

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

California School

HOW SHALL WE SING THE LORD'S SONG IN A FOREIGN LAND?

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN JEWISH ATTITUDES

TOWARD THE CONCEPT OF ALIJAH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The concept and question of aliyah¹ has been an issue of American Jewish debate since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. Having experienced my own identity crisis as a result of being an American Jew who accepts as realistic and serious the choice of settling in Israel as an option for her personal destiny, the debate for me has taken on very tangible dimensions.

Promotion of large-scale aliyah has long been a priority of the Israeli government for both practical and ideological reasons. Major immigration from the West particularly is seen as a direct contribution to the survival of the Jewish State in terms of both physical numbers and of the social, educational and technical contributions it is thought that American immigrants could make to Israeli society. Further, many Israelis, as well as American Jews, contend that settling in Israel provides the only option for living a fulfilling Jewish

¹A literal translation of the Hebrew word aliyah is "going up" or "ascending." The sense of the word in common Hebrew usage and as it will be used throughout this paper is "going up, or ascending, to the Land of Israel;" in other words, immigrating to Israel.

life.

Yet despite American Jewry's overwhelming financial and emotional support for the State of Israel, there is a striking lack of anything resembling open and active promotion of aliyah. The great majority of agencies which together represent the organized American Jewish community, has yet to state with any clarity its position vis-a-vis immigration to Israel.

Thus there appears to be a gap between the priorities of Israel and those of the American Jewish community. Indeed, the nature of this breach seemingly cuts to the very basis of Zionist, religious, and contemporary Jewish thought. The importance to each party of understanding the perspective of the other is self-evident; a continuing positive relationship between Israel and American Jewry is dependent upon a clarification of the meaning and goals of the relationship, and a clearer understanding on each side of the bases which underlie the thoughts and actions of the other.

The purpose of this study is to enhance that understanding with regard to aliyah. Its intent is to explore the attitudes toward the concept of aliyah on the part of some of the most active participants in the organized Jewish community of Los Angeles. This is not a survey to discover how many Jews in Los Angeles have considered immigrating to Israel. It is a survey of the attitudes toward the concept of aliyah of individuals actively involved in some aspect of the organized

Jewish community.

As one of a small percentage of American Jews which has seriously considered immigrating to Israel, I was particularly interested in comparing stated attitudes toward aliyah as an option for American Jews with the interviewees' personal perspectives concerning Jewish life in the United States. From my own experience, this seemed to be a significant factor in the dilemma which the concept of aliyah presents to American Jews. Hence, the final questionnaire for the survey in some ways reflected the internal thought processes and ruminations of a potential immigrant.

In order to place the data gathered from the interviews in its proper perspective, it was necessary to look backward into recent and not so recent history. The major trends of classical Zionist ideology and the response of organized American Jewry are discussed in Chapter II. Chapter III outlines various aspects of the dilemma facing American Jews in the years following the founding of the Jewish State and continuing to the present time: Is it incumbent upon all Zionists to settle in Israel? In view of the existence of a sovereign Jewish State, should all Jews leave their present domiciles to live in Israel? There is little agreement on either of these questions.

I wish to thank Dr. Rosa Kaplan, my thesis advisor, for her sincere interest in the topic of this study and for her guidance throughout the lengthy process of its formulation and composition.

To Professor Gerald B. Bubis, Director of the Hebrew Union College School of Jewish Communal Service, my deepest appreciation for his personal interest and concern, and for affording me and my fellow students the opportunity to study in so special a Jewish house of learning.

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I want to extend my deepest love and gratitude to my husband Nachum whose affectionately strict encouragement and comments forced me to be brutally honest with myself throughout the process of collecting and analyzing the data and writing the manuscript; and to my parents Katherine and Irving Wexler, whose understanding and support enabled me to reach this point in my education.

Special notes of thanks are due two special people: To my dear friend Janice Kamenir Reznik, upon whose experience and advice I depended in this endeavor, and who can always be depended upon, my deepest appreciation. And to Sherri Weiner, who shared with me the agonies and the joys of this unique year, many thanks.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to those individuals who graciously agreed to be interviewed for this study. Their candor in answering my questions demonstrated a marked interest in and recognition of the importance of free dialogue concerning the relationship between Israeli and American Jewry. I thank them for being open with

me and for providing me with a variety of perspectives from which to view the dynamics of that relationship so crucial to the destiny of all Jews.

CHAPTER 21

SOME ASPECTS OF JEWISH THOUGHT

AND THE AMERICAN RESPONSE

There is little, if anything, of influence of Jewish, Jewish, thought of America and they interpretation are almost as Jewish is modern Jewish tradition as are varying communities and administration of Jewish law. Jewish as a political, national or religious phenomenon has been both suppressed and distorted by Jews since the nineteenth century.

What aspects within the realm of Jewish tradition have particular import with respect to Jewish thought? The philosophical underpinnings of the main aspects of Jewish thought may shed some light on this question. Also since that historically Jewish has been both suppressed, the political and the cultural. Political thought, as expressed by Herzl, will be the philosophical and intellectual underpinnings of the Jewish state.

Joseph Hertzberg, ed., *The Jewish Idea*, New York: Schocken, 1959, pp. 110-11.

Robert Katz, "Judaism in the 19th Century," *Compassion*, 4(1961) February, 1970, 48

CHAPTER II

SOME ASPECTS OF ZIONIST THOUGHT
AND THE AMERICAN RESPONSE

There is no one, all encompassing, definition of Zionism. Indeed, theories of Zionism and their interpretation are almost as common to modern Jewish tradition as are varying commentaries and interpretation of Biblical law. Zionism as a political, cultural or religious phenomenon has been both expounded and denounced by Jews since the nineteenth century.¹

What aspects within the roots of Zionist disputation have particular import with respect to present-day aliyah, migration of Jews to the Land of Israel? The philosophical underpinnings of the major strands of Zionist thought may shed some light on this question. Alter notes that historically Zionism had two main components, the political and the cultural.² Political Zionism, as espoused by Herzl, held as its primary goal the founding of a Jewish nation-state as a solution to

¹Arthur Hertzberg, ed., The Zionist Idea (New York: Atheneum, 1969), passim.

²Robert Alter, "Zionism for the 70's," Commentary, 49:47-57 (February, 1970), 48.

the "Jewish problem" and the anti-Semitism of nineteenth century Europe. The Jewish State was to provide Jews with the physical security and civil liberties which they had historically lacked in any nation in which they were not sovereign. In his formulation, Herzl rejected other proposed solutions such as assimilation or political emancipation of Jews within the host society. He wrote:

I referred . . . to our "assimilation"; I do not for a moment wish to imply that I desire such an end. Our national character is too historically famous, and in spite of every degradation, too fine, to make its annihilation desirable. We might perhaps be able to merge ourselves entirely into surrounding races, if these were to leave us in peace for a space of two generations. But they will not leave us in peace. For a little period they manage to tolerate us, and then their hostility breaks out again and again.³

Thus was postulated the concept of Zionism as a political solution to the problem seemingly caused by the existence of a Jewish entity within the nascent nation-states of Europe and in Russia.

Cultural Zionism, on the other hand, was postulated on a different premise entirely. Ahad Ha-am contended that the Jewish question was a matter of the spirit and that this spiritual problem was characterized in different ways in the West and in the East.

The eastern form of the spiritual problem is absolutely different from the western. In the West it is the problem of the Jews; in the East, the problem of Judaism.

³Theodor Herzl, The Jewish State, trans. by Sylvie D'Avigdor (3rd ed.; London: Central Office of the Zionist Organization, 1936, first printing 1896), p. 27.

The first weighs on the individual; the second, on the nation. The one is felt by Jews who have had a European [secular] education; the other, by Jews whose education has been Jewish. The one is a product of anti-Semitism, the other is a natural product of a real link with a millennial culture, and it will remain unsolved and unaffected even if the troubled of the Jews all over the world attain comfortable economic positions, are on the best possible terms with their neighbors, and are admitted to the fullest social and political equality.⁴

The concept of cultural Zionism proposed the settlement of the problem of Judaism, not of Jews. Based on the supposition that a total "ingathering of the exiles" is practically unattainable,⁵ the cultural theorists posited Zionism as a mechanism by which the most precious ethical and spiritual elements of Judaism be preserved and developed. To this end Ahad Ha-am advocated the creation of ". . . a viable, autonomous community which, in a modern secular context . . . would serve . . . as a focus of meaningful national identity for Jews everywhere."⁶

Both Hertzberg and Neusner discuss the effects of Judaism and Zionism upon one another. Historically, Jews lived in close-knit communities bound by religious and social traditions which kept them apart from the surrounding society. Hertzberg points out that an

⁴Ahad Ha-am, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem," in The Zionist Idea, ed. by Arthur Hertzberg (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 266.

⁵Ibid., p. 264.

⁶Alter, "Zionism for the 70's," p. 48.

increasingly secular Western world, beginning with the rise of the liberal nationalist and emancipation movements of Europe, forced religious aspects of life to become private and individualized. This phenomenon provided a further base of support for Zionist ideologists when coupled with the historic religious and physical connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

It is the individual Jew's experience of the Jewish people, of its corporate life, way and history which mediates for him between the individual and G-d. When the richness and inner integrity of the life of that community is attenuated by either persecution or assimilation, or when belonging to the tradition becomes so privatized as to represent a bewildering variety of personal choices, that which is specifically Jewish in the consciousness of Jews will act . . . to recreate a living Jewish community in the land of Israel.⁷

Neusner, in a more modern context, notes that secularity has led to a crisis of Jewish identity for which Zionism provides a solution. He says that Zionism in the modern world provides a renewed political and spiritual basis of unity for the Jewish people. "Zionism provides a reconstruction of Jewish identity, for it reaffirms the nationhood of Israel in the face of the disintegration of the religious bases of Jewish peoplehood."⁸

As American response to Zionism and to the founding of the

⁷Arthur Hertzberg, "Judaism and the Land of Israel," Judaism, 19:423-434 (Fall, 1970), 433.

⁸Jacob Neusner, "Zionism and 'The Jewish Problem,'" Midstream, 15:34-45 (November, 1969), 41.

State of Israel is examined, the themes of secularism and religiosity, politics and culture recur. Immigrant Jews living in the United States responded very differently to the call of Zion than did their European brethren in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much of their early lack of enthusiasm for the Zionist cause may be attributed to a number of factors which substantially differentiated the American Jewish lifestyle from the European. As explained by Urofsky:

The lack of anti-Semitic tradition in this country, the economic opportunities available, made many of the newcomers look on the United States as their new Zion, and those with brains and skills and ambitions soon reaped the rewards of their labor. For others, the hardships of life in the urban ghettos left little time or money for a chimeral dream. America offered Jews freedom and opportunity, but in a land built by immigrants, it also demanded their full loyalties. Many Americans, Jew and non-Jew, saw Zionism as some sort of foreign ideology, inimical to true Americanism.⁹

At the time of the first Zionist Congress in 1897, organized religious Jewish life in the United States was centered primarily in the Reform movement. Most Reform Jews of the period were against Zionism for two reasons: 1) the problem of dual loyalty created by the spectre of a Jewish political entity, and 2) the premise that the mission of Judaism is spiritual and religious, not political, in nature.¹⁰ While

⁹ Melvin I. Urofsky, American Zionism from Herzl to Holocaust, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1975), p. 2.

