

THE FUTURE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE REPUBLICS OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

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Focus on the struggle to "let my people go" from the Soviet Union has given way to the need to absorb Russian Jews in Israel, the United States, and other countries and the examination of the impact of the Russians (and immigrants from other republics) on the absorbing societies. It is now clear that not all Jews from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will leave, even though they have the opportunity to do so. This article analyzes the possibility of the development of a dynamic Jewish community in the CIS. Although much Jewish activity is taking place within the CIS, the demographics of the migration movement and the nature of the Jewish identity of those remaining lead to a negative prognosis about the future development of an organized Jewish community in the CIS.

The winds of Moscow blow across the city on a cold, blustery evening. Eight men and women are making their way by train and bus to one of the mass housing projects that all look so similar, and that are distinguishable only by the particular street name and apartment number. In this anonymous city, there are no names on the mail boxes or on the doors. If you do not know where you are going, you do not belong there. As each of the men and women make their way to their apartment, they occasionally see one another. There are no greetings or even signs of recognition, however, precisely because they know where they are going. It is 1984, and they are Jews on their way to a class on the laws and customs of Pesach.

A country that wished to see its Jews disappear has since disappeared itself. The collapse of the Soviet Union was thought to herald a new era of world peace. It did not take long, however, to realize that the Iron Curtain was not only preventing Russians from being exposed to the West; it also prevented outsiders from looking in. The facade of the stability of the Soviet Union has been sheared, and it soon became clear that Western estimates regarding the

economic fortitude of the Soviet Union were overrated.

The newly autonomous republics of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) or the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are now struggling with one another for independence, dominance, and security. Tension between republics spills over to tension between people from different ethnic backgrounds. The backlash against Russia in the non-Russian republics leads to antagonism against ethnic Russians and, more generally, to non-natives. The economic, social, and political difficulties encountered on the state level are felt by the local populace, who is now willing to openly express its dissatisfaction. According to a country-wide poll conducted in Russia in March 1993, only 12% of the adult population are satisfied with their lives, 71% find it a financial strain to clothe their own families, 61% report a deterioration in their living standards over the past three months, 71% express little or no trust in the government, and 53% feel that mass disturbances, anti-government riots, and bloodshed are likely to break out (Komozin, 1993). For Jews, civil strife, physical violence, economic woes, and questions of ethnic identity are always a potent mixture. The disappearance of the Iron Curtain leaves the Jews on center stage with no cover.

The preparation of this study was supported by the World Jewish Congress.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the impact of this situation on the Jews, and specifically on the feasibility of developing a vibrant Jewish community in the FSU that can be maintained and perpetuated from generation to generation.

ADJUSTMENT TO DECLINE IN FAILING STATES

Two basic options exist when an enterprise fails. One can either try and get out, or one can try and make the best of the new situation (Hirschman, 1970). The struggle for Soviet Jewry in the past was predicated on the perception of Jewish and Israeli officials that there was no future for the Jews as a communal group in Russia (as the entire country was known at that time) and that the only way of saving Russian Jewry was to help them get out. Since 1968, over one million persons have taken advantage of their Jewish ethnic identity (or that of their relatives) and utilized the privilege it gave them to leave the country.¹ Although the exit papers they received entitled them to go to Israel only, many of those who left the former Soviet Union went instead to the United States, Germany, Canada, and other Western countries. The high "dropout" rate of persons who left the Soviet Union but did not move to Israel (at times over 90% of those leaving) indicates that the factors pushing them to leave were stronger than the call of Zion pulling them to that country. This is also indicated by current emigration rates. The migration stream flowed to Israel when other options were less feasible, but the economic and social absorption of Russians in Israel has not been easy. The result of this difficulty, together with the perception, whether accurate or not, that

the situation in at least some areas of the FSU (like Russia) may have stabilized and may even improve, has led hundreds of thousands of Jews who were expected to leave the FSU and come to Israel (with consequent implications for absorption budgets, construction, and other preparations) to remain (Margulies & Singer, 1993).

THE BASIS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

What will happen to the Jewish identity of those who remain in the FSU? This question is very egocentric, because it is predicated on *our* desire that they remain Jews. The fact that the Jews have not totally disappeared can actually be considered a "mistake" of the Soviet authorities themselves. The legal classification that ensured registration of "Jews" in internal passports helped lead to a heightened sense of identity that took the legal taxonomy as a point of reference. To be sure, Oriental and Ashkenazic Jews differed in their reaction to state persecution (Chlenov, 1994), but the spark of Jewish interest manifested throughout the years of oppression was kept aglow, inadvertently, by the Soviet Union. Since Russia, the "evil empire," did not let them forget they were Jews, they remembered. Chlenov (1994) argues that the announcement by the Russian Federation of the decision to stop registering nationality in new identity documents, together with a decline in state anti-Semitism, will almost certainly lead to an erosion in Jewish identity.

