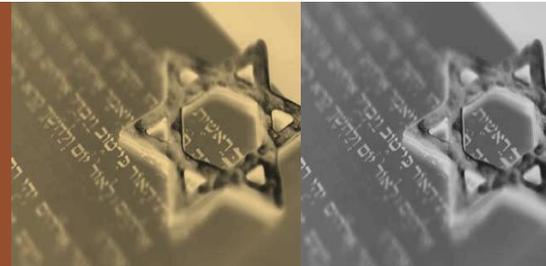


CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARDS THE FINISHING LINE: THE JEWISH PEOPLE'S STORY. THE MODERN PERIOD



INTRODUCTION

We live in a modern Jewish world. The world that existed before modernity was a very different kind of a world, organized in a totally different way, based on different premises. In this chapter we are going to try and survey the changes in the Jewish world and the reasons for those changes.

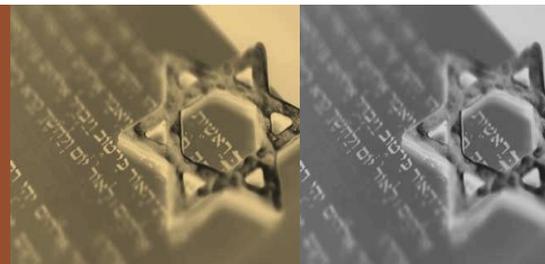
Let us start, perhaps by asking what makes our modern world modern? What are the things that characterize the world today that were not part of the pre-modern world? There are many things we could mention but let us limit ourselves here to ten of the most important ones.

1. Literacy and mass education.
2. Urbanisation and industrialization.
3. Internationalisation of culture.
4. Secularisation and a less central role of religion in many people's lives.
5. The idea that individuals have rights.
6. Breakdown of absolutist governments and the development of democracy.
7. Development of mass media.
8. Medical advances and longer life expectancy.
9. Development of political awareness and secular ideologies.
10. The ideology of women's equality and advances in the status of women.

Any one of these in and of themselves, important as they are, would not necessarily be enough to define our time period as modern. Some of them were present in one way or another, in the pre-modern world. However taken together we can recognize that the mass effect of all of these things together is such as to transport us to a totally different situation to the one that existed two to three hundred years ago.



MODERNIZATION WHEN AND WHERE?



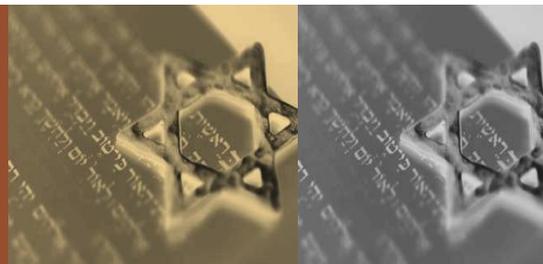
So much for the idea of modernization in general. We need to recognize that these changes developed in different parts of the world at different times. In the western world however, in the old world of Europe or the new world of America especially, we start to see many of these changes developing in the late 18th century and the early 19th century. That was when the western world entered modernity. The rest of Europe was much slower. In general, the further east we go in Europe, the later did changes develop.

The eastern world under Islam started to enter this world of change far later than the advanced west, in most places, well into the 20th century. In many places in the world, modernization only began to happen when some European nations controlled and governed various areas and began to leave their influence on the local life of the country. This was the case, especially, in many parts of Asia and Africa. Thus, we find many differences between the major areas of the world where Jews were situated, the Christian world of Europe on the one hand and the Moslem world of the east on the other. As a result modernity would start to penetrate the world in which the Jew lived, in different places, at different times.

Modernity, as we said, came first to Western Europe – France, Germany, England and the like. In these countries, starting from the end of the 17th century and right through the 18th, advanced thinkers began to question the world around them and press for change in the ways that people thought and the ways in which they lived. They looked at the world around them and started to suggest that the world could - and should - be organized in a different way according to different concepts. As a result, these were the first countries which began to reorganize themselves according to modern ideas of how people should live their lives.