¹⁰ Abraham J. Karp, "Reaction to Zionism and to the State of Israel in the American Jewish Religious Community," Jewish Journal of Sociology, 8:150-174 (December, 1966), 155.

there were some pro-Zionist elements within the Conservative and Orthodox movements, there was little supportive activity.

With the onset of World War I American Jews began to realize that, while they had come to a land of freedom, many of their brethren still lived in misery and oppression in Europe. This dawning recognition was followed in 1917 by the publication of the Balfour Declaration, which politically legitimized Jewish right of settlement in Palestine. At this juncture, the Reform movement felt it necessary to clarify its position. "Reform publications made it clear that their opposition to Zionism was not because of lack of sympathy for the sorrows and sufferings of oppressed Jews. Opposition was only to the Zionist philosophy of Jewish nationalism."¹¹

Further opposition to Zionism at the time of the Balfour Declaration came from the opposite extreme of the religious spectrum, and the point of contention again was the spectre of modern Jewish nationalism.

Opposition to Zionism by Orthodox Jews was based on what they regarded as the irreligious orientation of Zionism. They objected to the Zionist emphasis on the political aspects of the Jewish problem at the expense of the religious. Reform Jews were indignant at the Zionist claim that Jews constituted a nation that needed a homeland of its own. The extreme Orthodox Jews rejected any attempt of the restoration of Palestine as the

¹¹Charles Israel Goldblatt, "The Impact of the Balfour Declaration in America," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, 57:455-515 (June, 1968), 478.

homeland of Israel by any agency other than Divine intervention.¹²

Between the anti-Zionist extremes of Reform and Orthodox Jewry was the pro-Zionism of the Conservative movement as well as of many Orthodox Jews who arrived in America in the mass immigrations of the early 1900's and provided a base for the religious-Zionist Mizrahi movement in the United States.¹³ The Conservative movement, which was based on a philosophy of Jewish peoplehood, saw Zionism as a heterogeneous movement which could provide a source of unity for Jews of all countries and cultures. Thus, in 1919, the Conservative umbrella organization, United Synagogue of America, adopted a resolution which emphasized "Zionism as a means for the preservation of Judaism and the survival of the Jewish people."¹⁴

While many European Jews were turning to Zionism as the only reasonable option outside of assimilation and persecution, the Jews of America were experiencing their first real encounter with religious and economic freedom. Life was difficult, but America was a land of immigrants all of whom seemingly had the same opportunity to attain the American Dream. American Jewish response to Zionism must be viewed in the context of the Jewish experience in the United States at

¹²Ibid., p. 483.

¹³Karp, "Reaction to Zionism . . . ," p. 159.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 157.

that time. As Leon Fram points out:

Interestingly, despite the rationalizations of both Orthodox and Reform leaders, the original opposition to Zionism was not a matter of theology at all. Opposition to Zionism came primarily from Jews who felt secure and comfortable in the countries they now called home, and who indulged themselves in the naive nineteenth century myth that civilization, freedom and brotherhood were on a triumphant and irresistible march.¹⁵

The realities and shock of the Nazi holocaust in Europe, however, brought to a standstill the philosophical differences of the major American religious movements with the basic tenets of political Zionism.

By the mid-forties Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism came to terms with Zionism. Ideological differences were resolved in the face of the enormity of the Jewish refugee problem. The sanction of religion by all the major divisions of American Judaism supplied prestige to the Zionist ideal. The pulpit was opened to the Zionist cause. American rabbis became spokesmen for Zionism.¹⁶

The proclamation of the independent State of Israel was received with enthusiasm by all three organized Jewish religious movements in the United States. Only some small fringe groups of Orthodox extremists and the radical Reform American Council for Judaism still held onto an anti-Zionist stance. In the years between the first Zionist Congress of 1897 and the establishment of Israel in 1948 there

¹⁵Leon Fram, "Reform Judaism, Zionism and the State of Israel," CCAR Journal, 15:38-43 (June, 1968), 39.

¹⁶Goldblatt, "The Impact of the Balfour Declaration . . .," p. 510.

had been a move from almost total opposition to almost complete support for the state among American Jews.¹⁷

Karp delineates two primary reasons for this amazing change in American Jewish thought. First, the early predominance and influence of the Reform movement was gradually modified by the impact of a stronger Zionist influence exerted by immigrants who arrived in mass waves of immigration from Eastern Europe. Secondly, the Reform movement itself returned to a concept of Jewish peoplehood, as opposed to the anti-Zionist, anti-nationalist stance typified by the earlier Pittsburgh Platform, which defined Judaism as ". . . the highest conception of the G-d idea as taught in our holy Scriptures . . ."18 By 1937 the Central Conference of American Rabbis had reformulated that definition in the Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism: "Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people."¹⁹

With the holocaust and the declaration of Israel's independence, the historical and religious experience of the Jews was made and re-made in the eleven years between the publishing of that statement and the 1948 realization of Herzl's Jewish State. The declaration of the independent Jewish State, however, provided only a brief respite

¹⁷Karp, "Reaction to Zionism . . . ," p. 168.

¹⁸Pittsburgh Platform as quoted in Karp, "Reaction to Zionism . . . ," p. 171.

¹⁹As quoted in Karp, "Reaction to Zionism . . . ," p. 171.

from the internal strife of the Jews for a moment of rejoicing. Though most American Jews were now united in their support for Israel, a philosophical battle on the grounds of a redefined Zionism was in the offing for the Americans and their "newly-born" Israeli counterparts.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL

I believe that the meaning of Zionism is the right of every Jew to live in the land of his fathers, not a Jewish state.

The state of Israel is an act of defiance and rebellion against the world as it is. It is the Jewish people's declaration of independence. It is the Jewish people's answer to the question of their own future. It is the Jewish people's answer to the question of their own survival. It is the Jewish people's answer to the question of their own identity. It is the Jewish people's answer to the question of their own destiny.

The founding of the Jewish state is a historic event. It is a event that has changed the course of Jewish history. It is a event that has changed the course of world history. It is a event that has changed the course of human history.

David Ben-Gurion, "The Jewish People and the State of Israel," *Commentary*, 11:11-12 (1951), 191-192.

David L. Miller, "The Jewish People and the State of Israel," *Commentary*, 12:11-12 (1951), 191-192.

CHAPTER III

ZIONISM, JUDAISM AND ALIYAH

I believe that the meaning of Zionism is life in the Land of Israel, not affiliation with a Zionist organization.¹

--David Ben Gurion

The stage for debate as to the meaning and obligations of Zionism was set at the Twenty-Third World Zionist Congress held in Jerusalem in August of 1951.² Arguments which were first given a public hearing in this arena provided the groundwork for American-Israeli debate and dialogue in the years to follow. Underlying all of the discussion from those days to the present is the question of the spiritual and physical centrality of Israel to the Jewish people.

The founding of the Jewish State presented an immediate dilemma for American Zionists whose main activities up to that time had been fundraising and political agitation. The fact of a political entity called "Israel," fully equipped with governmental leaders,

¹David Ben Gurion and Simon A. Dolgin, "Can We Stay Jews Outside 'The Land'? An Exchange," Commentary, 16:233-240 (September, 1953), 239.

²Judd L. Teller, "American Zionists Move Toward Clarity, To Be or Not to Be 'Ingathered,'" Commentary, 12:444-450 (November, 1951), passim.

cabinet officers and diplomats, effectively stripped them of their political functions within the newly founded Zionist State. American Zionists had hoped there would be an open and consultative relationship between themselves and the Israelis -- but found instead a demand placed upon them for personal realization of the Zionist aspiration, immigration to Israel.³

The rationale for Israeli emphasis on recruitment of pioneers, or halutzim, from among American Zionist ranks may be described in terms which are very similar to those presented in aliyah literature up to this day: the need to maintain an increasing Jewish population; the need to balance immigration from Oriental countries (Arab and African) until further education and training set immigrants from all lands on an equal social and educational footing; the need for Western technical specialists and investors; and, above all, the need for aliyah in terms of classical Zionist doctrine which "juxtaposed a 'full Jewish life' in a sovereign Jewish territory to debilitating existence in a permanent galut."⁴ In short, American Zionists "were told that their response to the call for manpower would be the measure of their Zionist sincerity."⁵

Teller contends that American Zionists in the years following

³Ibid., p. 446.

⁴Ibid., p. 448.

⁵Ibid.

the declaration of the State never faced the basic issue: Is it the private obligation of every Zionist to settle in Israel? Nor did they attempt to answer the questions concerning the viability of Jewish life in the Diaspora, which were pointedly raised by Israeli talk of a spiritually doomed golah.

The Zionists did not challenge or even attempt to revise the Zionist idea that the assembly of the Jewish people in its own state is the sole and exclusive guarantee for Jewish group survival; they did not question the Israeli claim to the Jews of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. They only requested that American Zionists be exempt from deducing the logical consequences of this doctrine for themselves.⁶

Thus the clash that occurred at the Twenty-Third World Zionist Congress pointed up the necessity of reformulating American Zionist ideology. There was a need to confront the basic issues posed by the Israelis and to consider alternatives for the most desirable relationship between American and Israeli Zionists -- and American and Israeli Jews.

The American Zionists were not ready to go to Israel -- therefore they resisted the new ideological formation of their duties . . . a new ideology began to emerge, according to which there were specific Zionist obligations still to be borne in the diaspora and not only in Israel or in immediate preparation for going to Israel.⁷

⁶Ibid., p. 449.

⁷Ben Halpern, "The Impact of Israel on American Jewish Ideologies," Jewish Social Studies, 21:62-81 (January, 1959), 78-79.

American Jews, Zionists and non-Zionists, began to clarify and reformulate a philosophy delineating the value of a permanent Diaspora.⁸

Many writers since the time of the Twenty-Third Congress have addressed the question of the relationship between Zionism, Judaism and the Jewish people. In 1963, Edward Neufeld wrote that American Zionism could be characterized by the phrase "Zionism without Israel."⁹ He terms as unacceptable the growing American Zionist tendency to shift the focus of Zionism toward Jewish life in the Diaspora, to define its function in terms of the role Israel and Israeli Jewry play in perpetuation of the Diaspora, and to negate aliyah. Neufeld contends that this extreme view of Jewish life in the Diaspora as an end in itself is as unacceptable as the opposite view that all Jews must be in Israel, which can provide the only option for the survival of Jewish life.¹⁰

More recently, Jacob Neusner has defined Zionism as ". . . the highest expression of the Jewish people . . . the Jewish affirmation, the assertion that Jews constitute one people and that they wish to preserve that people and enhance its spiritual life."¹¹

⁸Ibid., p. 80.

