estimated to have been between 4.5 and 7 million.

The great change that occurs after the Temple's destruction is that, within a few generations, not only do the majority of Jews live outside the Land of Israel, but the centres of gravity of the Jewish world have started to move beyond the borders of the Land. After the writing of the Mishna in Eretz Israel (circa 200 C.E.) the old community of Babylon rose increasingly to prominence while the community of Judea, went into a decline from which it would only be saved thousands of years later, in the 20th century. From that point on it was all Diaspora, as different Jewish centres rose and fell, in relatively swift succession.



Sometimes, in some generations there were several great Jewish centres that co-existed with each other. Only for a brief couple of generations, in the 16th century, do we get any kind of a meaningful Jewish centre appearing in Eretz Israel. In the overall picture, then, we get thousands of years of live Jewish centres in the lands of Diaspora. These different centres were very diverse. As Babylon declined, Spain and Ashkenaz (the German lands) were rising to prominence, and as these in turn declined, North Africa and Poland came into their own. Still later, Jews returned to Northern and Western Europe and the new lands of the Americas began to surface as a new direction in Jewish community history.

Generally, as we look at the middle ages, a couple of comments should be made. Firstly, there is no question that the size of the world Jewish population declined substantially in this period. Around the fifteenth century, for example, the number of Jews in the world is estimated to have been approximately one million. Secondly, right up to the early modern period, the majority of Jews lived in the east. Out of the same million Jews estimated to have been living in the fifteenth century, only about 30% of them – some 300,000 are thought to have lived in Europe. With the beginning of the modern world, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, things start to change in both of these respects. Absolute numbers went up and the proportion of the European Jews also increases. Thus in 1800, of an estimated 2.5 million Jews in the world, around 1.5 million lived in Europe.

It was the late nineteenth century, however, that started to create the dynamic that would lay the underpinnings of our own Jewish world. It was then that the great centre of Eastern Europe began to discharge its Jews to North (and, to a lesser extent, South), America, the English speaking world as a whole and finally, and arguably most significantly, to the old new land of Israel. It is here that we must start to examine the story a little more precisely.

Let us survey the six different historical phenomena that have shaped the demography of the Jewish world that we inhabit today. We suggest that these are the central processes that underlie the demography of the modern Jewish world. We will examine them each in turn.

1. Events in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century.
2. The Holocaust.
3. Zionism and the rise of the State of Israel.
4. The fall of Communism in Eastern and East Central Europe.
5. Economic factors causing migration.
6. Assimilation and intermarriage.



1. EVENTS IN RUSSIA AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

It is a relatively well-known fact that 1881 is a key date in modern Jewish history. It is the date that caused great earth tremors to ripple through the Eastern European Jewish community centred in the “pale of Settlement”, the vast area to the west of Russia in which the vast majority of Russia’s Jews were restricted. It is in the wake of the events of 1881 that enormous changes, both demographic and ideological, began to develop, changes that would change the face of the Jewish world forever.

Among those who are somewhat familiar with this fact, the reason most often given for the changes is the pogroms that occurred in that year in the wake of the assassination of the Tsar of Russia, Alexander the Second, whose death was largely blamed on the Jews. It is indeed true that the pogroms provided the immediate catalyst for the intense soul searching that underlay the new winds that blew through the community from now on. However, what often fails to be understood is that there was a major demographic cause to the events of this year.

The pogroms were aimed against a Jewish community that was in the process of starving to death and the major reason for this was the enormous population explosion that hit the Jews of Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century. Eastern Europe in general and the area of the Pale of Settlement specifically, were among the most undeveloped parts of Europe economically. The Jews themselves were a particularly hard-hit community. Restricted as they were by their inability to own land in almost the entire area, pushed into a number of marginal occupations from which they were forced to try and make a living, and generally discriminated against by the regime, they would have been in trouble in any circumstances. But in addition to all these, the nineteenth century saw a major population explosion among the Eastern European Jews for reasons that have never been completely explained.

Their population had been expanding for many generations but the first eighty years of the century saw an extraordinary increase in population. In these two generations their numbers rose by over 500% - from around a million at the beginning of the period to over five million in 1880. Predictably, in these circumstances, the material circumstances of the Jewish population, went hurtling downwards – and even at the start of this period, their position had been very difficult! The result was widespread poverty and starvation. The community and its institutions were in a state of collapse. And it was against this background that the pogroms struck the community. Is it any wonder that the two expressions of the crisis in which the community now found themselves were ideological and demographic?

The response was ideological on the one hand because it was obvious to many of the youth, in particular, that there was no future for them in Eastern Europe unless they started to take fate into their own hands in one way or another. They had to change their situation by their own efforts, rather than wait passively in the blind hope that



their situation would improve naturally. Increased numbers started to enter the ranks of the socialist, and revolutionary camp while others began to make their way to what would soon become full-fledged Zionism. These responses were not long in coming. The other response, the demographic one, was immediate.

Millions of the Eastern European Jews reacted to the new situation created by the pogroms by deciding to leave Russia and Eastern Europe in general. Starting in the immediate wake of the pogroms, thousands, then tens of thousands and finally hundreds of thousands and millions of Jews left Eastern Europe and struck out for areas of more promise in the modern world. The majority wanted America.

America had struck roots among the Jews as the potential “Goldene Medina” the golden state where the very streets ran with gold and where immigrants would be able to improve their economic situation and work their way upwards in a very brief period of time. It was the myth of America rather than the concrete reality that caused the stampede to that land.

Interestingly, although America was the goal of almost everybody, many of the emigrants never got there but ended up somewhere completely different. For a variety of reasons including unscrupulous ship agents, shortage of funds and efforts of certain philanthropists who had other plan for the emigrants, many ended up in different parts of the world. Many went to Western Europe, especially to Britain. Others went to South America. But the vast majority did indeed go to the United States where they soon formed the dominant layer numerically of the Jewish communities there.