MODERNITY COMES TO THE JEWS



Inevitably, it was only a question of time before the ideas started to penetrate into the minds of some of the Jews who lived in these places. Jews in all of these countries started to think of changing aspects of the way they lived in accordance with the ideas that were penetrating from the outside world. Some changed their language, their dress, aspects of their way of life. But it was a specific German Jew, a small hunchbacked man Moshe Mendelssohn, who was the first man actually to come out with an ideology of changing the Jewish world.

Let us visit him in his study in Berlin. It is the end of the 1770's. Mendelssohn is about fifty years old. He greets us and we sit in his comfortable room, drink tea and talk. We immediately notice that in spite of some of the things that people say about him ("he will destroy religious life and religious belief"), he sits with covered head and murmurs the required blessing before drinking.

"I greet you all and am glad that we can carry on our conversation in German, the language of the land in which we sit today. I think it is extremely important for Jews to speak the language of the lands where they live. There are lands – Moslem lands on the whole, also Italy – where many Jews did just that in the past. In fact, there are many places where Jews have felt quite comfortable interacting with the people of the world around them. If you had visited Spain, say Cordova, about eight hundred years ago, for example, you would have found the Jews speaking Arabic and feeling quite comfortable in their interactions with the surrounding population. Here, in lands like this, the situation was different.

Almost never have Jews in German lands, or in Northern or Eastern Europe as a whole, interacted in any meaningful way with the surrounding population. Indeed just about everywhere in the Jewish world, we have become distanced over the last centuries from the people among whom we live - in Arab lands, I understand, no less than in our Christian countries. They did not want us, and therefore we didn't want them. We wrapped ourselves up in an ideology of our own supremacy and announced that we were turning our back on the non-Jewish world although it was in truth that world that had done the same to us.

But what does it matter who started the process? The important thing is to understand that the world outside is changing and we have now a chance to change ourselves and our communities over to a much more positive relationship with the outside world. I sense that that world is willing to greet us and accept us as part of a wider process of changes in society. Our rights have been taken away over hundreds of years. Now, at best we are suffered, shunted off into the filthy corners of our societies but nowhere do we have real rights in those societies. I predict that if we start to change ourselves and look for ways to integrate ourselves, to talk the



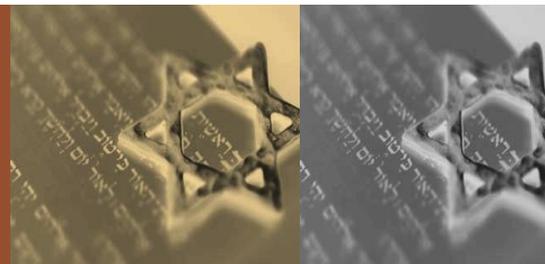
language and adopt the dress and outward appearance of the people among whom we live, we'll gain rights and ultimately be able to feel that we fully belong in places like this.

What I want to try and get over to my fellow Jews is that if the world is going forward, we too must go forward, not just because we will be 'punished' if we don't, but because it is the right thing to do. So many old superstitions and customs have become part of our way of life. As a result our sublime belief system, a system full of the highest human values, has become hidden by the weight of the petty superstitions and customs that have made their way into the system and that everyone thinks can't be changed. But they can be changed – and they must be changed.

There are those who say that this will destroy our traditional way of life and undermine our religion. I say the opposite. It will strengthen our way of life. Our religion will become cleaner, purer. All these generations that we have turned inwards, away from the people among whom we live, has been bad for us. Individuals need human company. 'Lo tov heyot ha'adam levado' לא טוב היות האדם לבדו – God recognized that a person shouldn't be alone. If you spend too much time by yourself, you get depressed, twisted from your isolation. It's the same with peoples and nations. We Jews have become twisted in our long centuries of isolation. It wasn't our fault. The world shut us out more than we shut it out. But the effect is the same. The world is changing around us. We have a chance to be accepted and to become part of the world again. We mustn't waste the opportunity. We must turn back to face the world – as Jews, as proud Jews. Don't let anyone tell you differently. It's our only way forward."