⁹Edward Neufeld, "Zionism and Aliyah on the American Jewish Scene," The Jewish Journal of Sociology, 5:111-135 (June, 1963), 117.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Jacob Neusner, "Toward a Zionism of Jewish Peoplehood," Reconstructionist, 38:14-21 (November, 1972), 14.

Both Neufeld and Neusner refuse to approach Zionism in terms which focus solely on Israel or Diaspora Jewry. While noting that aliyah is an important component of Zionist activity, Neusner hastens to point out that "the definition of Zionism solely in terms of aliyah is not a negligible quibble about words . . . It is nothing other than the assertion that the golah has no part in the Jewish future, in the Jerusalem of the future."¹²

Neufeld's own formulation of Zionist ideals also stresses

. . . common bonds of identity of Jewish peoplehood as a religious and ethnic entity regardless of geographical dispersion and national loyalties; the concept of Jewish statehood as an inherent factor in Jewish history and its future; and . . . spiritual attachment to Israel.¹³

He argues further that the perpetuation of Diaspora Jewry and a continuing stream of immigration to Israel will have positive reciprocal influence.¹⁴ In short, Israel-Diaspora relations and Jewish life in general would be greatly benefited by aliyah.

The practicalities of encouraging aliyah, while at the same time working toward positive Jewish life in the United States, have not been overlooked in the literature. Only through encouraging programs which emphasize Jewish history, tradition and peoplehood will a climate

¹²Ibid., p. 16.

¹³Neufeld, "Zionism and Aliyah . . . ," p. 126.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 118.

be set in which pursuance of both of these goals is feasible.

It is, therefore, imperative for the Zionist movement to develop appropriately orientated Jewish cultural and social conditions which in turn will become conducive to such a function. These must be defined within the context of the American Jewish environment, closely related to its temperament and culture, and consciousness. They must be based on their own resources and self-nourishment and not on the values and standards of Israel.¹⁵

A recent survey concerning the relationship of Jewish community priorities to American aliyah pointed out the importance of a climate conducive to positive Jewish identity formation as a factor in successful immigration.

Aliyah policy must . . . concern itself with the Jewish environment -- both in America and in Israel -- and its impact on aliyah. It is difficult to imagine an American Jew undergoing the kind of identity transformation required for aliyah without substantial group reinforcement, from his family, peer group, the American Jewish community, and Israel itself.¹⁶

It can be seen that advocates of aliyah and those who place priority on strengthening Jewish life in the Diaspora may very well seek implementation of similar means to reach their differing goals. And just as the means are not exclusive to one goal orientation, neither should the ends be considered mutually exclusive or of value

¹⁵Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁶George E. Johnson, "The Impact of Jewish Community Priorities on American Emigration to Israel," Analysis, 53:1-7 (November, 1975), 3.

solely to Israeli or American Jewry.¹⁷

In this regard the question arises whether there is a perception on the part of the American Jewish community that its need for special program emphasis in order to enhance the perpetuation of Jewish life in the United States may be congruent with Israel's need for similar programs which could provide the necessary basis of Jewish identity as an impetus toward aliyah. Encompassed in the question of recognition is the additional factor of willingness to acknowledge the mutuality of need and work together to implement programs which may or may not lead to aliyah, but which would certainly address the goal of enhancement of Jewish identity and life exclusive of geographical limits. Johnson's study indicates that the leadership of the organized Jewish community controls access to the largest number of Jews in the United States.¹⁸ Leadership's willingness to facilitate communication between the Zionist Jewish Agency Aliyah Center and other American Jewish organizations may in large part determine the extent to which mutuality of Israeli and American Jewish interests may be recognized and acted upon. Johnson notes that

Quite in contrast to the solidarity with Israel, and the extensive fundraising and community relations campaigns launched for Israel, in the majority of American Jewish communities the Israel Aliyah Center is an 'outsider' and

¹⁷Neufeld, "Zionism and Aliyah . . . ," p. 126.

¹⁸Johnson, "Impact of Jewish Community Priorities . . . ,"
p. 3.

more or less kept apart from the local community.¹⁹

American responsibility for promoting immigration to Israel is reiterated by Neusner, who also claims that aliyah will provide spiritual benefit to American Jewry.²⁰ On a very practical level, he contends that the federations of each community have proven themselves the most effective means of planning, promoting, organizing and mobilizing Jewish leadership to get a job done. Promotion of aliyah should thus fall within their realm of responsibility.

American aliyah . . . had best begin in America, with the careful planning, adequate attention to finance, concern for the welfare of individuals, and thoughtful and self-critical reflection which characterize the American way of accomplishing things.²¹

The suggestion that American Jewish organizations take it upon themselves to encourage aliyah, while at the same time maintaining efforts to sustain viable Jewish life in the United States, assumes an openness, acceptance, and understanding of Israeli priorities within the context of American Jewish needs and interests, and the wider context of Jewish peoplehood. In the meantime, there seems to be a lack of such a willingness to combine efforts toward the multiple ends suggested by both American Jews and Israelis. It would

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Jacob Neusner, "American Aliyah," American Zionist, 58:13-14 (January, 1968), 14.

²¹Ibid., p. 13.

appear at this point in time that concern with aliyah is a fringe phenomenon in American Jewish life and culture.²²

²²Johnson, "The Impact of Jewish . . . ," p. 1.

METHODOLOGY

Although some studies have been conducted to measure
incidental factors which may influence the level of this activity
interest and engaged into activities toward aliyah of those persons who
are aware of their remaining activity, very little attention has been
given within the context of the American Jewish scene. Hence, this
study is of an exploratory nature. It is a preliminary attempt at
ascertaining factors. The process by which the sample was chosen, the
structure of the research table, and the selection procedure will
be described in the chapter.

Background

Jews living in all quarters but together they are united by a
common sense of identity, shared customs and religious observance in
their conduct of life, and their distinctive Jewish beliefs. Many of
these Jews, however, choose to participate by living in their own land
in order to furthering the goals of one or more of their organizations.
The reasons for this activity may vary from their wish to become full
citizens and professionals who are actively involved in the

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Although some studies have been undertaken to measure motivational factors vis-a-vis immigration to Israel, little serious research has inquired into attitudes toward aliyah of those persons who, by virtue of their community activity, may be considered to be committed Jews within the context of the American Jewish scene. Hence, this study is of an exploratory nature, based on a purposive sampling as described below. The process by which the sample was chosen, the construction of the interview guide, and the interview procedure will be examined in this chapter.

The Sample

Jews living in the greater Los Angeles area are served by a wide variety of organizational structures and agencies established to meet a range of physical, social and educational needs. Many of these Jews, in turn, choose to participate by giving of their time and/or money in furthering the goals of one or more of these organizations. The sample for this study was taken from this pool of Jewish lay leaders and professionals who are actively involved in the

organizational life of the Los Angeles Jewish community.

Because of the plethora of organizations from which to choose the sample pool, the field was divided into five representative categories: Jewish Community Centers, Religious Schools, Jewish Federation-Council, Jewish Community Relations Agencies, and Overseas Aid Organizations.¹ Two organizations were chosen from each of the delineated categories. A purposive selection was made on the basis of perceived differences of the ideologies or points of view of the agencies. The top-ranking lay person and professional of each agency were selected to be a part of the sample. In all, there were twenty people in the original sample, ten lay leaders and ten professionals.

A letter introducing the researcher, stating the purpose of the study, and requesting time for an interview was sent to each person in the sample (Appendix I). The letter specified that the researcher was conducting a study on the response of people active within the organized Jewish community to the concept of aliyah; prospective interviewees were informed that they would be asked questions regarding two general subject areas: aliyah and American Jewish life.

A short time after the letters were mailed, the researcher

¹Zionist organizations were excluded from the sample pool because it was thought that by ideology and definition they already hold a certain position with relation to aliyah.

made follow-up phone calls in order to set and confirm interview appointments. All ten Jewish professionals immediately agreed to be interviewed. Eight of the ten lay leaders also agreed very graciously to do so. One lay leader indicated that he would prefer not to be interviewed concerning the subjects delineated in the letter of introduction. He suggested contacting the agency director in order to receive the name of another officer of the organization to be interviewed in his place. The researcher followed his suggestion and the second officer was most willing to be interviewed. Finally, one lay leader, upon receipt of the letter, left a message referring the researcher to the Israeli Consul-General to discuss matters pertaining to aliyah.²

All of the professionals were interviewed in their offices. Three lay leaders were interviewed in their homes, four in their places of business, and two in their agency offices. The interviews were between forty minutes to one hour and a half in length.

The Interview

All of the interviews were conducted according to an interview guide (Appendix II). The interview guide consisted of broad questions relating to the following general areas of concern:

²This may have been due to a misreading of the letter of introduction, which specifically designated the desire to speak with someone actively involved in the American Jewish community. On the other hand, one might speculate that this person perceives aliyah as strictly an Israeli concern -- thus his referral to the local Israeli Consulate.

- 1) Points of view toward the concept of aliyah and aliyah as an option for American Jews ,
- 2) Assessment of Jewish life in the United States in the present and the future , including degree of concern felt for Jewish survival in America ,
- 3) Influence of Israel upon American Jewish life ,
- 4) Jewish background experiences of the interviewees (including family life , education , group affiliation , etc.) ,
- 5) Organizational and educational programming for the promotion of aliyah , and
- 6) Organizational policy toward aliyah and the respondents' relationship to the organization .

It was hoped that , by focussing on these areas , information would be elicited reflecting the respondents' attitudes toward aliyah in relation to their views concerning Jewish life in the United States and in Israel .

Questions were first presented in a general manner in order to maximize spontaneous expression . If specifically desired points of information were not covered in the response to the original broad inquiry , the interviewer probed further with a prepared set of sub-questions as guide .

The tone of the interviews was in most cases quite informal and conversational in nature . The researcher usually began by re-introducing herself and referring to her association with the School of Jewish Communal Service . If the interviewee had no questions or comments , the researcher would then restate the purpose of the study and begin with the first overall question on the interview guide . The

interviews quite often took place over a cup of coffee and about half of the conversations were interrupted at at least one point by telephone calls.

Some Observations

Out of the original sample of twenty persons, nineteen were interviewed. Only one person refused to be interviewed on the basis of the question areas to be explored. A second lay leader, either due to a careless reading of the introductory letter or due to some other personal or philosophical reasoning, chose to refer the researcher to an Israeli "expert" who was by definition not acceptable for the sample population.