They were the third layer of the Jewish community of the United States and from this point of view, the situation was not dissimilar in many of the other communities in which the new immigrants found themselves. The veteran settlers were almost all Sepharadi (Spanish) Jews whose ancestors had escaped Spain and Portugal in centuries past and had struck out for the New World in the hope of escaping religious persecution. An additional layer of Jewish settlers had come mostly from Central Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, propelled by a host of motives, economic, religious and political. The 1870’s had seen several thousands of East European settlers make their way to the United States, but this was a mere prelude to the floods that came in the decades following 1881. Altogether over two million Jews would make their way to the new “promised Land” in these years.

Most of these would encounter a very difficult and sometimes horrific reality on their arrival there, so different from the dream and visions that they had experienced while still in Russia. A brutal proletarianisation would be the lot of many in the sweatshops of the big American cities such as New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. Large Jewish ghettos, centres of sordid poverty and social ills, would develop in these and other cities (paralleled by similar developments in cities in other countries. The Lower East Side was in many ways only a larger version of London’s East End).



It is worth mentioning at this stage that the experience of urbanisation and proletarianisation was not restricted in these years to the Jews who left Eastern Europe for the cities of the New World. A similar experience was the lot of many of the Jews who stayed. It is important to remember that despite the vast exodus from Eastern Europe, the net effect was merely to drain off the surplus population. The Jewish population of the Pale stayed fairly stable remaining at the five million level on the eve of World War One, despite the exit of some two and a half million Jews in the preceding thirty years. Many of the remaining Jews in these years were pulled into the big cities that were developing as a result of industrial investment and other economic forces. Cities such as Odessa, Bialystok, Lodz, and most especially Warsaw, now developed large Jewish proletariats. Warsaw became a giant – the largest community in the world before it was finally overtaken by New York.

In the Jewish world as a whole it can be said, that at least among the Ashkenazi Jews (the vast majority of the total Jewish population at this time), these were years of great difficulties but also years of great dynamism and change. In the cities of the New World, the often brutal conditions encountered by the immigrant generation would largely give way, within less than a generation to a much better economic and social reality. These Jews were on the whole upwardly mobile. In the large Jewish cities of Eastern Europe, on the other hand, upward mobility would be the experience of only the minority. The vast majority would stay down in the working classes, due to the limited economic growth of the entire area and the equally limited opportunities for Jews in particular to progress economically.

2. THE HOLOCAUST.

For all the horror associated with the Holocaust, it is relatively simple to sum up its demographic effects. The most obvious effect was plainly the destruction of the vast majority of central and eastern European Jewry. With the two exceptions of Hungary, where some hundred thousand Jews are estimated to have survived because of specific circumstances, and the interior of Russia, never conquered by the Nazis, and a haven to hundreds of thousands of Jews who fled to the east during the war years, almost all of this Jewry was destroyed. The heart of Europe's Jewry was utterly destroyed and the map of the Jewish world would alter forever. In the aftermath of the Holocaust the total Jewish population fell from around 16.6 million in 1939 to around 11 million after the war.

The number of Jewish survivors who wanted to return to their pre-war homes in Central and Eastern Europe was far exceeded by those who wished to leave those areas forever. The pogroms that broke out in the immediate post-war period in those areas to which the Jews did return, also influenced many to call it a day and to look for other countries to live out their lives. It is difficult to talk of precise numbers but hundreds of thousands now went in the wake of the previous generations turning either to Palestine/Israel on the one hand or to the new centres of western Jewry in America (including South America), western Europe, Australia and South Africa. Some 150,000 are estimated to have arrived in the post-war years to Palestine/Israel. The effect of the Holocaust survivors on all of the communities



where they arrived was enormous, especially in the middle to long term where certain communities emerged with Holocaust consciousness at the centre of their Jewish identity.

3. ZIONISM AND THE RISE OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

The Zionist story has had enormous impact on the modern Jewish story in many different ways. There is hardly an aspect of Jewish existence that has not been transformed in one way or other as a result of the rise of Zionism and the State of Israel. Among these the demographic revolution wrought by Zionism is especially worthy of note.

The emergence of a great new Jewish centre in the Old New land of Palestine is far more than a major demographic change for the Jews but the demography itself is striking in a number of different ways. In 1800, the total Jewish population of Palestine was only a few thousand. This number had risen to just over 25,000 before the beginning of the “Zionist” Aliyah which followed the 1881 pogroms.

In relation to the mass immigrations to the west and specifically to the United States in the decades after 1881, which brought, as mentioned, millions of immigrants to the west, the Zionist Aliyot (waves of immigration to the Land of Israel) were small. By 1914, at the end of the second Aliyah, a mere 65,000 are estimated to have joined the Jewish community of Palestine and to have stayed. Numbers increased considerably from the mid-1920's and at the end of the 1930's, the Jewish population was over 425,000. The next decade would bring a little less than 200,000 Jews so that on the eve of independence the Jewish population stood at over 600,000.

Equally important in the developing picture was the ethnic background of the Jewish population. Before the Zionist waves of Aliyah started to change the country, there was a large proportion of Sepharadi Jews, many of whom traced themselves back for generations in the Land. But with the exception of some significant groups of Yemenite immigrants, the vast majority of the pre-State immigrants were European in background. This perhaps should not surprise us. Zionism was a creation of Europe. Ideologically it came out of a Europe that was in the grip of fierce nationalist excitement throughout the nineteenth century. The eastern world was less touched by the factors that created Zionism. It had fallen on fairly sleepy times centuries earlier and would only start to wake up to new ideas in the twentieth century. As a result, the new state was a creation, almost exclusively, of a Zionist Ashkenazi Jewry which had largely revolted against its native European way of life.