THE EFFECTS OF MODERNITY IN THE WEST



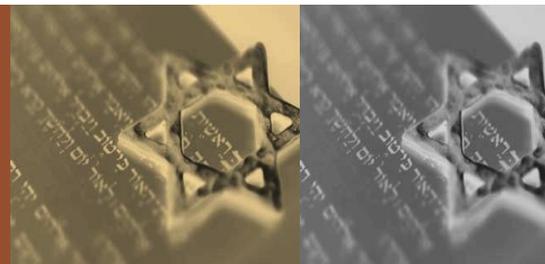
Mendelssohn's words were persuasive in Germany and the lands of the west. Many followed his example and opened up to the outside world, learning the language and the literature, adopting large parts of the lifestyle of the surrounding population, or at least the educated middle class. But while Mendelssohn himself remained an observant Jew throughout his life, there were many, including Mendelssohn's own children, who started out in his direction but failed to stop where he stopped. They moved right past him and stopped in other places. Many (including several of his children) left Judaism altogether, converting to Christianity and embracing the outside modern world in its totality. Others remained Jews but abandoned Judaism. To them, their being Jewish was little more than a biological accident. It meant very little.

Others remained conscious Jews but left traditional halachic Judaism behind them. Different, more modern, streams of Judaism started to appear. Some were non-halachic, such as the stream that became known as Reform Judaism. Others were halachic but believed in change, in an evolving halacha such as the stream that became known in Germany as Positive Historical Judaism and later transferred to America as Conservative Judaism.

A further development from the mid-19th century was the emergence of a modern Orthodox stream which preached a combination of traditional halachic Judaism with a thorough embracing of the outside world in the same mold as Mendelssohn. All these were products of the new attitude towards the outside world that Mendelssohn had called for and which came to be known as 'the way of Haskalah', critiquing the traditional world and calling for change where it was felt to be needed.



REACTION: THE HATAM SOFER SPEAKS OUT



As opposed to all these new ideas, and in conscious reaction to them, came the ideas spearheaded by Moses Sofer, known as the Hatam Sofer, the early 19th Rabbi of Bratislava, who believed that this entire trend was disastrous to Judaism. Let us meet him and hear his thoughts.

"When I was born in Frankfurt, Germany, Mendelssohn was just over thirty years old. Most of his damage was still in front of him but he had started his career of destruction. Oh, I'm not going to paint him as the devil. I'm sure he was a good man in his own way, but he never understood the implications of his harmful ideas. Look at the situation that he created. Almost no German Jew today lives the same way of life as his grandfather or great grandfather.

We were a community who believed that the task of every generation was to try and duplicate the essentials of the way of life of the previous generation so that nothing would be lost. But now everyone talks of change, of modernity. The whole thing is disastrous. We have lost our Judaism. All over the lands of Western Europe, Jewish boys and men are walking bareheaded. They look just like the non-Jews. They have no pride in being Jewish. All they want is to be exactly like their gentile neighbours.

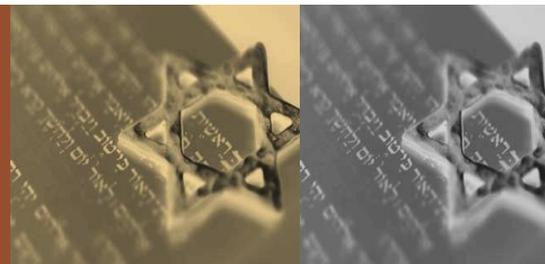
Is this what we were meant to be? We were always taught that we were to be a light unto the nations, as Isaiah put it. We were to show them the way. We were to give them an example of what it means to be a holy nation, a nation who lives for God alone. And now we behave as if they are a light to us. We try and imitate them, we see them as our example. We have abandoned everything that made us special and are trying to do whatever we can to ingratiate ourselves, to make ourselves acceptable. It is humiliating, to think that going down to the level of the non-Jews is something that Jews should do.

What we need to do is to go back to the traditional way but to stay extra vigilant, being on guard so that the harmful effects of the outside world can never get near us. We must distance ourselves from all things modern. Sin creeps in when we least expect it. The outside world is sin. We will keep it from our door."

It was the Hatam Sofer who led the Orthodox reaction against all things modern. He created a backlash against modernity that still affects significant sections of the Jewish world today. He had a strong effect on Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, but the west, for the most part, from his point of view, was lost.