One or two persons said that they lacked specific knowledge or expertise in the subject areas outlined in the letter. They were informed that this would be a survey of attitudes, impressions and points of view which are not necessarily dependent on detailed knowledge of the topics of inquiry; the fact that they were active participants in some aspect of the organized Jewish community of Los Angeles was the only pertinent factor in their being chosen for the sample. Emphasis was placed on the fact that each respondent was being approached as an individual, although some questions about his organization and his relationship to it would be asked during the interview.

As noted, the majority of the interviews took place in a very open and informal atmosphere. This point is significant as it relates

to a concern which had troubled the researcher during the process of sample selection. The question arose as to whether the respondents, particularly because they were from the upper echelons of professional and lay leadership, would differentiate between organizational points of view and policy and their own personal attitudes. For this reason the interview design included questions related to agency policy and the individual's perceived relationship to the organization. The responses to these questions, coupled with the overall tone of the interviews, indicated that the respondents were expressing their own personal points of view which coincided, to greater or lesser degree, with the stated or implied stance of the agencies with which they were affiliated.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Since the interviews were conducted according to an interview guide, and not an interview schedule, questions were not always put to each respondent in exactly the same manner. Similarly, perhaps consequently, responses were given in various forms and wording due to the open-ended nature of the interview. Some comments were rather nebulous and vague in meaning, causing some difficulty in the process of analyzing the data. Notes were recorded on a prepared notesheet (Appendix III) during the course of each interview for provision of exact quotes in the composition process. Following the interview, a summary of the response to each question area (including all

sub-questions) was prepared and kept together with all of the responses on that subject. Thus there was a separate list for each subject area which included each individual's response to questions relating to that area. These individual responses were coded according to type of organization and whether the respondent was a lay person or professional within the organization. In order to analyze the information gathered, responses for each question area were then clustered according to similarities of wording and perceived intent of the speaker.

For example, in discussing Israel's influence on American Jewish life, sixteen respondents mentioned only positive factors although those factors were described and delineated differently by different people. In the section of Chapter V which deals with this question, this cluster of positive response is noted and the variations within the overall area are discussed in more specific terms. This method of clustering responses and dividing the clusters according to variations in theme was used consistently throughout the process of data analysis and is apparent in the structure of Chapter V in which the data are presented.

This survey is of necessity limited by the small number of subjects in the sample and by factors in the sampling plan which could possibly influence the findings. These factors include: 1) all of the respondents are from the top echelon of their specific organizational structures, 2) in all cases subjects have been active on various levels

of Jewish organizational involvement before reaching these upper echelons, and 3) the subjects' Jewish activity and general environment at this point in time is for most part specific to the greater Los Angeles area. The sample was also chosen based on speculation that persons associated with agencies which have different goal orientations or philosophies might by virtue of these factors have differing approaches to questions concerning aliyah, Israel and American Jewish life.

The overriding concern of this study was to determine attitudes of persons active within the organized Jewish community to the concept of aliyah. The interview sample and guide were designed to shed light on this subject based on the stated attitudes of respondents to the direct questions relating to aliyah. Also examined were selected components which were considered by the researcher to have some relevance to these attitudes. These components include points of view relating to American Jewish life, Jewish organizations and education, and Israel.

The data were examined for specific trends or patterns in manner of response, both verbal and non-verbal. Trends and findings specific to particular question areas concerning American Jewish life and aliyah were compared and contrasted with one another. Overall patterns were then discussed and interpreted in terms of hypotheses for future exploration and research. The utility of this exploratory study, then, is in its ability to point to directions for further research

based upon the data and trends presented by the information, in the context of the additional factors and limitations involved in the sampling plan.

CHAPTER

CHAPTER

CHAPTER

As noted in the introduction, the research that was conducted in the experiments that constitute the present report was designed to evaluate the effects of various factors on the performance of a specific task. The results of these experiments are presented in the following chapters. The first chapter, Chapter 2, describes the experimental design and the procedures that were used to collect the data. Chapter 3 presents the results of the experiments and discusses the implications of these results. Chapter 4 discusses the limitations of the study and the need for further research. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and conclusions of the study.

This chapter will describe the various aspects of the study that were investigated. A description of the study, including the objectives, the experimental design, and the procedures that were used to collect the data, will be provided. The results of the experiments will be presented and discussed in detail. The implications of these results will be discussed, and the limitations of the study will be identified. The need for further research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER

The results of the experiments are presented in the following chapters. The first chapter, Chapter 2, describes the experimental design and the procedures that were used to collect the data. Chapter 3 presents the results of the experiments and discusses the implications of these results. Chapter 4 discusses the limitations of the study and the need for further research. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER V

JEWISH LEADERSHIP

VIEWS JEWISH LIFE AND ALIYAH

As noted in the methodology, the research plan was formulated on the hypothesis that attitudes toward American Jewish life and aliyah are related to one another; that one might have some influence upon the other. The sample population and interview guide were structured to elicit perspectives regarding these subjects from persons actively involved in organized Jewish community life. General and specific points of reference about aliyah and Jewish life in the United States were discussed during each interview.

This chapter will examine the various points of view expressed by the respondents. A short description of the interviewees is followed by two sections describing perspectives with relation to aliyah and American Jewish life. An analysis of the relationship between these two perspectives comprises the concluding section of this chapter.

Background of the Respondents

Ten Jewish professionals and nine lay leaders were interviewed. The sample included fifteen men and four women. The

average age of the interviewees was approximately fifty years. Most respondents had received some form of Jewish education in their childhood, the majority in Reform or Conservative settings.

Seventeen people in the sample had visited Israel on at least one occasion. Six of the nineteen persons interviewed had, at one time or another, affiliated with a Zionist organization; for two of the six this affiliation was a very short-lived experience in their youth.

Perspectives On

Jewish Life in the United States

Views Regarding the Character
of Jewish Life in America

Two recurring trends emerge from almost all interviews:

1) optimism about the quality of American Jewish life and its prospects for the future, and 2) a belief that positive Jewish identification is easy to achieve and encourage in the United States. Many respondents related these positive attitudes to a democratic atmosphere in the United States which they consider conducive to freedom of expression and creative development on both individual and group levels.

Ten respondents described themselves as unequivocally optimistic about the future of Jewish life in the United States. Thirteen people said specifically that they see no problems in identifying as Jews and living Jewishly in America. One person is encouraged by what he views as "a return to Jewish roots" on the part of some third generation American Jews. Young people, he feels, are "developing a more honest relationship to Jewish laws than mere observance of them." He sees their approach as based on a concern for basic Jewish values. Another interviewee in effect summed up the comments of many of his fellow optimists by noting that America is in the midst of an "ethnic period" which provides the opportunity for a blossoming of Jewish culture and development of varied ways of

expressing Jewish spirit and tradition; he sees the "dawning of a golden age of Jewish life in America."

Seven other interviewees referred to the pluralistic nature of American society and its effect on Jewish life. One respondent noted that while Jewish life is benefited by the multi-cultural American milieu, the probability of assimilation is greater in a free society than in one in which ethnic ghettoization is the rule. It is interesting to note that only one person viewed the Jewish future in terms of religious tradition, whereas nine people emphasized the terms "ethnicity" and "culture" in this regard.

The important influence of the democratic nature of American life was emphasized by another respondent who contends that the freedom of choice afforded all persons in the United States permits individuals a wide range for Jewish identification. He feels that Jewish life flourishes in America because of the freedom and liberty which characterize the political climate of the country. Parallel to this viewpoint is the opinion expressed by one interviewee that the greatest hope of the United States and its democracy is that component of it which is rooted in Judaism. These responses reflect a feeling that positive reciprocity and mutual benefit accrue to both American Jews and the total society of which they are a part.

A number of other effects of pluralism with relation to Jewish identity were mentioned. One respondent suggested that although he

personally has no problem living Jewishly in the United States, some people certainly might encounter personal problems of Jewish identification due to the acculturation process and what he sees as the parallel collapse of the Jewish educational process in America. Another interviewee asserts that young people in particular may have difficulty in maintaining positive Jewish identification because "the Jewish community has not found ways to provide them with connections for Jewish self-expression in organized community life." This woman also feels that American Jews must first educate themselves as to the meaning of living Jewishly in order to have a viable future. She notes that while some groups feel an urgency about working toward this goal, others do not wish to separate themselves from the mainstream of American society by doing so. These last two respondents along with three others were of the opinion that some people might have problems identifying Jewishly in the United States, partly because it is a non-Jewish society, and partly because of a lack of quality educational, programmatic and/or organizational alternatives on the American Jewish scene.

Although the bulk of the comments regarding American Jewish life was positive, one person did state that he was not at all optimistic about the quality of Jewish life for the small Jewish group surviving in a gigantic, free society. He noted the difficulty of individual identification in a "commercial, hedonistic society" (his description of the

United States), and said that more Jews are assimilating with each generation because of the difficulty in identifying. Although he supports the strengthening and "cementing of American Jewish organizational life" as a necessary step in assuring Jewish survival in the United States, his overall view is pessimistic. He foresees American Jews in the future as being more assimilated into American society and much more marginally Jewish. Altogether, six people mentioned that they are disturbed by the possibility of widespread assimilation.

In summary, while the majority of respondents are optimistic about the prospects for Jewish life in the United States, there appears to be some concern about problems which must be overcome if Judaism is to survive on the American scene. The multi-cultural nature of American life is viewed as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it is seen as allowing for the freedom of expression which can enhance Jewish creativity and a flourishing of Jewish expression. On the other, the openness of the society is feared to heighten the likelihood of Jewish assimilation into the predominantly gentile culture.

Israel's Influence on American Jewish Life

Factors mentioned in discussion of the influence of Israel on Jewish life in the United States may be grouped in the following categories: 1) pride in Judaism, 2) enhancement of Jewish consciousness and identity, 3) the political nature of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry, and 4) the desirability of mutual reciprocity

in the Israel-Diaspora relationship. Sixteen respondents felt that the existence of the State of Israel has had a positive effect on Jewish life in the United States; one person thought that Israel has had a negative influence on American Jews, and two people displayed mixed feelings on the subject.

The positive effects of the Jewish State were most often described in terms of pride in and commitment to Judaism. One respondent said that Israel has "vicariously given pride to American Jewry" by way of its accomplishments. Another interviewee, speaking from a different perspective, feels that Israel gives American Jews a "sense of strength and validity" in their Judaism; he suggested that the pride Jews feel is due to the fact that Israel herself is the "handiwork of world Jewry." A third person said that Israel has provided a sense of the Jewish past and future, and has engendered pride in the humanitarianism of the State.

The interviewer sensed that the phrase "pride in Israel" was used synonymously with "pride in Judaism or Jewishness" and vice versa. Several respondents confirmed this impression -- that pride engendered by Israel as a Jewish State is transferred into feelings of pride in the Jewish people and hence, into pride in one's own Jewishness.