One of the first decisions of the new state was to reverse the closed immigration policy of the British, who had seriously restricted Jewish immigration in the pre-war years. New immigrants poured into the country. In these years, immigration came mainly from two sources. The first was Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, many of whom had been placed by the British in internment camps on Cyprus. The second source was the masses of Eastern Jews who had played up to now only a marginal



role in the Zionist story. These communities were now on the move due to a mixture of Zionist propaganda, Messianic enthusiasm and the anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish feelings that had flared up in many Arab countries in recent years.

It was in these years that the character of the Jewish State as a European creation of ideological Zionism began to be challenged. Hundreds of thousands of eastern Jews came in the years after independence from countries in Asia and Africa. The three largest eastern communities of these years were from Iraq (by far the largest), Yemen and Morocco. They joined the Jews coming in at this time from post Holocaust Europe, spearheaded by large groups from Rumania and Poland. As Israel began to fill up, absorbing some 680,000 immigrants in the four years following independence, it was at the expense of large parts of the Jewish world, in Eastern and East Central Europe who were being emptied of their Jews after centuries and millenia of Jewish communal existence. The roots of the Iraqi (Babylonian) community and the Yemenite community were some two and a half thousand years deep. These years see the beginning of the end for those communities, and their relocation in their original soil, the Land of Israel.

Following those early years of statehood, where the Jewish population of the young state more than doubled, causing intense social tensions and problems which continue to impact today's Israel, immigration settled down to more manageable proportions for the next thirty years. Many Jews continued to come in the 1950's especially from countries like Poland, Rumania and Morocco. In the aftermath of the 1967 war, there was some substantial immigration from western countries, especially the English speaking world and Western Europe. Soviet immigrants began to appear in the early 1970's as Russia, under intense pressure from the western world allowed Jews to leave for Israel. By the end of the decade, around 140,000 had arrived in Israel.

This Aliyah, hailed as a triumph by Jews throughout the world, and including many figures – prisoners of Zion, who had become famous in the years of their struggle – caused much social tension in Israel, as resentments towards the newcomers developed among many of the disadvantaged population. This would be a prelude to the far larger wave of Russian immigration that would develop in the late eighties, the last years of the Communist regime and in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet state. With peak years in 1990 and 1991 immigration from the former Soviet Union would reach three quarters of a million by the end of the century.

Other notable waves of Aliyah include the Ethiopian Aliyah, principally from 1984 (operation Moses) and 1991 (operation Solomon). This Aliyah brought an almost unknown new element into the State of Israel and indeed to the consciousness of the Jewish world. It was, at one and the same time, a source of great pride to Israel and a cause of great frustration and difficulty due to the difficulties in absorption, which are still felt in large parts of the community today. Most recently the troubled communities of Argentina and France have increased the numbers of their immigrants in significant numbers. Altogether millions of immigrants have come to



Palestine/Israel reinforcing the fact that the last century should be seen in the Jewish world as a century of Jewish migration, by far the greatest in Jewish history.

Why have all these people come? Here we come to a subject of far wider relevance than just the Zionist context, but it is a good time to introduce it. In order to understand why people move from place A to place B, we need to understand that there are two sets of factors that have to be examined, “push factors” and “pull factors”.

Push factors are the things that make a person want to leave their home. Pull factors are the things that attract them to a specific new place. It is not enough to explain that a person feels pushed out of place A. It is necessary to explain why they have chosen place B rather than place C. If we apply these ideas, to the question of the Olim (new immigrants) who came to Palestine/Israel, we get an idea of the complexity of the issues involved.

The early Zionist Aliyot were largely composed of people who felt both that they could not continue to live in Eastern Europe and that they were ideologically attracted to the idea of a Jewish society or state. For many of them, the reasons that they could not continue to live as Jews in Eastern Europe were connected with their concept of what it meant to live a Jewish life, itself influenced by Zionism. There were others, however, that wanted a geographical change rather than an ideological change. Many of these came to Eretz Israel in the same period as the Zionists but they did not come for Zionist motives. Most of this last group was attracted by the idea of a life in the Land of Israel but wanted no part of the Zionist idea of a Jewish society or state. All of these immigrants were drawn in one way or other to the idea of living in Israel, but there were many different concepts of what the Israel was to which they wanted to come. This alone would set up many conflicts in years to come. Even after the establishment of the State of Israel, there were Jews who came to Israel not because of the State but rather despite it!

Many came to Palestine/Israel because they were pushed out of their native lands and they had no other good option. This is true for many of the central European Jews who came to Palestine as refugees from Hitler and fascism in the mid-1930's. Most of them did not come as active Zionists. They would far rather have stayed in their native communities and would indeed have done so if they had not been forced out. They came to Palestine because there were very few openings to them and Palestine was more accessible than other places until the British clamped down strongly on Jewish immigration. But when they came to Palestine and encountered the reality there, many of them became very strongly Zionised. In this way, the pull factors acted on them to a large extent when they had already made their move! Some groups – Yemenites in the early years of the twentieth century, Ethiopian Jews at the end of the century - came to Palestine knowing very little about the reality but attracted by Messianic dreams harboured for thousands of years.

There were many who came for economic reasons – Jews from Poland in the early 1920's, Jews from the F.S.U. in the 1990's and Argentinian Jews recently. Many of



them were transformed once they got to Israel: others moved on when better economic chances opened up subsequently.

One of the compelling subjects that needs to be mentioned in this regard, is the interaction of the different groups that came to make up the society of Israel. It should come as no surprise when we consider not only the multiplicity of different groups who came here, but also the diversity of their reasons, that the interaction between the groups and sub-groups was anything but smooth.