CONTRASTS: DIFFERENT JEWISH WORLDS?



The west – meaning Western Europe, parts of Central Europe and North America - had indeed changed. Because of the changes in the surrounding world, Jews saw the world in which they lived in a different light. Having for centuries maintained essentially a defensive posture against a world which was felt (with good cause) to want to harm them, Jews now wanted to be part of that outside world. Especially after Jews in Europe and the west (America), began to gain equal rights (the process which we call emancipation, that started in the late 18th century in France and the United States), Jews became increasingly eager to identify with the modern world which they saw as attractive and rewarding.

Not so the Jews of the Moslem world. With very few exceptions, these processes passed them by entirely. The world around them for the most part stayed essentially the same world as they had known for centuries. The days when they had felt welcomed by the Arab world in Cordova or in Kairouan had long gone, passing, it seems, for ever. For generations they had maintained that same defensive posture towards the outside world that western Jews had done. They had tended to suspect the representatives of the outside world as being potentially harmful. They had been wary of contact even as they had economic dealings with them. There were large parts of Arab and Moslem society that were closed to them as Jews.

This situation tended to continue through the period that Jews in the west were feeling more optimistic about their situation. Here in the east, there was little outside change. There were very few changes of the kind so strongly felt in the west. Only in some specific areas, usually capital cities and large towns of countries which were conquered or ruled by western nations, such as England, France and Italy, were Jews in eastern countries likely to discover the benefits of modernization and to encounter this different reality. The Jewish world was growing apart. It was going in different directions.

With all of this in mind, let us examine this situation in the middle years of the 19th century in different parts of the world. For the sake of generalization we can at this time divide up the Jewish world into three different and contrasting areas.



A. In **Western Europe, parts of central Europe and the small Jewish community of North America**, Haskalah and Emancipation were making the vast majority of Jews enthusiastic to be thought of as a part of the outside world.

B. In other **parts of Central Europe and Eastern Europe**, the old suspicion towards the outside world was still in place. At this time very few Jews had become supporters of the idea of Haskalah. There were no signs of emancipation and equal rights. Many Jews were either ignorant of the changes in the west, despairing of the fact that any of those changes would come to their areas or thoroughly opposed to the ideas themselves, influenced as they were by the ideas of the Hatam Sofer or other like minded Rabbinic figures.

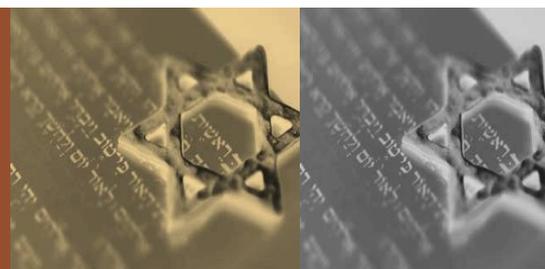
C. In **Moslem lands**, apart from smallish groups of Jews from the big cities under western control, the vast majority of Jews saw little change in the world around them and had no incentive (and usually no possibility) to open up to the world outside. It should be mentioned however, that on the whole, we do not get the same intense ideological opposition to modernity among Jews in the Moslem world as we find within many of the resistant Eastern European Jews. One reason for this was the generally more moderate tone taken on such issues by many of the Rabbinic authorities of the area, some of whom were influenced by the more open traditions that still were remembered from the Middle Ages. A second reason was that many of the leaders of the opposition to change in Central and Eastern Europe, had strengthened their stand against the outside world because of ideological opposition to the developments in Western Europe. That whole fight had never entered the lands of the Moslem Jews.

This then was the situation in the middle years of the 19th century. It is worth pointing out something else that is relevant for the time in question. As opposed to the situation four or five centuries previously, the Jewish world was growing and the centre of gravity was in the west. Up to the early modern period, the majority of Jews had lived in the east, the Moslem lands outside of Europe. Out of the million Jews estimated to have been living in the 15th 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-18th century onwards, things had started to change in both of these respects. Absolute numbers had gone up and the proportion of Jews living in Europe had also increased. Thus in 1850, of an estimated 4.75 million Jews in the world, around 4.1 million lived in Europe. Of these around 3.4 million lived in Eastern Europe! Thus the centre of the Jewish world was very European, and the centre of the European Jewish world was very heavily weighted in terms of Eastern Europe. Only a few tens of thousands of Jews lived in North America and the number of Jews in Eretz Israel was less than 20,000.