Ten people mentioned that more positive Jewish identification and consciousness are a result of Israel's influence on American Jewish

life. One respondent said that Israel has helped to maintain Jewish consciousness and that without the influence of Israel, an erosion of Jewish life in the United States would take place at a much faster pace than it does. Another person noted that Israel serves as a constant reminder of Jewish peoplehood, and thus "crystallizes hope for the future and pride in being Jewish." It was suggested by a third respondent that Israel has provided the American Jew with "a source for identification beyond the synagogue and the country club." He said that Israel has had a positive effect in that it has contributed to a return to tradition in Jewish education and in the way holidays are celebrated; Jewish life in the United States, he said, has become more Israeli/Jewish oriented and less oriented to the traditions of the Eastern European culture.

One interviewee who maintains that Israel has not had a great effect on the nature of American Jewish life, said that the existence of a Jewish State may affect the way in which some people view themselves as Jews in the United States, but that this influence is usually felt much more in times of crisis. He, along with two other respondents, mentioned that Jewish identity and consciousness is often related to a "crisis mentality." When Jews feel themselves to be in a threatening situation, such as during the Six Day Israeli-Arab War, Jewish consciousness and commitment become intensified. One respondent went so far as to express the opinion that there is a

potential danger that the Jewish community may lose some of those who identify themselves as part of it, should there be fewer crisis situations in the future.

The political nature of Israel's relationship to American Jewry was approached from varied perspectives by several of the respondents. Only one person mentioned the problem of dual loyalty in connection with Israel's influence on American Jewish life. This respondent said that while American Jews have more pride in their heritage due to the influence of Israel, her existence has also complicated their lives and made them more difficult. In this sense, Israel has had both a "positive and a problematic effect" on Jews in the Diaspora, who have been called upon to support Israel politically in their home countries, and thus might be in the position of having their loyalty to those countries questioned.

Another interviewee said that the relationship between Israel and American Jews today is purely political. Thus, he believes that Israel's influence at this point in time is detrimental to the American Jewish community because it ties Jewishness to the State of Israel's political policies. Similarly, someone expressed dismay that concern for Israel's survival has, in his opinion, engendered a spirit of conformity in American Jewish life. Due to this phenomenon, he maintains, American Jewish activities on behalf of Israel have lost their credibility because "Jews are no longer using their critical judgment" in the

decision-making and program-planning processes.

This person lamented that largely due to the influence of Israel, the American Jewish community is losing its traditional respect for diversity. Israel's positive effects have been the provision of a "model of a vital, living Jewish community and a unifying and activating frame of reference for Jewish concern." On the other hand, he said, it has had some negative effects including those mentioned above as well as a growing tendency for Israel to provide a surrogate for meaningful Jewish education. He and one other respondent feel that there is an unfortunately increasing tendency in American Jewish life to equate donating money to Israel with being a good Jew. He said that the necessity of fund raising for Israel has had the effect of diluting the quality of Jewish community leadership, as leaders are now chosen primarily on the basis of their ability to give; this he sees as another example of the loss of respect for diversity in the community.

Respondents were asked specifically about the effect of Israel on American Jewish life. It is interesting to note that in response to this specific question eleven people made comments concerning the totality of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry. Although no such general question was asked, most often the responses reflected concern with the mutuality of the relationship between Israeli and American Jews.

Two interviewees mentioned that the existence of the Jewish

State has raised questions concerning the centrality of Israel to the Jewish world and for Jewish life. The point of view taken by these respondents was most clearly stated by one who said that "Israel represents a kind of redemption and a dream, but is only one of the fountainheads of Jewish life and culture." Another respondent noted that there are competing pulls on Jewish life from the various Diaspora communities and the central structure of the Jewish State. In his view, "Israel is a major focus among other foci" of Jewish life.

One woman noted that, since 1967, there has been a stronger commitment to Judaism as represented by Israel on the part of American Jews. Although she sees this phenomenon lessening over time, she still is concerned that Israel not replace Judaism in American life. Similarly, another respondent said that people in the United States tend to "abdicate" to Israel responsibility for Jewish survival and Jewish life. She advocates efforts to build a creative Jewish life in America as well as in Israel. This view is seconded by a respondent who is of the opinion that "American Jews are more concerned about Israel than Israel is about the quality of American Jewish life" and its perpetuation. She stated that Americans must provide their own "American brand of Judaism" which is suited to their culture and which may be different from Judaism as practiced in other countries.

Several interviewees felt that the relationship between American Jewry and Israel has been and is now characterized by mutual

reinforcement. In this regard one respondent said that Israeli and American Jewry are "bound together by living tissue" -- what happens to one will inevitably affect the other in the dynamics of this relationship. Another person referred to Achad Ha-am's formulation of cultural Zionism¹ and commented that Israel as a center of Jewish life is dependent on a mutual relationship with a vital Galut.

Finally, in discussing Israel's effect on American Jewish life, nine respondents expressed the opinion that Judaism could survive in the United States even if the State of Israel did not exist. Two of these opinions were related to the evidence of history. As one respondent put it, "Judaism will survive in some recognizable form indefinitely with or without Israel and/or the United States." And another person pointed out, "American Jewry would survive no matter what happens to Israel and vice-versa -- historically Jewish communities can survive."

On the other hand, while no one felt that Judaism definitely would not survive in America were there no Israel, four interviewees were uncertain and said they would worry about the survival of American Jewry in such a situation. This point of view was most clearly expressed by the respondent who felt that there would be some question about the viability of the Jewish community in the United States without

¹See Chapter II.

the influence of Israel because of the assimilation problem. He felt that it is "just too easy for Jews to disappear in America."

Summary

All of the respondents, with one exception, feel that Israel has had at least some positive effect on Jewish life in the United States. Most respondents are of the opinion that Israel's influence has been overwhelmingly positive, particularly in relation to encouraging positive Jewish identity formation, pride, and consciousness. Three people noted that some of the positive aspects of identity formation supported by Israeli influence may be negated because they are too often linked to a crisis mentality.

Two interviewees expressed concern that the positive aspects of Judaism in the United States and in Israeli culture are being clouded by and intertwined with political issues. Some of these comments, together with the responses of the eleven persons who discussed the mutuality of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry, caused the interviewer to sense a general feeling among the respondents that the American Jewish community is of equal importance to Israel and that the component of prime importance to both should be Judaism.

Perspectives on Aliyah

General Overview of Response to the Subject

Respondents first discussed their personal knowledge of individuals and families who had immigrated to Israel. They were then asked about their general attitudes and feelings concerning the concept of aliyah and what they would consider sound motivations for immigrating to Israel. The following themes occurred in response to this area of questioning: 1) Jewish idealism and fulfillment, 2) cultural differences and difficulties of life in Israel, 3) the needs of Israel and of the American Jewish community, and 4) concern for physical and economic security.

Fourteen of the nineteen people interviewed know at least one person or family who has immigrated to Israel. A wide variety of reasons were given for the decision made by these immigrants with whom the respondents had had personal contact. The most clear-cut rationale for immigration of acquaintances to Israel was given by the respondent who said that most of the olim² he knew were committed Labor Zionists. Two additional interviewees knew committed Zionists who had immigrated to Israel. The reason for aliyah most often identified was a commitment to Jewish identity and peoplehood, accompanied in some cases by the feeling that only in Israel can one

²Olim - (Hebrew) immigrants, plural. Singular form is oleh (masculine) or olah (feminine).

live a meaningful Jewish life. Two people knew olim who had gone to Israel for the academic and business incentives offered to Western immigrants. Two more respondents mentioned that disaffection with the American lifestyle had caused people they know to emigrate. Finally, one person stated that he knew emigrants who had left the United States for Israel because they felt uncomfortable with their Jewishness in this country and felt that anti-Semitism is a real factor in American Jewish life.

Respondents voiced a variety of perspectives from which American Jews might approach the subject of aliyah. "Idealism" and "cultural gaps" were the factors most often commented upon in general discussion, often inter-related in the context of the responses. Ten persons mentioned that idealism was probably a necessary factor in any decision to immigrate to Israel. "Idealism" was most often used in the context of adherence to Zionist ideology or commitment to Judaism. One interviewee thought that it would be difficult for anyone other than "idealistic young people" to immigrate because those who are used to the comforts of life in the United States would find it very difficult to do so. Along these same lines, another respondent suggested that few Americans will become olim because of the difficulty in adapting to a new culture. He noted that people who move from one culture to another generally feel marginal to both. This discomfort with loss of cultural roots, in addition to the practical aspects of a lower standard

of living and the security problem in Israel (which is a factor of everyday life very alien to the experience of the average American), causes this interviewee to take a dim view of prospects for aliyah from the United States. Altogether, five interviewees mentioned the difficulties of life in Israel in relation to aliyah.

On the other hand, one interviewee does not believe that all Zionists have to live in Israel, nor does he believe that people lose their status as committed Jews if they do not immigrate to Israel. His perception is that people often make decisions concerning aliyah based on their calculation of "how bad things are" where they now live as opposed to "how bad" they perceive the situation to be in Israel. This person was one of five respondents who, in discussing aliyah, mentioned the theme of "escape" either from physical or financial problems or from undesirable lifestyles. Two of the five expressed concern about people immigrating to Israel due to negative motivations to "escape from" rather than positive yearnings "to move toward"

Six interviewees said they recognized the need for new immigrants from Israel's point of view. One of these individuals, however, was of the opinion that widespread aliyah from the United States is not desirable because it might act as a drain on the talented people needed for quality Jewish community life in America. He feels it appropriate for some to immigrate, but would not like to see American aliyah on a large scale. Another respondent said he understands

Israel's need for people, but sees Israel's survival also based partly on a strong Diaspora community. On the other hand, one person stated his belief that the American Jewish community will increasingly recognize the importance of aliyah in terms of the needs of Israel and of Jewish life in general; he expressed the opinion that American Jewry has to play a key role in aliyah.

The respondents were asked what they would consider sound reasons for immigrating to Israel. Fifteen persons answered that they would consider such rationale to be enhancement of Jewish identity and ideological reasons relating to Judaism and/or Zionism. As one respondent put it, sound reasoning would see aliyah as a means for meaningful fulfillment of Jewishness and a desire to be identified with the historic destiny of Jews. Another interviewee expressed the same sentiment, as "idealism and a dimension of Jewish history are essential elements" for the American oleh.

In the context of "Jewish fulfillment," six people mentioned the aspect of living in an entirely Jewish milieu. One interviewee suggested that any Jew who feels uncomfortable or insecure in a non-Jewish milieu, "surrounded by Christological exposure," and who would be more comfortable living in a society where the majority of the citizenry is Jewish, would have a sound reason for considering aliyah. He also contends that Israel is a better place to fulfill one's spiritual needs than the United States. Similarly, another person felt that

"a combination of commitment to the State and to Judaism and an interest in being in a totally Jewish environment" would be sound motivations for aliyah. Congruent with these comments are those of two respondents who included the personal need to be a "pioneer" and a desire to add one's talents to building the Jewish State among sound reasons for immigrating to Israel. One person noted that a strong commitment to Jewish survival and improvement of the Israeli life should be coupled with a realistic understanding of the pressures and needs of Israel; ideology, this respondent asserted, is not reason enough to enable one to face the difficulties of life in Israel.