There are many reasons for this and we can hardly enter into them here, but suffice it to say that one of the interesting and important results of this was the reinforcement of separate group identity among many of the groups decades after they came to Israel. The founding fathers of the Zionist state set up a paradigm of melting pot that would have each group jettisoning their separate group identity in order to subsume it in a common identity of a new Hebrew nation. However, the different aims of the members of the different groups and the antagonism that was aroused by the difficult interaction between the groups acted to preserve a separate group identity among many of the groups. This was true especially for many of the groups who felt, in one way or other, that their identity was looked down on by the mainstream establishment. As a result not only was group identity preserved, but it was preserved often with an aggressive and resentful attitude towards the establishment, seen as the purveyors of the idea of a uniform culture.

Thus we have the fascinating phenomenon of a Jewish Diaspora that has largely vanished in many parts of the world but where the specific identities of many of the members of those cultures have been preserved to some extent, albeit in much altered form, in Israel. Unquestionably one of the most important questions that Israel is dealing with internally is to what extent these separate cultural identities will be meaningful in another generation. It is too early to tell. The total Jewish population of Israel today is a little over 5,250,000 out of a total population of some 6,500,000.

One of the critical questions in modern Jewish demography is the balance between the Jewish community of Israel and the rest of the Jewish world. We said in the introduction that somewhere around the end of the second Temple period, the Jewish people became a Diaspora based people. This happened in three stages. Already before the Temple was destroyed, the majority of Jews already sat in Diaspora. It appears that we have a clear advantage in numbers to Diaspora communities at the very latest by the turn of the millenium, two generations prior to the Temple's destruction. Nevertheless, in terms of weight and direction, the centre was still in Judea. The Temple's destruction changed immensely the balance of the two elements but the emerging post-destruction Rabbinic leadership still provided a centre around which Jewish life was constructed and organised. Somewhere in the third century C.E. after the publication of the Mishnah, the situation finally changed in favour of Diaspora Jewry. With the help of scholars who left Eretz Israel, the great community of Babylon, existing already quietly for many centuries, finally began to assert itself. This was the beginning of the final stage in the transition to Diaspora



centrality. The Land of Israel became an emotional and theological centre rather than a living centre and as such it remained until the beginning of the Zionist story. At this point, the balance, slowly but surely began to change again. Over the past 120 years, more and more Diaspora Jews began to relocate in Palestine/Israel. More and more Diaspora communities began to empty out and the numbers of Jews in “Zion” steadily increased. In terms of numbers, the picture is clearly reflected in the following statistics which are based on developments since the late 1930’s. Some of the statistics for the world Jewish population are disputed. We have taken the numbers that seem most acceptable.

Year	World Jewish Population	Israel Number
1800	2,500,000	6,000
1880	7,750,000	25,000
1939	16,620,000	445,000
1945	11,000,000	565,000
1948	11,530,000	650,000
1950	11,373,000	1,203,000
1955	11,800,000	1,591,000
1975	12,742,000	2,959,000
1985	12,871,000	3,517,000
1990	12,869,000	3,947,000
1993	12,963,000	4,335,000
1995	13,000,000	4,550,000
2001	13,254,000	4,952,000
2002	Exact numbers not available	5,292,000

What are the implications of these numbers for the overall balance of the Jewish world as a whole? If we remember that the transition from the hegemony of the Eretz Israel community to the dominance of Diaspora was accomplished gradually through a series of stages that took several centuries in all, it should be clear that we must not rush to conclusions. Absolute numbers do not convey the whole picture. Eretz Israel still had leadership and centrality in the Jewish world when the Diaspora communities were already a majority. It can be tentatively suggested that what we have here is the same process in reverse. According to the statistics, it will still be a number of generations before Israel has numerical superiority over the whole of Diaspora. We are nearing the time when Israel is expected to surpass the largest Diaspora community, of the United States. However, a strong case can certainly be made that in most significant aspects, practical leadership passed to Israel at some undefinable moment in the past. It remains to be seen to what extent these trends continue, but it seems clear that unless statistical trends turn around because of some dramatic development, we are in the process of a reversal of the diasporisation process from thousands of years ago.



4. THE FALL OF COMMUNISM IN EASTERN AND EAST CENTRAL EUROPE.

As mentioned earlier, the Holocaust all but wiped out Jewish life in Central, East Central and Eastern Europe. Substantial communities only existed potentially in Hungary (essentially Budapest) and in the central and more easterly parts of the Soviet Union. We use the word “potentially” to underline the problematic nature of Jewish existence in the lands that remained under Communist control until the late 1980’s.

Communism made any kind of meaningful Jewish life untenable. Jewish culture was recognised only in the most restricted way and members of the Jewish communities of Communist Europe always felt themselves under suspicion by the society and by the specific regimes. For all but the hardiest and most determined of Jews, survival as human beings living in these countries was felt to be threatened by the open living of a Jewish life.

This feeling was, of course, enhanced by the knowledge that millions of Jews had died recently just because they were seen as enemies by the regime. In these circumstances, to hide one’s Jewish origins was not to act as a paranoid, but rather to act in the most rational fashion. As a result in many places, Jewish life either went underground or simply ceased to exist, as parents found themselves unable or unwilling to pass over anything positive connected with Jewish life to their children. Jewish identity became for many a stigma and there were many who consciously worked to dissociate themselves from any suspicion of being Jewish. The results were inevitable – an almost complete attrition of the Jewish life of the communities living under Communist regimes. A few older people, too old to change, kept up some vestigial connection with Jewish life. They were seen as harmless by the regime and in some cases were actually co-opted and used by the regime. These people could not provide any model for the younger generations. As a result, it seems fair to say that Jewish life came to a standstill, all over central and Eastern Europe, as much in those places where there was a Jewish population as in those places where the population had been wiped out by the Holocaust.

There were some exceptions to this, especially in areas of the Soviet Union where in the late 1960’s Jewish and Zionist identity became in some ways connected with dissident opposition to the state. In this way, some young and brave Jews were attracted to set up underground circles where Jewish culture and language were studied. These circles were noteworthy but by their very nature they were minority creations and had no possibility of coming to the surface as large-scale manifestations of Jewish identity.