BRINGING IT UP TO DATE WHY IS OUR WORLD LIKE IT IS?



If we survey the Jewish world today, some hundred and fifty years later, we see that the situation is totally different. Major centres have disappeared. Others have developed out of all proportion. What has caused the changes?

We want to suggest six major factors that have transformed the modern Jewish world and produced the world we see before us today.

Let us survey these six different historical phenomena. We suggest that these are the central processes that underlie the demography of the modern Jewish world. Separately and in the interaction between them, they created the Jewish world around us. We will examine them each in turn.

1. Events in Russia at the end of the 19th 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

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 great 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.

That year saw pogroms, anti-Jewish riots break out against the Jews. They were blamed in general for many of the problems of Russia and specifically they were blamed for the assassination of the Tsar – the Emperor - of Russia by revolutionaries. The pogroms were aimed against a Jewish community that was in the process of starving to death and one major reason for this was the enormous population explosion that hit the Jews of Eastern Europe during the 19th 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 19th 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 which had been developing for a while in Russia 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. Some 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. 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-19th century, propelled by a host of motives, economic, religious and political. The 1870's had seen several thousand 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. Many of the new immigrants would soon find themselves in the sweatshops – the brutal small factories of the big American cities such as New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, where they worked for anything between twelve and fifteen hours a day in dreadful conditions. 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).

It is worth mentioning that it was not only the immigrants to the west who experienced the phenomenon of a move to the big city and the transition to a working class in the urban factories and workshops. A similar experience was the lot of many of the Jews who stayed in Russia. 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. Cities such as Odessa, Bialystok, Lodz, and most especially Warsaw, now developed large Jewish proletariats. Warsaw became a giant – the largest Jewish 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 moving upwards in society. In the large Jewish cities of Eastern Europe, on the other hand, this 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, (unlike the western part of the country) never conquered by the Nazis, and a haven to hundreds of thousands of Jews who fled eastwards 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.

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 comparison with 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. However, numbers increased considerably from the mid-1920's and at the end of the 1930's, the Jewish population was a little under 450,000. 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, among the Jews of Palestine, 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 19th 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 20th 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 from Moslem countries 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.

Hundreds of thousands of eastern Jews came in the years after independence from countries in Asia and Africa. The three largest eastern communities in the Israel 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. Israel began to fill up, absorbing some 680,000 immigrants in the four years following independence, but other parts of the world (East and East Central Europe, the Arab lands) were emptying themselves of their Jews. The roots of the Iraqi (Babylonian) community and the Yemenite community were some thousands of years old. 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, 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 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.

In Israel 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, inside 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 point that must be emphasized with respect to Zionism is the changing balance between the numbers of Jews in Palestine (before 1948)/Israel and the rest of the Diaspora. Let us look at the numbers. 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 available	not 5,292,000

What are the implications of these numbers for the overall balance of the Jewish world as a whole?

In the earlier chapters we talked about the process through which the Jewish community in Eretz Israel ceased to be dominant, as pride of place passed slowly but surely to the Diaspora. What we are seeing now to a large extent is a reversal of that process. Israel has less Jews by far than the Diaspora as a whole but more Jews than any centre apart from the United States. The United States, for its part has far more Jews than the rest of the Diaspora communities all together. This raises once again the issue of what might be called the "shape" of the Jewish world.

There are those who say that the Jewish world has one centre, Israel, with the Diaspora communities ranged around it, some greater and some smaller. There are others who suggest that we have returned to the model of "Jerusalem and Babylon", mentioned in the last chapter, whereby we have two co-existing centres in the Jewish world, in Israel and the United States. Others talk of the Jewish world as a network of linked but independent communities without a definable centre or centres.