Four interviewees mentioned a search for security as sound motivation for aliyah. In the view of one person, people who live in societies where social, economic or religious discrimination exists have good reason to immigrate to Israel. Another person cited immigration to Israel as a refuge from anti-Semitism. Persecution is discussed from a slightly different perspective by one respondent. He noted that Americans do not really have a "push" (such as economic persecution) from their home country to take a step toward aliyah, and when Americans do move to Israel they always have the option of coming back. He suggested that perhaps just such a "push" (i.e., persecution, discrimination) is the soundest of all reasons for immigration because it leaves no option for return, and thus the new immigrant must try harder to become a part of Israeli society. In short, one must "make

a go of it" because he has no other options; one is forced to overcome all of the problems because he has no other choice.

Two respondents, speaking from different perspectives, said that sound reasons for immigrating to Israel would include disaffection with the American lifestyle. One person felt that Israel might be seen as a "last frontier of Jewish life" by those who are not satisfied or fulfilled with Jewish life in the United States. However, she did suggest that, with some effort, ways of living Jewishly in America could be found. The other interviewee thinks that the kibbutz ideal, or the communal lifestyle, is very appealing and has a strong attraction for young people who are disaffected with the American lifestyle and who are considering aliyah.

Seven people in the sample expressed the feeling that aliyah should be a personal and individual choice. One of these respondents added that she does not look favorably upon the idea of encouraging all Jews to immigrate to Israel. She feels that "American society would suffer a loss" if all Jews went to Israel. Another person, who identified himself as being American in nationality and "religio-ethnically Jewish," also said that aliyah should be a personal decision and that people should not be unduly influenced by individuals or community groups in making that decision.

Summary

Jewish and Zionist idealism, escape, practical difficulties

of immigration and of Israeli life, and the need for new immigrants in Israel were subjects mentioned by the interviewees during general discussion of the topic of aliyah. Fifteen respondents mentioned ideological and Jewish fulfillment as sound reasons for considering immigration to Israel. Within this category, six people considered that a desire to live in a Jewish milieu, and two people that a pioneering spirit, might be sound bases for aliyah.

Four interviewees discussed persecution and the desire for security in the context of sound motivations for immigrating to Israel. Two persons commented that other understandable rationale might be disaffection with American or American Jewish lifestyles and a search for alternative modes and milieux. Seven respondents said that aliyah should be a matter of personal choice. As might be expected, there is some overlap of these responses.

Israel as An Alternative Jewish Lifestyle

Respondents were asked whether they would suggest aliyah as an option to people exploring ways of living Jewishly. This was also discussed in the context of Jews who may be dissatisfied with what they perceive of as their options for living Jewishly in the United States. Over half of the interviewees said they would suggest consideration of aliyah under certain circumstances; several others said they would not suggest immigration to Israel as an option. Personal and Jewish communal considerations were the factors most often mentioned in response

to this question.

Seven respondents said that aliyah should be considered by persons seeking an alternative Jewish lifestyle. Three of these seven think that individuals who are dissatisfied or who have difficulty identifying Jewishly in the United States should consider living in Israel. One person said that while there are many opportunities to live a meaningful Jewish life in the Diaspora, a dissatisfied person should consider aliyah, provided he understands the material difficulties involved in settling in Israel. Another interviewee said that she would suggest aliyah as an alternative, but not as an escape. She asserted that there are many options open to people who wish to be involved and she is more concerned with those people who will not consider Jewish involvement of any kind at all. Yet another respondent said that he sees life in Israel as a viable alternative which could be considered by the individual Jew for any reason, although he feels that if one cannot find outlets for Jewish expression in the United States, he probably cannot find them anywhere.

Five respondents commented in a more ambivalent manner than those previously discussed. They seemed to feel that there was hope for Jewish life in the United States, that there has been a proliferation of "alternative" Jewish institutions and groups to which a person may turn if he is not satisfied with the Jewish establishment, and that even the establishment itself is becoming less rigid and more

open to experimentation. Thus, the people in this group felt that those dissatisfied and seeking Jewish options should first try to become involved in the American Jewish scene, perhaps try to change the aspects which are causing their dissatisfaction. Only after this step has been taken should Israel be considered as an alternative by the Jew seeking fulfillment. Once again it was stressed that the decision to immigrate to Israel should not be based on the fact that one is unhappy with American Jewish life. As one respondent put it, he would suggest aliyah as an alternative to "an individual whose personal consciousness and identity already gear him in this direction."

Seven persons tended to agree with the notion that there are alternatives other than aliyah and that one does not have to go to Israel to find ways of being Jewish. Three of these respondents were of the opinion that a person must come to terms with his Jewishness, no matter where he is, and that aliyah should not be considered an option by those still in the process of searching for their own Jewish identity. Aliyah, they feel, should be suggested and considered only for positive reasons.

One interviewee said that he does not consider Israel an alternative for American Jews and that the fulfillment of Jewish history must occur in the Diaspora, that Israel is one of a number of viable centers of Jewish life. Another opinion expressed was that young American Jews should not be encouraged to settle in Israel, but that

once they decide on aliyah, the community should provide assistance for the potential immigrants to realize their goal. Another person also stated that she would not suggest aliyah as an option for American Jews at all. She said that the survival of the American Jewish community is dependent upon the commitment of American Jews to work toward strengthening their own communities in the United States.

To summarize, seven respondents would suggest consideration of aliyah to Jews dissatisfied with Jewish life in the United States or those searching for new options for Jewish living. Seven respondents would not suggest aliyah as an option at all. Five persons suggested that options for Jewish life in America should be explored first and then Israel might be considered as an alternative based on knowledge of all of the options available to American Jews. All of these responses, however, were accompanied by comments which indicate a concern that individuals develop awareness of their own Jewish identity and make decisions regarding Jewish involvement and aliyah based on self-knowledge and positive commitments rather than negative attitudes.

The Organizational Perspective

When asked to define the goals and purposes of their respective agencies, interviewees usually responded in the most commonly recognized terms. For example, the Overseas Aid organizations' primary goal is to raise funds to meet the needs of Jews on a local and international level. Goals of the Religious Schools were delineated as

provision of the tools and atmosphere which enable young people to develop their full potential as Jewish human beings. Purposes of Jewish Centers were described in terms of perpetuating the quality and enhancement of Jewish life and provision of opportunities for leisure time activity in a Jewish atmosphere; one respondent further noted that Centers are membership agencies with a "non-sectarian approach" and make no ideological demand of those who become members. Federation goals were defined as unification, overall planning and provision of service to meet the needs of the entire Jewish community of greater Los Angeles; an additional purpose, noted by one interviewee, is to build and strengthen Jewish life in its many aspects, both in the United States and in Israel. Overall goals of Community Relations organizations were defined in terms of maintenance and survival of Jewish life wherever Jews live and securing full civil and religious rights for Jews, while at the same time insuring a viable democratic society for all groups in the United States.

Eleven of the nineteen respondents said that their organization, its professional staff or membership, may sometimes affect their opinions. All nineteen respondents said that they have some influence upon organizational policy and programs. Most respondents appeared to feel that they have more influence on agency policy than does their organizational involvement influence their own opinions. Positive responses to the question concerning personal influence on agency

policy and functioning in most cases were stated with more strength and less hesitance than those relating to agency impact on personal opinion.

None of the ten agencies and organizations with which the respondents are affiliated have a formal policy relating to aliyah.³ Most of the organizations encourage in some measure financial and spiritual support of Israel as part of their regular programming, as well as promotion of travel and study programs in Israel. One interviewee noted that though his agency has no policy about aliyah, there is a positive feeling for interchange between Israeli and American Jews and an eagerness to promote travel to Israel. Another person said that her organization has not taken a vote on establishing a policy on immigration to Israel. She noted in this regard that the organization's membership is diverse -- that while it can cooperate with those who encourage aliyah, it cannot officially promote American immigration to Israel because "someone would be upset." Another agency was described by one respondent who said that while his agency does not oppose

³However, according to the May, 1975 issue of Al Ha'Gal (a publication of the Israel Aliyah Center in New York), the Board of Directors of the umbrella organization of the Jewish Centers movement, the National Jewish Welfare Board, recommended a policy supportive of aliyah efforts by providing meeting places and representation on aliyah committees, as well as information and interpretation of Israeli needs in respect to new immigrants. None of the respondents from the local Centers noted this national policy during the interviews.

aliyah, it would not actively program for it. He said that the agency has been strongly committed to Israel for many years, but it maintains a distinction between Americans and Israelis, feeling that national allegiances should be separated.

In summary, the respondents are affiliated with a spectrum of Jewish agencies, the goals of which range from broad community planning and programming to more specific fund raising and educational functions. None of the agencies is explicitly Zionist in orientation. None of the ten Jewish agencies represented in the sample has an official policy relating to aliyah.

Approximately half of the respondents feel that their opinions are influenced somewhat by their organizations. All of the interviewees feel that their opinions influence and have some impact upon their organizations.

While it was anticipated that there might be differences in response between voluntary and professional workers in an organization, this turned out not to be the case. The lay-professional factor appears to have no significant bearing on any of the findings. Similarly, differences in the goals and ideologies of the agencies appear to have no bearing on the general trend of the findings.

Stance of Jewish Schools
And Organizations Toward Aliyah

Responses concerning the stance which American Jewish schools and organizations should take concerning aliyah may be divided into four categories: 1) aliyah should be encouraged, 2) aliyah should not be encouraged, 3) aliyah should be presented as an alternative, and 4) programs should provide pressure-free exposure to Israel.

Two interviewees are of the opinion that aliyah should be encouraged by the organized American Jewish community. Said one, "Every organization and school should make every viable effort to predispose toward and to trigger aliyah." The other respondent agreed that selling aliyah as a viable alternative is beyond the responsibility of the Zionist movement, that promotion of immigration to Israel is also the responsibility of the total American Jewish community. He feels that American Jewry must play a key role in aliyah. This person noted that unfortunately American Jews who do not see aliyah as an option for themselves personally have a psychological conflict about trying to encourage others to view aliyah as an option.

Three respondents feel that aliyah should not be encouraged by American Jewish schools and organizations. One person expressed his view that encouragement of aliyah is "not an appropriate activity nor is it a proper item on the agenda for the American Jewish community." He said that this sort of activity to some extent undermines the

viability of Diaspora communities and that the richness and diversity of Jewish life is enhanced by having more than one vital center for Jewish living. He does feel that there should be positive programs to stimulate aliyah in communities where there is obviously no future for Jewish life. (He mentioned the Soviet Union as an example.) The two additional responses in this category were that neither schools nor organizations should promote aliyah, although travel and living experiences not necessarily geared toward immigration might be encouraged. Both of these respondents said that Zionist groups could and should encourage immigration to Israel, as it is within their purview to do so.