When the Iron Curtain started to totter and finally fell, it was unclear what would happen from the Jewish point of view. No-one knew how many people would be prepared to define themselves as Jews. Even if the regime had fallen, it was not clear that it would be wise or beneficial to individuals to reveal their hidden



identities as Jews in a social situation where Jews would not necessarily be much more accepted than before. One thing that did change, however, was the ability of western organisations to operate in the vacuum that existed.

Some organisations – such as the American Joint Distribution Committee– had been operating quietly underground for many years. These could now emerge and start working more openly and more efficiently. Other organisations that had not been active in the communities could now come in and set up shop, advertising their Jewish wares for all to see. It is difficult to know what exactly would have happened if there had been no attempt by world Jewish organisations to come in and galvanise the latent community. What did happen, largely as result of these organisations, however, is clear. With large resources being used to stimulate the Jewish communities back to life in a whole variety of spheres by the provision of cultural and religious services, and welfare activities, the communities started hesitantly, returning to life.

With time more and more people including many who had never acknowledged their Jewishness, began to emerge and to connect themselves in one form or another with the institutions of the Jewish community. Predictably, the main arenas of activity were in Hungary and the former Soviet Union, but other smaller communities, including Poland, the Baltic states and the new states that came out of the former Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia also showed considerable activity considering their small size.

Contemporary estimates for the size of the Jewish communities today are still very speculative. No-one can be sure, even now, how many Jews are present because there are still Jews emerging in these lands. In addition, there is a major question regarding who should be counted as a Jew. Nevertheless, informed estimates talk in terms of the following round numbers.

550,000 Jews in Russia
400,000 in the Ukraine
80,000 Jews in Hungary
60,000 in Belarus
35,000 in Uzbekistan
30,000 in Azerbaijan,
30,000 in Moldova
17,000 in Georgia
15,000 in Kazakhstan
15,000 in Latvia
14,000 in Rumania
8,000 in Poland
6,000 in the Czech Republic
6,000 in Lithuania
6,000 in Slovakia



and a half dozen more states with a Jewish population of between a thousand and five thousand Jews in each place.

It seems distinctly possible that at least for the next generation, these areas are going to provide unique examples of an expanding Jewish Diaspora population. This seems likely to happen as the school and informal educational and cultural networks work to change the image of negative Jewish identity that was so established in people's minds just a few years ago. Large resources will continue to be spent here in the foreseeable future and this could well cause more and more people to wish to identify as Jews. There is a major question mark connected to the issue of future migration of these populations.

As mentioned earlier hundreds of thousands of those who identify themselves as Jews, or who can prove some marginal connection with Jewish blood, have made Aliyah to Israel. Hundreds of thousands of others have gone to countries in the west, something we will examine in a moment. It remains to be seen whether the communities will stabilise demographically as their community life develops. Perhaps the major issue here is the economic prospects of the particular communities. It is to this factor in general that we now turn.

5. ECONOMIC FACTORS CAUSING MIGRATION.

If we examine the reasons for migration throughout Jewish history, we will see that the two major reasons for the spread of community and the movement of Jews to different areas in the world are the desire to escape persecution and the desire for improved economic prospects. Both of these factors have been operating constantly to shift the Jewish map of the world. Very often the two factors overlapped. Where Jews were needed economically, there was less likelihood of them being actively persecuted.

It was to such places that Jews inevitably gravitated. The Jewish move into Ashkenaz (the German lands) around the early ninth century and the eastwards push of that community into the Polish lands from the thirteenth century onwards and into the Ukrainian lands in the late sixteenth century are examples of these trends. This does not, however, mean that you can define safety and prosperity at any period by looking at a Jewish map. Some communities lived in marginal economic situations, very vulnerable from the point of view of their own security, simply because they had no choice. A half century after the terrible pogroms of the mid-seventeenth century in the Ukraine, which decimated the Jewish community of the area, causing tens of thousands of deaths and putting the mass of the community to flight, the Ukraine was once again full of Jews. Nevertheless, economic factors have been among the major causes of many large-scale Jewish migrations.

In the modern world, we have many examples of economic factors causing migrations. Sometimes these factors act alone as the sole motive for a move. More usually, they combine with other factors to dictate the timing and the new target area. We have already mentioned some examples of this. A major factor in the



stampede to the United States at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and to a lesser extent to Western Europe and South America, was the idea of the “Goldene Medina” with the streets paved with gold. Similarly, we mentioned groups among the new immigrants to Palestine/Israel whose motivation was primarily economic. Such groups, like the Polish Jews of the 1920’s or the former Soviet Jews of recent years combined economic need with the necessity of leaving a harsh social and political reality. It was the combination of these factors that caused the majority of members of these groups to come to Palestine/Israel.

But other major migrations have also been caused by the same mixture of factors, with economic considerations at the centre. We will indicate this phenomenon with four different community stories. These stories are meant to be representative rather than exhaustive. When we talk about the North African move to France we do not mean to imply that there were no Jews who moved to Canada. When we talk about the Russian move to Germany we do not mean to imply that there were not more Jews that moved to the United States. When we talk about the South African move to Australia we do not mean to ignore the fact that there were many who went to England. But each of these stories is indeed indicative of larger trends and is meaningful because of that fact.

A. The North African migration to France. In the 1950’s when much of North African Jewry moved to Israel, an estimated two hundred thousand also moved to France. Their reasons for moving out of North Africa were identical but the conclusions that they drew were different. They were familiar with French language and culture from the colonial dominance of France in North Africa and they wanted to move to a place where they could better their standards of living. These were pragmatic considerations rather than ideological and from that point of view, they certainly worked. French Jewry received an enormous influx of energy which transformed the tired post-war community, and the new immigrants themselves moved into the classic immigrant model of rising fortunes through the generations. This was in stark contrast to the immigrants in Israel, where, as mentioned, bereft of the community leadership which had largely moved to France, and at a disadvantage in the Hebrew speaking spartan environment of the early Zionist state, they struggled, largely unsuccessfully, with that lack of success continuing to much of the second and third generation.