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, the dominant ideology that governed in Eastern Europe during most of the 20th century made any kind of meaningful Jewish life untenable. Jewish culture was allowed only in the most restricted way and members of the Jewish communities of Communist Europe always felt themselves under suspicion. For all but the most determined of Jews, it was preferable either not to live an openly Jewish life or not to live a Jewish life at all.

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 disappearance of Jewish life of the communities living under Communist regimes. A few older people, too old to change, kept up some 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 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 only a small number of Jews joined them. They could not be a model for the Jewish population as a whole.

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 for 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. Many Jewish organizations started to operate in the ex-Communist countries to help the Jews physically and to help them regain some kind of a Jewish life.



It is difficult to know what exactly would have happened if there had been no attempt by world Jewish organisations to come in and help the potential 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, where most Jews had survived the Holocaust 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 given their small size.

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.

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 have overlapped. Where Jews have been needed economically, there has been less likelihood of them being actively persecuted.

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 19th and the 20th 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, there were 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. Let us meet some modern day Jews who represent this phenomenon. We can find such people in many different countries but let us hear a couple of personal stories to illustrate the idea.

Anatoly Aged 45. Germany.

"I left with my family for Europe in the early 1990's. The truth is that we were simply desperate to get out of Russia. In Moscow where we lived, the economic situation had become very difficult after the fall of Communism. From one point of view we were delighted that Communism fell, but we were also very wary. Things might have been bad under Communism but at least you always knew where you stood. There was stability, security. Once the regime fell, we were left to fend for ourselves. We didn't know anything about free market forces. There had never been a free market in Russia, not in my lifetime at least. All sorts of parts of the economy collapsed and we found ourselves along with many others in a very bad situation. And it wasn't as though we had nothing to offer, no profession. But there was no work in my field and I didn't know what to do.

Friends had moved to Israel but the truth is that I don't really identify strongly as a Jew and we heard of the terrible problems the Russian Jews were having there at the time, so we didn't want to go there. It was difficult getting into America at the time. That would have been our first choice but the Americans were clamping down on immigration and Germany was offering places so we came along with many others. The majority of Jews in Germany today are ex-Russians. We came for financial reasons, not because of any love for Germany. If you knew what Germany did to Russia in the Second World War, you'd know that there's little love between us and the Germans. But money talks and we came. By the way it was interesting to me to see that there are quite a few ex-Israelis here. They came about twenty years before us, also for economic reasons. That surprised me as I would have thought that Israeli Jews would feel more sensitive because they carry the memory of the Holocaust with them. But as I said, money talks. Are we here for ever? Who knows? Twenty years ago we only thought of ourselves as Russians. Somehow we found ourselves here. Strange thing history, no?"

Beverley. Aged 17. Australia.

"I'm not Australian. At least I don't see myself as Australian. I still feel South African although I was only a little girl when we left. It's been ten years since we left and we form part of a big South African Jewish community here in Sydney. Most people came at about the same time. The situation in South Africa was getting difficult.



After the end of the apartheid regime, when a black government came in, many Jews started to worry. It wasn't so much that everyone had loved the old government but it was secure for us.

After that government fell we didn't know where we stood. There were all sorts of rumours about revenge that the blacks were going to take against the whites – and for them we were white, of course – and lots of people feared that they were going to lose their businesses. In addition, there was suddenly a lot of crime on the streets. It was really frightening. We lived in a big house behind a high fence – I still remember it – and we had all sorts of electronic alarms and things in case anyone tried to break in. There were a couple of attempts apparently. Anyway, it was clear. The writing was on the wall for us.

My parents decided to leave. One or two of their friends had relocated in Israel – South Africa was always a strong Zionist community – but my parents didn't fancy it. They said it was too foreign for them. They'd never learn the language and all that. So they looked for a country, an English speaking country, where they could live comfortably as Jews and feel at home. Australia sounded good. We had a lot of friends who had already gone. And so we got here. It's funny. Not only are almost all my friends Jewish – I go to a big Jewish school here – but they're almost all South African! Talk about a ghetto in a ghetto, that's the South African Jews for you."