Six interviewees think that aliyah and life in Israel should be presented as an alternative to American Jews. The words "possibility" and "awareness" occur typically in the responses in this category. Two people mentioned that aliyah and life in the Jewish State should be presented as a possibility, though not promoted, in Jewish schools. One person noted that the discussion of aliyah as a possibility for the American Jew is a natural component of a presentation on Israel. Most of these respondents agreed that organizations should help people be aware of aliyah as an option for Jewish living and that information on the subject should be made available. One person said schools and organizations should take the stance that aliyah is an alternative, "each agency acting on the matter according to its own ideology."

Finally, eight respondents expressed the opinion that exposure to Israel, free of pressure toward aliyah, is the proper position for Jewish communal organizations and schools. These people take a positive view of organizational programming about all aspects of Israeli life and opportunities to visit Israel. Promotion of aliyah, on the other hand, is not considered a proper component of Israeli programming by respondents in this group. One person said that religious schools should indicate the historical, religious and geopolitical importance of aliyah, while at the same time emphasizing the realities of Israel's standard of living and military problems. He noted that "not all organizations can be all things to all people" and aliyah does not fit into every agency's agenda. Another interviewee believes that Jewish schools and agencies should not actively organize "Immigrate to Israel" programs, but should facilitate existing programs to enhance knowledge about and encourage travel opportunities to Israel. He said that American Jews should not teach that Israel is the only place for Jews to live, although Israel should be central to school and congregational life; direction and guidance should be provided to those who do want to settle in Israel. Another person in this group suggested that to present aliyah as an option for American Jews would be an "imposition" upon them.

All eight respondents in the last category emphasized that the American Jewish community, as represented by its schools and

organizations, should present the broadest and most realistic view of Israeli life possible through educational information programs on political, social and spiritual topics, provision of material, and opportunities for varied types of travel and living experiences. A desire for this type of programming was indicated by the bulk of respondents and was reflected in most of their discussion relating to the stance which the organized American Jewish community should take toward aliyah.

Summary

Three interviewees feel that promotion of aliyah is not an appropriate activity for American Jewish schools and organizations. Two people believe that American Jewish groups should participate in efforts to encourage aliyah.

Of the fourteen remaining respondents, six think that aliyah and living in Israel should be presented as an option for consideration by Jewish schools and organizations to their constituencies; eight people feel that Israel should be given maximum exposure and importance in American Jewish programming, but that aliyah should not be presented as an alternative within this context.

A Comparative Review:
Attitudes Towards Aliyah and Their Relationship To
Perspectives on American Jewish Life

Almost all of the respondents share three basic attitudes:

1) optimism about the quality of American Jewish life and its prospects for the future, 2) concern with the relationship between American Jewry and Israel, and 3) ambivalence toward the notion of direct encouragement of aliyah from the United States.

All respondents agree that the quality of Jewish life in the United States is improving. They feel encouraged by what they perceive as opportunities for experimentation with various modes of Jewish expression available within the framework of a pluralistic, democratic society. They see these opportunities engendering development of new styles of Jewish community, prayer, and study, such as the proliferation of chavurot.⁴ They feel that the freedom of American society also allows for a return to traditional patterns and practices, which is not the case in countries in which personal and group liberty is not so highly valued.

At the same time, there is a concern about the potential for assimilation stemming from the same factors which appear to encourage the enhancement of American Jewish life. The free society provides opportunities for acquaintance with other religious and ethnic groups

⁴Chavurot - small groups of Jews who meet for the purpose of Judaic study and celebration.

and cultures, and the choice to identify with one of these, or with none at all, as well as the opportunity for Jewish growth and creativity.

Respondents agreed that Israel has been an important factor in American Jewish life. Israel is thought to have contributed greatly to the American Jewish psyche in the development of pride and positive Jewish identity formation and consciousness. While Israel's impact on American Jewish life was generally considered very positive, many comments indicated concern with the nature of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry. Respondents had questions about the centrality of Israel to Jewish life in general and emphasized the importance of Jewish diversity, and the vitality and importance of maintaining various Jewish communities in the Diaspora, as well as in Israel.

Finally, respondents indicated a great deal of ambivalence toward the concept of aliyah. Discussions of aliyah centered on idealism and ideology in relation to the practicalities of moving from the United States to a more difficult Israeli lifestyle. Most respondents intimated with varying degrees of conviction, that very few American Jews have the necessary "idealism" to move to a country which is beset by so many economic and military problems.

Additionally, the bulk of interviewees do not believe that immigration to Israel should be encouraged outright by American Jewish organizations. The underlying reasons for this feeling appear to be threefold: 1) it is important to build up American Jewish community life

and it is of primary importance that local talents should be used in this direction, 2) each American Jewish organization must concentrate first on meeting its own stated goals, and 3) aliyah should be a matter of personal choice and individual decision. There is a recognition of the importance of aliyah for the survival of Israel as a Jewish State. The great majority of respondents feel that Israel should play a prominent role in the programs of American Jewish organizations and schools. It would appear that the emphasis on programming about Israel in itself is thought to provide a knowledge and an emotional base from which, possibly, later personal thoughts about aliyah might be explored by the individual.

The respondents' optimistic forecasts and comments on American Judaism, the importance of enhancing the quality of Jewish life in the United States, and the need to stimulate creative Jewish expression, may be compared with their feelings relating to Israel and aliyah. Respondents credit Israel's influence on Jewish identity and raising of Jewish consciousness as providing a foundation for the positive aspects of American Jewish life. Interestingly, the positive influence of Israel upon American Jewry and the consequent emphasis on development of quality Jewish expression and life styles in the United States appear to be important factors in the tendency to stress an Israeli-American Jewish relationship based on equal Jewish status. In other words, the emphasis upon the equal importance of the two

Jewish communities appears to be bolstered by the optimism which characterizes perceptions of present and future Jewish life in the United States. Thus, paradoxically, Israel's positive influence may itself be a contributing factor in the tendency to question the centrality of Israel to Jewish life, particularly in the United States.

Similarly, the seeming ambivalence toward the concept of aliyah may be related to the comfort, both physical and spiritual, which Jews experience in the United States. Emphasis on the positive aspects of democracy and cultural pluralism coupled with the resurgence of Jewish consciousness in America, tend to reinforce the feeling that immigration to Israel should be the personal decision of an idealistic few. With relation to concerns about the quality of Jewish life and survival, respondents tend to emphasize a future and solutions within the American context rather than within the Israeli context. In this sense, aliyah does indeed seem to be viewed as a phenomenon peripheral to the mainstream of organized American Jewish life, a decision for the idealistic few who decide to make their personal choice within a national Jewish context.

It is interesting to note that the two respondents who felt strongly that aliyah should be encouraged by the organized American Jewish community had differing opinions about Jewish life in the United States. One had a very negative view of prospects for the American Jewish future. He did not mention at all the renaissance of identity

and search for creative modes of expression noted by other interviewees. He tended to view the future in terms of increasing assimilation and Jewish marginality. The other respondent identified positive aspects of Jewish life in America and stated the belief that it is possible to live a Jewishly fulfilled lifestyle in the United States. While not negating the influence of problematic aspects of American society (e.g., the ease with which one can assimilate) and Jewish organizational life, the overall view of American Jewish life was optimistic. This respondent was able to reconcile his optimism about Jewish life in the United States with the notion that aliyah should be encouraged as a suitable option for some American Jews.

Of these two respondents only one departed from the general tendency toward optimism about American Jewish life. While many of the respondents' comments indicated a perception of problems which face American Jews in consciously perpetuating Judaism and their own distinct Jewish identity, these were almost always stated in a context of positive attitudes toward Jewish life in the United States.

The general theme of the survey findings may then be restated as follows: Respondents are ambivalent toward the general concept of aliyah and toward the notion of direct encouragement of aliyah from the United States. This ambivalence, viewed in the context of optimism concerning American Jewish life, suggests that attitudes toward the concept of aliyah may be negatively influenced by

positive attitudes about prospects for the Jewish future in a free, pluralistic society.

CHAPTER 11

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN AMERICA

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The Jewish community in America has a long and rich history. It is a community that has made significant contributions to the American people. The Jewish community in America is a vibrant and growing community. It is a community that is proud of its heritage and its traditions. It is a community that is committed to the values of freedom, justice, and equality. The Jewish community in America is a community that is proud of its role in the American story.

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CHAPTER VI

TOWARD AN INTEGRATION OF PERSPECTIVES:
THE SEARCH FOR POSITIVE
ISRAELI-AMERICAN JEWISH INTERCHANGE

Political Zionism proposed the founding of a modern Jewish nation-state as the solution to the problems Jews faced in countries in which they lacked physical security and civil liberties. Cultural Zionism proposed that the Jewish nation-state provide for Jews the world over a modern focus of identity with the ethical and spiritual elements of Judaism. These basic components of Zionist theories emerge as themes in this survey of attitudes toward the concept of aliyah.

Cultural pluralism, freedom and democracy are emphasized by the respondents as factors which make for an atmosphere in which Jewish religious, scholarly, social, and communal development can be encouraged in the United States. Whereas political Zionism was postulated in the context of a search for freedom and civil liberties, American Jews find themselves in a democratic, pluralistic society. Religion has become more private and individualized as in most Western societies, but the possibilities for personal development and

group ethnic, cultural, and religious expression are wide-ranging.

Cultural Zionism, with its proposed solution to the spiritual problem of Judaism in the form of a number of centers of Jewish life with the State of Israel providing a model for modern Jewish identity, would appear to be a more appropriate philosophy to compare with American Jewish perspectives than a theory that is based on a search for security and is rooted in European anti-Semitism. Even here, however, some of the expressed attitudes differ strikingly from more traditional thought. The difference takes the form of questioning the centrality of Israel to Jewish life and in attempts at re-defining the relationship between American Jewry and the Jewish State. The difference questions traditional Jewish religious, as well as later philosophical and Zionist ideological, thought. "Yearning for Zion" was an element of Jewish life long before the modern Zionist movement came into being. The founding of the State of Israel thus presented modern American Jews with a dilemma: a choice between either realizing the dream and immigrating to Israel, or formulating a philosophy which would recognize the value of a permanent Diaspora.

Given this dilemma, American Zionists, and most American Jews, began slowly to conceptualize a philosophical and historical construct for life in the Diaspora. The value of perpetuating Jewish life in various communities throughout the world, and particularly in the United States, and the reciprocal importance of those communities

and Israel, was delineated and articulated. Historical and geographical settings were taken into account in these formulations. Consideration was given to the differences between anti-Semitic societies of the past and free, democratic Western societies of the present, as well as to the underlying basis of a tradition of religious and ethical thought common to all Jews.