B. The Russian Jewish migration to Germany. Another example of a similar phenomenon, where practical economic considerations were dominant can be found in the tens of thousands of former Soviet Jews, who have moved in the last decade or so to Germany. Here the story is a little different in that the parallel stream who came to Israel, did not on the whole come because of Zionism, but were themselves looking for a new start in a different land. Israel was for many simply the easiest place to be accepted. Nevertheless, the stigma attached still to the idea of Jewish life in Germany is considerable. Only those determined to ignore all other considerations besides the purely practical could really embrace a life there, only fifty years after the Holocaust. Of the 60,000 odd Jews who live in Germany



today, the vast majority are former Russians and their presence has once again begun to transform the community in recent years.

᠘. The Israeli move to Germany. If we stay in Germany for a moment we can talk about a previous layer of the population who represent another side of the same phenomenon. These are the many thousands of Israelis who left Israel for Germany in the 1970's and 1980's, decades that saw a large outflow of Israeli Jews who sought a better economic and social reality in the western world. The majority of these Israeli Jews went to the big cities of the English speaking world, but the presence of a considerable community in Germany highlights the motives of the Jews precisely because of the stigmatic associations of life in Germany.

Israelis live in the one Jewish community in the world which considers moving to it or away from it in ideological terms. The mere choice of the words Aliyah ("going up") to denote the act of Jews who come or Yerida ("going down") to describe the act of those who leave, imply clear moral judgments. Those who come are good and those who leave are bad! The idea is that there is a right place for Jews to be and a wrong place for Jews to be. This Zionist interpretation of the old theological category of Galut (exile, i.e. the wrong place) to denote all places where Jews live outside of the Land, made it difficult for many years for people to leave. The situation today is considerably more tolerant but certainly in the seventies and eighties when tens and ultimately, hundreds of thousands of Jews left Israel, the stigmas attached to such an act were very great indeed. Thus, those who left Israel for Germany of all places, were doubly stigmatised. They had to be highly motivated personally and prepared to ignore all ideological considerations to want to move to Germany and many of them clearly were. Thus on a symbolic level, the move of Israeli Jews to Germany represents the wider act of Israeli yerida in its starkest and most problematic way.

᠔. The South African move to Australia. A fourth group of Jews who left their native country largely, although not completely, for pragmatic economic and social reasons were the Jews of South Africa who for the last twenty years have been leaving their country and making a new home for themselves, largely in the English speaking world and especially in Australia. The reasons that they have left are a combination of the social-political and economic. Socially and politically, they felt increasingly uneasy in a society which was being revolutionised by the black entry into power. Many Jews felt uncertain about the future of the country and their future within the country. In addition, they felt vulnerable to the rising crime rate which swept through most of South Africa, victimising the middle class of which the Jews were an important part. In addition, economic considerations connected with the fall in value of the South African rand made many feel that they should get out before they would not be able to do so economically. These Jews were totally different from the smaller group of South African Jews of the previous generation who left South Africa for ideological reasons because of their inability to live in a regime of apartheid. Many of this earlier group of migrants had made their way to Israel, backing one ideological decision with another.



The recent emigrant Jews of South Africa have had a large impact on the community of Australia, transforming communal institutions and providing a massive injection of talent and energy into the local Jewish leadership. South African Jews, largely because of the difficulties of submerging themselves in the white world of the Afrikaners, have tended to develop a very strong Jewish and Zionist identity. This was a community many of whose members were prepared to roll up their sleeves and work to improve and to influence whichever community they found themselves in.

The four examples above are indicative of a major factor in modern Jewish demography. In an increasingly mobile world, there is an increasing awareness of the ability to transform one's economic and social circumstances by changing the place where you live. This phenomenon has not passed over the Jews. Whole new communities are being built on the basis of these migrant Jews. Old communities are being transformed.

6. ASSIMILATION AND INTERMARRIAGE.

Contrary to popular belief, this last factor is not new among the Jewish people. Two and a half thousand years ago, the Jewish leader Ezra, returning to help take charge of the Jewish community of returnees to Eretz Israel, was shocked by the amount of intermarriage among the Jews of Jerusalem and forced them to divorce their non-Jewish partners. Nevertheless, we have comparatively little information concerning the phenomenon in the pre-modern period. It is clear that it existed in some times and places. But religious taboos and social isolation would have restricted the frequency. We assume it to have been infrequent. The situation changes when we enter the modern age.

With this set of clear demarcations, Judaism entered the modern age, an age where the traditional boundaries which had separated Jews and non-Jews started to fall in the Christian lands of the west. Precisely at this time, we begin to perceive that traditional religious belief was growing weaker among many of the Jews who were encountering the ideas and realities of the outside world. The temptation to convert grew strong, and the nineteenth century in particular sees hundreds of thousands of Jews converting and marrying out.

In the early generations the numbers of Jews who wanted to remain Jews but to marry non-Jews was small, but as the Jews became increasingly accepted and the laws limiting Jewish participation in society were slowly eliminated, the temptation to convert became weaker. At this point the numbers of the intermarried started to climb. The early decades of the twentieth century saw the numbers of intermarriages soaring in most parts of western and central Europe. It is in these years that intermarriage starts to become a real issue for the Jewish people and their leaders.



Already in the mid-nineteenth century, some of the leaders of Reform Judaism were rethinking the traditional ban on intermarriage and beginning to accept the idea of marriage to non-Jews as long as the children were brought up as Jews.