6. ASSIMILATION AND INTERMARRIAGE

Contrary to popular belief, intermarriage is not new among the Jewish people. The Bible tells us that in the story of Ezra and Nehemiah in the early part of the second temple period. It is clear that intermarriage 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 the clear taboo against intermarriage, 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 19th 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 20th 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.



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. But 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 as the be-all and end –all of a relationship, the decline of Jewish religious belief, the ignorance of tradition and history and the higher degree of acceptance in the Jewish community as a whole have all contributed their share to the climbing intermarriage numbers.

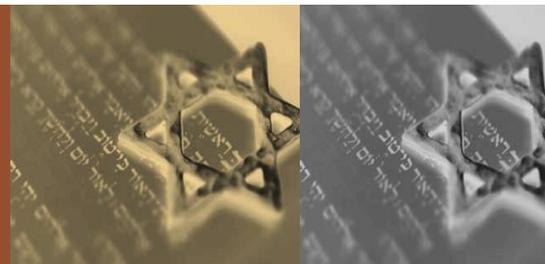
But it is not just intermarriage that is an issue in most of the Jewish world today. Assimilation – the loss of a strong specific Jewish identity and the adoption of a lifestyle with few if any Jewish distinctive Jewish elements – is very common in families where there is no intermarriage. Once it could 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.

For demographers – those people whose job it is to try and work out how many Jews there are today - this brings up a series of new and very difficult 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 according to which, if the mother is Jewish, so are the children (although some communities accept the idea of accepting children as Jewish if the father is Jewish)? Should we just count those people who say that they feel they are Jews? 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?

This issue is by no means restricted to the west. It is just as relevant in the communities of East Central and Eastern Europe about which we have already spoken. Let us take Hungary as an example. How many Jews are there in Hungary? Who should be counted? 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 fact that people in Hungary hid their Jewish identity for many years 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 SITUATION WHAT'S ON THE AGENDA TODAY?



As we look around the Jewish world today and ask what the major issues are we will get a number of different responses. Let us listen to six young Jews of today talking of what they see as the major problem facing the Jews today.

1. Sandrine. France. Aged 24.

"To me the number one problem that Jews face around the world, and especially here in France, is anti-Semitism. We feel it almost every day here. It's been like this for a few years already. The struggle between Israel and the Arab world has brought these tensions to the surface, but I guess they were always there. Here in France we have a specific problem because we have a large and vocal Moslem community – several million people – many of whom hate Israel and hate us too, seeing us as the representatives of Israel in France. Not all of them believe this or at least say it, but there are enough of them to make our life difficult. When my parents and grandparents came here from Tunis in the 1950's, they thought they were leaving these issues behind. It looks now as if they brought the issues with them. It's not only the Moslems. So many of the French people seem to be willing to talk against us and to make our lives difficult. Where I live in Marseilles, it can be very scary sometimes to be a Jew".

2. James. England. Aged 32.

"To me the number one problem that Jews face around the world and, needless to say, here in England, is assimilation. I have two young kids and I break my head thinking how to ensure that they want to stay Jewish. To me it's the most important thing in my identity besides my love for soccer, and I want my kids to feel that. I'm not particularly religious but I see that I must continue with many of the religious traditions including going regularly to synagogue just to give them the best chance to remain Jewish. They are surrounded by so many attractive things in the outside world. Just look at how many T.V. stations there are. Look at the power of advertising always pulling them to this attraction or that. It's not that I'm against these things but I want to make sure that they have enough of a Jewish background and feeling to be able to deal with them as Jews. I know I'm Jewish and I know what it means to me. I just want them to be able to say the same thing."



3. Yaffa. United States. Aged 28.

"To me the number one problem that Jews face around the world and especially here in the U.S. is the status of women in Judaism. Look, you have already delved deeply into Jewish history in all sorts of different countries. I understand you've talked to lots of Jews. I'm willing to bet not a single one has been a woman, at least up to this generation. Am I right? Of course I am. We've never been seen as equal with the men. It's they that have been in the centre of things for ever. All the public positions have always gone to men. Why would you want to meet a woman from the Jewish past? What could she tell you about the community? What they eat? Did you ever hear of a woman in a position of leadership? And don't mention Devorah in the Bible. Why do you know her? Because she's the only one! Who else is there? Eve? Worse than that is the fact that for thousands of years, ever since the Rabbis put studying Torah at the centre of the Jewish agenda, women have not been seen as suitable for studying. The texts have remained closed to us. That is beginning to change. Finally, in many places in the world, women are studying Torah. The men find it very hard to deal with but it's happening. However, they don't know what to do with women who are knowledgeable in Judaism. And as a result, Judaism itself – and I mean halachic Judaism – is not changing. Something has to move. This is the great problem of the religious Jewish world at the moment. It refuses to change. But it will change at some point because the pressure will become irresistible – and it's the women who will lead the revolution."