However, while this clarification of the purpose, meaning, and necessity of Jewish life in the Diaspora was taking place, another need congruent with this philosophical undertaking was going unmet. There was no clarification of the nature of the Israel-Diaspora relationship in this emerging philosophical context. In recent years various writers have addressed this deficiency. But the lack of clarification for many Jews is evident in the findings of this survey. The respondents expressed concern about the nature of the Israeli-American Jewish relationship. Yet when questioned about a concept inherent to an understanding of Israel's historical and ideological underpinnings, the result was predominantly one of ambivalence with some indication of a lack of desire or an inability to focus on aliyah within some sort of conceptual framework.

The purpose of this study was to explore attitudes toward the concept of aliyah of a sample of the most active participants in the organized Jewish community of Los Angeles. It appears that there is a lack of conceptualization in the approach to aliyah presented by most

of the people interviewed. Detail and depth characterized responses about American Jewish life, but response about aliyah was not equally well developed. That is, while most respondents articulated feelings concerning Jewish life in America within an historical and philosophical context which included geopolitical dimensions as well as those of past, present, and future, very few comments on the concept of aliyah reflected that the topic had been considered as a component within such a total Jewish context.

The interviewees' comments emphasizing a reciprocal relationship between Israel and American Jewry are based upon recognition of the common destiny of all Jews and of the positive influence it is perceived that flourishing Jewish communities may have upon one another. The importance of enhancing the quality of Jewish life is viewed from both local and global perspectives. On the other hand, immigration to Israel is most often perceived with an emphasis on practical concerns and in terms which show little consideration of the relationship between aliyah and other significant factors such as Israeli and European Jewish history, traditional religious thought, Zionist theories, and the variety of effects American aliyah might have on Jewish life in the United States. In short, the sensibilities of the majority of respondents appear to be finely attuned to the promises and needs of American Jewish life based on knowledge, emotion, and experience of some depth -- the approach to aliyah, on the other hand, is lacking in such a conceptual and

philosophical construct.¹

Implications and Recommendations

The concept of aliyah presents the modern American Jew with a dilemma. It forces the Jew to consider the relative value and merit of individual and group destiny. Dealing with the concept of aliyah within the context of a free American society requires one to make choices concerning his own meaning and position in the totality of Jewish peoplehood. The issue forces clarity of definition of the meaning of terms such as "Jewish peoplehood" and "reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship between Israel and American Jewry."

The individual who identifies himself as a Jew and recognizes within that identification a personal responsibility which transcends his oneness, is faced with a decision of how best to fulfill that responsibility within his conception of Judaism and Jewish peoplehood. At some point in this decision-making process the individual's personal and Jewish needs must be juxtaposed with his perception of the Jewish group and future. Decisions for personal involvement in any facet of Jewish life anywhere will come out of this juxtaposition of individual

¹It should be noted that the interview guide included no questions relating specifically to the philosophical or historical frameworks within which aliyah or Jewish life in the United States might be viewed. The nature of the responses, and the researcher's subsequent interpretation of the varying degrees of conceptualization, were unanticipated in the original interview and sampling plan.

and group perceptions, desires, and needs.

If it is true that most of the respondents in this survey are more articulate and better able to conceptualize bases and justification for enhancement of Jewish life in the United States and optimism for the American Jewish future than they are to articulate a conceptual framework within which aliyah is a component part, perhaps there is something in their life experience which accounts for this phenomenon.

Development of cognitive and affective bases for Jewish involvement on both a personal and a group level is a long process. The individual, as noted previously, will make decisions based on perceptions of self and the Jewish group. Those perceptions are developed over time and are shaped by social, educational and emotional factors and by the individual's interaction in both social and work environments.

Similarly, the ability to conceptualize and to view oneself within a larger framework is gained through this developmental interactional process. It appears that for most of the participants in this study the process has not been geared toward gaining the cognitive and affective tools with which to approach the concept of aliyah from a multi-dimensional framework, while the opposite has been the case in regard to developing a concept of American Jewish group identity. The validity of this hypothesis should be explored and the results then examined for their ramifications vis-a-vis Jewish education and the development of attitudes toward American and Israeli Jewish life.

The participants in this survey are all actively involved in the organized Jewish community of Los Angeles. All of them are in upper echelon positions of leadership and the majority have reached these positions after years of involvement in Jewish community activities at various lower levels of leadership. Attitudes toward American Jewish life and aliyah have developed largely within the context of their professional and voluntary work in the community. Question arises as to the part which the geographical location of this particular community plays in the formulation of attitudes toward Jewish life. The nature of Jewish community life in other American cities is bound to be affected by social mores and geographical considerations which differentiate them from Los Angeles.

Similarly, upper echelon leadership may hold views which are different from those of Jews actively involved in other areas and at other levels of community life. People so deeply involved in one or more specific aspects of American Jewish life may simply lack the time and energy to develop an interest in other areas, related though they may be to their field of endeavor. Thus, ambivalence might be an expected attitude toward a topic considered peripheral to one's investment of time, energy, and emotion -- particularly if that topic, such as aliyah, is perceived to conflict with the purposes of one's efforts.

The lack of ability to view aliyah within a conceptual framework may be the result of a deficiency in formal and informal Jewish

education and prevailing Jewish community mores and attitudes. It may be the result of a lack of concern or desire to delve into a subject considered peripheral, or perhaps conflictual, to one's own existence. Such conflict may result in a reluctance to encourage aliyah as an option for others. Interestingly, the American Jewish leaders most willing to encourage aliyah were those most able to place the concept within a context and framework that considered past, present, and future implications for both Israel and American Jewry, and to recognize the differential needs of individuals.

It is just such a reconciliation of implications, purposes, and meaning of all issues for both the Israeli and American Jewish communities that is necessary in order to clarify the nature of the Israel-Diaspora relationship. Positive attitudes and a desire to work toward quality Jewish life in the United States do not negate the need to build bridges between the American Jewish community and Israel. Neither community need build its own traditions and institutions at the expense of the other. Rather, a commitment to Jewish life and to the soundness of Jewish tradition and ethical teachings can provide a common basis for a philosophy which allows for Jewish individual and community development in the United States and in Israel. Fear that immigration to Israel and encouragement of aliyah might detract from and cause deterioration of American Jewish life must be overcome.

Participants in the survey emphasized the importance of using

organizational programs to provide American Jews with cognitive and affective knowledge of Israel. These recommendations, together with the findings of the survey and their implications, tend to suggest some important foci which should be included in future American Jewish programs: 1) an approach to understanding Israel and her relationship with American Jewry in an historical, global context, 2) an attempt to re-define the nature of the Israel-Diaspora relationship based upon that understanding and the already refined and delineated values of perpetuating quality Jewish life outside of Israel, and 3) an approach to aliyah which encompasses implications of the concept and the reality for American Jews as well as for Israel.

Programs should be formulated in conjunction with Israelis knowledgeable about the structure of American Jewish community life and well acquainted with American Jewish mores and mentality. Such programs might include components both of a formal educational nature in order to impart factual information, and of an open-ended nature in order to enable participants to build upon their knowledge, experience, and feelings and to formulate their own frameworks within which to view aliyah, Israel, and American Jewish life.

Perceptions and attitudes toward aliyah are often narrowly molded within the context of active American Jewish community existence. The possibilities and meaning inherent in the concept are too often overlooked. Aliyah can be viewed not only as a solution to

Israel's need for manpower, but also as a concept which has grown naturally out of two thousand years of Jewish history and tradition.

Aliyah may be viewed as a way in which the individual Jew of today can link his personal destiny to that of the Jewish people, past and future.

Finally, aliyah may be viewed in the context of its implications for Jewish life and the Israel-Diaspora relationship. For within the concept of aliyah reside the possibilities and the most likely resource for establishing human "bonds" which could provide the bridge for understanding and positive exchange between Israel and the American Jewish community.

APPENDIX I

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student in the School of Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College. In order to fulfill the requirements for the Master of Arts degree, I am conducting a study on the response of people active within the organized Jewish community to the concept of "aliyah" (immigration to Israel).

As an active participant in the Los Angeles area Jewish community, you can be of great assistance to me in the completion of my work. I would like to request the opportunity to meet with you for approximately one hour. During this meeting I will ask for your thoughts regarding the general subject of aliyah and the American Jewish community.

I will call you within the next week or so in order to set up an appointment. If at that time you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

Thank you so much for considering participation in this project. I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Tobi Inlender
Student
Hebrew Union College

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Have you any thoughts or point of view generally on the subject of aliyah?
 - a) Do you know anyone who has or is considering immigrating to Israel? What do you think are his reasons for going? What are the stated reasons for immigrating?
 - b) What, if any, would you consider sound reasons for a person to immigrate to Israel?
2. In general, how do you view living as a Jew in the United States?
 - a) Do you or your friends ever think about or discuss Jewish survival in America? What kinds of possibilities do you see? In what kinds of terms do you think of (or define) "Jewish survival?"
 - b) Do you think it is difficult to identify as a Jew or live Jewishly in the U.S.? In general. Personally, for yourself.
 - c) Do you think that Jews who are dissatisfied with Jewish life in America or who are exploring options for Jewish living should consider Israel as an alternative place to live? Please explain.
 - d) Would you suggest other alternative solutions to the Jew who is dissatisfied with Jewish life or with the possibilities for his own Jewish identification in America? What would they be?
3. In what ways, if any, do you think Israel affects American Jewish life?
 - a) Do you view the State of Israel as a factor in the perpetuation of American Jewry? If so, how important a factor. If not, why not.
4. Could you tell me something about your background which may have had some influence on the points of view you hold today?
 - a) What formal Jewish education did you receive? How, if at all, was the subject of Israel presented?
 - b) Have you or your friends been to Israel? Under what circumstances?
 - c) Are you or have you ever been involved in Israeli oriented and/or Zionist movements, organizations? Are your friends?

In what capacity?

- d) Did your family upbringing influence opinions on these subjects? In what way?
5. What do you think the stance of Jewish schools and organizations should be toward aliyah (may be answered as separate categories). Why?
6. Have you attended any programs which promote aliyah? What was your opinion of the program content and why? Who (or what type of organization) sponsored the programs?
7. What do you think is your organization's point of view concerning American immigration to Israel?
 - a) Does your organization's point of view affect your opinions in this regard and in general?
 - b) How do your views affect the organization, its policies and functioning?
 - c) What are the goals and purposes of your organization?
 - d) How did you become involved in this particular organization? Why did you choose to participate in this one rather than some other?

APPENDIX III

NOTES FROM INTERVIEW WITH _____

NAME OF ORGANIZATION _____

1. _____
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
2. a b c d _____
3. _____
 4. a b c d _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. a b c d _____

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