It might be that the decimation of European Jewry amid the enormous rise of anti-Jewish hatred throughout the western world (including the situation in the 1930's in England and the 1940's in America) slowed down the rate of intermarriage. Many moralists have tried to draw from the Holocaust the lesson that Jews who assimilate and intermarry can never succeed in avoiding their fate, which is to be seen and judged as Jews forever. For them, intermarriage is doomed to failure. Despite this, there are many who believe that the situation in the world today is indeed different.

The last generation has seen a return to the pre-war situation of large and ever increasing rates of intermarriage. It is easy to point to the main reasons. The belief in romance which promotes emotional connection as the sole criterion for a relationship, the irrelevance of Jewish religious theology to many contemporary Jews, the ignorance of tradition and history and the relaxation of communal prohibitions and sanctions have all contributed their share to the climbing intermarriage numbers. The Conservative movement has followed Reform in making conscious decisions to accept non-Jewish spouses into their congregations.

Their major argument is that it is preferable to try and win new adherents for Judaism and the Jewish people from among the circle of the intermarried. Pushing them out of the community will weaken the Jewish people in the long run. Encouraging them to re-enter the community and to find their place there is likely to create the basis for a strong and meaningful Jewish life for at least some of the intermarried. This, they argue, is the productive way of dealing with the problem. It should be clear that there is no movement which encourages intermarriage as such. The question that all movements have to deal with is how to respond to the reality.

In the non-Orthodox world, this outlook, with important practical implications, has thus tended to replace the traditional response of outrage and collective shunning that was the preferred communal response until fairly recently at least in the more traditional circles. For the non-Orthodox world, it has been pointed out, outrage has given way to outreach. The Orthodox world, on the other hand, on the whole maintains the traditional attitudes and sanctions towards the subject. The subject remains a difficult one for the majority of the Jewish world.

This whole subject of intermarriage and assimilation is, naturally, of great importance to Jewish demographers. Leaving aside theological considerations of what it does to Judaism and sociological considerations of what it does to the Jewish community, demographers have to decide what to do about the criteria for counting the Jews in communities where assimilation and intermarriage are rife.

Once it could be safely assumed that there was more or less a complete overlap between the number of Jews and the number of Jews involved in communal institutions. No more. Only a percentage of Jews are involved in the different



institutions of the community however the community's institutional lines are drawn. This brings up a series of new and very contentious questions which have no real right or wrong answers. What do you do with children of mixed families if the children are not brought up as Jews? Do you go according to halachic criteria of matrilineal descent even if some communities have embraced patrilineal descent as an equally valid criteria? Are subjective considerations the major criteria for demographic Jew counting? Are Jews who say that they do not see themselves as Jews despite their family antecedents to be counted in or out? Or are there objective criteria such as synagogue attendance, or involvement in cultural and social activities that need to be the deciding factors?

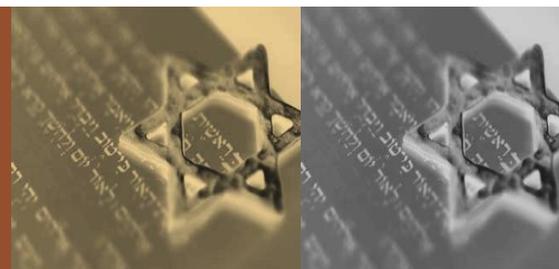
Despite the development of ever more sophisticated survey techniques, we suggest that the demographers job is becoming ever more difficult. It is because of the tremendous difficulties of making "correct" decisions on such complex issues that we suggest that the numbers are important in the main in so far as they support the evidence for trends within the specific community being examined.

Let us take the debate around the recently published figures for American Jewry that has developed in the American demographic arena. According to the National Jewish Population survey, the once-a-decade major official survey of the American Jewish population, the current size of the Jewish population of the United States is 5.2 million. However, the San Francisco based Institute for Jewish and Community Research has come out with recent research that estimates the same population as 6.7 million. The difference results less from differences in surveying technique and more from the criteria that the two surveys have used to answer the question "Who is a Jew?". In addition, the latter study reported that there are another 2.5 million Americans who are "socially or psychologically" connected with Judaism. In this category are people who practice Judaism together with another religion, who were raised Jewish but who adhere now to another religion or who have a Jewish partner or spouse.

This issue is by no means restricted to the west. It is just as pertinent in the communities of East Central and Eastern Europe about which we have already spoken. . Another case in point is Hungary. We quoted the accepted community statistic that places the numbers of Jews in Hungary as 80,000. What we did not mention is that there are a number of surveys of Hungarian Jewry today and the discrepancy between them is astonishing. The numbers quoted in the surveys vary between 50,000 and 200,000. Some of the difference can be explained by the specific reality of the community in which people have hid their identity and are not necessarily hurrying to reclaim it through open connection with the community. But a significant part of the differences is due to the questions that we have raised here. Who exactly should be counted a Jew? These questions are relevant for almost every Jewish community in the world.



SUMMING UP THE ISSUE. SUGGESTIONS FOR MEANING



A recent magazine article (Jerusalem Report 21.10.2002) quoted the demographer responsible for the above-mentioned San Francisco report as saying that “Jews are not disappearing, they are transforming...The kinds of language we used to describe populations in the past are useless and self defeating...We have to be more open to the idea that the Jewish community is broader and probably disconnected from Jewish life. I think that the potential for a larger and even more vibrant Jewish community, is huge”.

We quote this opinion because it has enormous implications for how we see the Jewish community today. Among other things it raises the question of the meaning behind the raw figures. What are the implications of a Jewish population, a large part of which is alienated from the Jewish community and “disconnected from Jewish community life”? Can there be any meaning to Jews who live their lives without a Jewish community. Judaism and Jewish life have always been based around community. The meaning of Jewish life has always been found in the interaction between the individual Jew and the Jewish community.