4. Sergio. Aged 18. Argentina.

"To me the number one problem that Jews face around the world and especially here in Argentina is lack of Jewish solidarity between communities. We have been having a terrible time in Argentina for the last few decades. In the 1970's a thousand of our Jews simply disappeared together with thousands of non-Jews when the military regime that was then in power kidnapped its opponents who were never seen again. A thousand Jews – and did you ever hear about it? Then there were the two bombings in the Israeli embassy in 1992 and the Jewish community building in 1994. About 130 people were killed altogether. Did you ever hear about it? Probably not. And then there has been our disastrous economic situation over the last few years. Tens of thousands of Jews with nothing to live on. Maybe you heard about that one – it was all over the Jewish press. But did you do anything about it? Some did – but not enough. That's what's wrong with the Jewish world today. There isn't enough solidarity. Once, it was different. Jews helped each other in whatever way possible. But today? Maybe people dig into their pockets for a few coins but that's it. That closes the book. Do people really care? I have my doubts."



5. Talia. Aged 21. Canada.

To me the number one problem that Jews face around the world is Israel's actions. I know this won't be popular and many of you will try and shout me down, especially if any of you are Israelis. But I think it's true. I don't dispute that Israel doesn't have it easy. I don't argue that it feels itself to be under attack. But it takes two to tango, and Israel has a lot of responsibility for the current situation. And I'll tell you the truth. It often makes me embarrassed to be Jewish. And I'm a good Jew – a conscious Jew. Being Jewish has always been very important to me. But I feel ashamed of many of the things I hear and read about. I was brought up to think that to be Jewish is to be moral: that we are super-careful of other people's human rights, because we were slaves in Egypt and because we were treated like dirt for so much of our history. But I don't see that Israel is carrying that tradition on as much as it should be. And this is the Israel that I am meant to stand up for because I am Jewish and in some way it's meant to be my state? No way. My parents call me all sorts of names and tell me I should be out there supporting Israel just because others are attacking it here in Canada. But to support Israel – right or wrong? I don't think so.

6. Shmuel. Aged 24. Israel.

"To me the number one problem that Jews face around the world and especially here in Israel is the fact that there's not enough religious belief and people don't live as Jews are meant to live. I'm not suggesting turning our back on the world and living as some of the extremely Orthodox do. Far from it. I believe in being part of the world in which we live. But living as a Jew means living from a halachic base-line. And not enough people are doing that. Here, in Israel, there's the extra problem of what it means to have a Jewish state. But even putting that aside and talking just of personal lifestyle, how many people are living even an approximation of the life that Jews lived for thousands of years? You can't just live any life you want and call it Jewish. A Jewish life is a specific kind of life. Either you live it or you don't. And not enough people understand that. There's commitment, obligation involved. And how much of that do we see around us today?"



Six people, six different points of view. The Jewish world today. A complex world, full of all sorts of difficult issues. Each person has their own assessment of what needs to be done to the Jewish world in order to improve things. Many have a picture in their head about what a Jewish world should look like. Those pictures are often different. That is perhaps to be expected. After the story that we have gone through, that has taken us through so many twists and turns of history, with so many people, especially in the modern era, having such different experiences, it would be miraculous if all Jews were to feel the same. They don't – and they are unlikely to do so at least in the foreseeable future. Maybe that's the challenge facing us today.

We have gone through the Jewish story, examining all sorts of themes and realities. Now we will start to work inside the large framework that we have painted here, examining in a little more detail, the specific theme of the Jewish community. Let's jump inside the big picture and start to examine that.