It can be suggested that the moment that demographers and statisticians begin to talk in terms of large numbers of Jews disconnected from the Jewish community as being a meaningful part of the Jewish collective, the time has come to go back to the drawing board and ask the question about the meaning of being a Jew in the world today. It is not enough to talk about numbers. Demography has to be able to talk about the meaning of the numbers for a living Jewish community. We have surveyed the forces that have created the Jewish world of today. We have suggested the meaning of the major demographic trends and have attempted to outline the contours of the Jewish world today. The official statistics talk about a little over 13,000,000 Jews in the world today. There are those who say that in providing these figures, the demographers have completed their task. We would suggest that in providing those figures, they have just started their work. The real work is in assessing the meaning of the figures for the Jewish present and thus for the Jewish future.



SUGGESTED EDUCATIONAL EXERCISES

1. MAKING SENSE OF JEWISH NUMBERS

- Ask each person in the group to write down what he or she thinks is the total number of Jews in the world today. In addition, they should write down the number of Jews that they think live in Israel today.
- Go round the group taking the numbers and write them all up in two lists on the board. Explain the difficulties of knowing precise numbers but circle the numbers nearest to the accepted statistics. If some of the numbers are way off target, pause to discuss the implications of the suggested numbers. Are there more Jews than most people expected? Less Jews? How do they understand that?
- Explain to the group that they are a group of demographers who have been asked to make a report to the next World Conference of Jewish Statisticians. Give out the following table of statistics (taken from page 9 above).

Year	World Jewish Population	Israel Number
1800	2,500,000	6,000
1880	7,750,000	25,000
1939	16,620,000	445,000
1945	11,000,000	565,000
1948	11,530,000	650,000
1950	11,373,000	1,203,000
1955	11,800,000	1,591,000
1975	12,742,000	2,959,000
1985	12,871,000	3,517,000
1990	12,869,000	3,947,000
1993	12,963,000	4,335,000
1995	13,000,000	4,550,000
2001	13,254,000	4,952,000
2002	Exact numbers not available	5,292,000

- Divide them up into pairs or small groups. Without any extra instructions, they have fifteen or so minutes to look at the statistics and to suggest three trends or phenomena that seem to them to be significant. They must prepare a presentation of those facts, preferably backing up their presentations with visual aids that they should prepare.



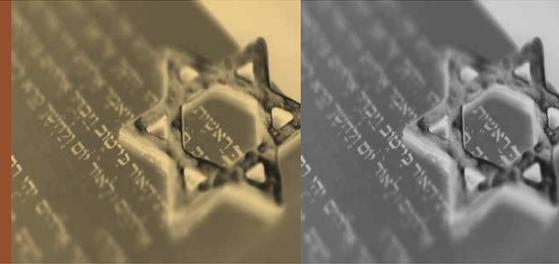
- Get the first groups to present to the class. Discuss each presentation as it comes up. Do the rest of the class agree with the presentations? After a couple of presentations, ask the other groups if they have any new trends that have not yet been mentioned. All the trends mentioned should be listed on the board.
- Each group should prepare a letter to the local Jewish newspaper explaining how they see the significance of what is happening to the world Jewish population. In addition, they should suggest policies that they think should be followed or initiatives that should be taken by the leadership of the Jewish community in your country.

2. ISRAEL AND DIASPORA – DEFINING THE BALANCE.

- In this exercise, return to the previous statistical table. Ask the students in pairs to choose four significant dates from the table and to try and draw approximate pie charts that show the portion of world Jewry living in Palestine or Israel for those four dates.
 - Compare the charts and discuss the trends.
 - Prepare a debate on the following question:



IT IS GOOD FOR THE JEWISH WORLD THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF JEWS LIVING IN ISRAEL IS CONSTANTLY INCREASING!



- Half the class should prepare reasons for the motion and half should prepare reasons against the motion.
- Run the debate, perhaps switching the speakers for and against as the debate continues. During the debate, the group must stick to the “for” or “against” position that they have already been given.
- At the end, out of “character”, have a vote and a concluding discussion.
- Ask everyone to sum up their ideas in writing.

3. COUNTING MY COMMUNITY

- Ask three people from the community from different backgrounds if possible, to come into the class or the group and talk about their own family stories. If there are recent immigrants from different countries try and invite representatives to tell their stories. Where do their families come from? When did they first come to the country? To the community? Why? What are the most significant things that have changed in the family stories in the last generations?
- If the members of the group or class have not done this in the framework of a roots project, ask them to find out their family stories from parents or grandparents stressing the same questions as were asked of the guests. If they have already one this, ask them to bring the material that they accumulated to class and to share it.
- Ask some community leader to come to the group and to give an overall picture of the development of the community, concentrating on the main sub-group who make up the community and the reasons that they came when they came.
- After the representative has gone, discuss how the individual stories of the members of the group fit in to the wider community story.
- Discuss the changes that the community have gone through and prepare a list of questions the answers to which would tell the group about the “Jewish health” of the community. What information should be collected in order to decide what are the trends within the community today?
- Either go out to pre-arranged meetings with community “experts” or invite a



panel of experts to talk to the group.

- After the meeting(s) each two members of the group should write a report on the state of the community based on the things that they have discovered. What is their bottom line? What recommendations would they make to improve the situation?

4. THE NATIONAL PICTURE

- Through the internet or community publications, the group should investigate the details of the national Jewish community (U.S., Canada, Britain, Australia etc) of which their community is a part.
- Prepare an exhibition on the situation of your community and how it fits into the national picture.
- Invite parents and families to a grand community night in which the exhibit will be presented. After the presentation, the group should present to the parents their conclusions from the previous exercise representing their assessment of the community in which they live and a list of suggestions for improving the situation. Discuss the students' conclusions with the parents.