Identity serves as an anchor in society. Knowing who we are gives meaning to our life and helps us in our interaction with others. Many of our identities are social, based on our group memberships. At times we define who we are by who we are not. Thus, the Jew in Russia becomes the Russian in Israel. We all have multiple identities and can rank them in a hierarchy. Some are more important than others. Some may bring extrinsic gratification and rewards. The choice of enacting a particular identity may depend on our perception of profiting from that identity. The task of

¹According to the director of the Israel Population Registry in the Ministry of Interior, as many as 29% of recent immigrants from the CIS did not succeed in proving their Jewish identity, and the "nationality" entry in their identity card was left blank. This figure does not include those who passed as Jews by using false information or forged papers (*Yom Le Yom*, April 25, 1994).

organizing multiple identities comes to the fore particularly in times of social change. Identity must remain continuous over time and space in order to ensure order, responsibility and even sanity (Wegert et al., 1986).

Throughout the years of darkness, Jews visiting Russia managed to make contact with their co-religionists to reinforce their Jewish identity. Some visitors conducted religious classes for them. Some taught them Hebrew and lectured about Israel. Many visitors apparently brought with them religious and other, more materialistic items that they conveniently "forgot" to take home. The manner in which all the books and items on display at the Israel pavilion of the International Book Fair "disappeared" was made into a documentary broadcast on Israeli television. The direct message for the Jews was that a worldwide campaign was on to help them as *Jews* in the USSR. (Israel, for example, was not anxious for the Jews to be involved in the general dissident movement.) While many Jews tried to pass as non-Jews, Jewish identity became a salient and central component of their identity in a positive manner—not only because they were forced to adopt such an identity by the Soviet authorities. The indirect message for some was that it materially paid to be a Jew.

It clearly "pays" to be a Jew for those who now want to leave, because it is still relatively easier to leave the FSU as a Jew, especially since Israel will still accept any eligible person under the Law of Return. Jewish identity, then, serves as a life-saving anchor.

In addition, some of those who wish to stay in the CIS can find solace in their Jewish identity because it provides them with meaning in a turbulent society. The Soviet people were accustomed to a fixed set of rituals and symbols that they could count on for continuity. A country that had experienced tremendous strife in the war years survived by promising its citizens stability. Jobs were guaranteed, and one knew that

one would be employed until one received a pension. The bread and food lines were a price that had to be paid, but one knew that there would be bread. It might take years, but eventually one would have some type of apartment. This situation lasted until the 1980s, when a new generation realized that bread and milk and apartments could be attained in the West without having to wait forever. The younger Soviet citizens, especially those who had not experienced the suffering and sacrifices of the Great Patriotic War (World War II), questioned why should they be different.

These changes in Soviet life have resulted in turmoil. Skepticism characterizes everyday life. According to Israeli emissaries who have spent a considerable amount of time in the FSU, particularly in small towns and villages, there seems to be little belief in higher values. The perception is that everyone acts out of considerations of personal benefit. Some of those who search for a higher meaning in the spiritual vacuum that has developed find God in one form or another. Various Japanese, South Korean, and Hindu sects are making inroads in the FSU because of this situation. In fact, the Supreme Soviet of Russia changed the law on freedom of religion in 1993 to curtail the activities of foreign religious groups without the consent and explicit invitation of local religious congregations. This was done at the request of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is suffering from proselytizing by the White Orthodox Church and is also fearful of the impact of televised American evangelism.

Some Jews have been similarly affected. At the very least, affiliation with other Jews, even occasionally, provides them with the opportunity to share common experiences. Religious identity, for some, is basically a support group. The role of Judaism is especially significant in the non-Russian republics. The Jews in the Moslem republics, for example, are not Moslems. They are, but they are also not, Russians. Anti-Semitism affects them only, and they can share that

experience only with other Jews. The search for meaning with similar others can lead them to Judaism.

JEWISH LIFE IN THE CIS

The nature of social identity provides a framework in which to describe the beginnings of Jewish communal life in the FSU. However, at the present time one cannot really speak about a national united "Jewish community" with a shared heritage as it exists in the West. There are many programs and activities, but they are often independent and are focused on a specific audience. There is an Executive Board of the Union of Jewish Communities in the CIS (the Va'ad) that purports to speak for the entire Jewish body, but there is no real community as such.

In fact, surveys of the Va'ad members have yielded some disturbing results. Most members do not know any Jewish language, one-quarter have a non-Jewish spouse, and only one-third have some knowledge of Jewish history or are connected to Jewish culture. The researchers are of the opinion that in fact less than 10% of them have any attachment to Jewish culture (Shapiro & Cherviakov, 1992a & b).

It is also noteworthy that the discussion regarding the possibility of the development of a flourishing Jewish community in the future is tinged with political overtones. There are those who argue that Jewish life in the FSU is doomed and that the only solution is to get the Jews out. Some Israelis maintain this position and understandably argue that only in Israel can former Soviet Jews have a Jewish future. Persons who hold such an opinion do not want even to entertain the idea of a thriving Jewish community in the FSU. On the other hand, there are those who very much want Jewish life to prosper and flourish in the FSU and to have a say in the way it develops. Some of the religious movements, accordingly, are very active in the FSU.

There is a great flurry of Jewish activity in the former Soviet Union. No longer do

groups of Jews who want to study religious texts have to do so clandestinely. The Chabad-Lubavitch organization is one of the strongest Jewish religious movements in the CIS. Chabad emissaries travel all over the former Soviet Union teaching *Yiddishkeit*. Their purpose is to create a return to Judaism, but they are not a Zionist movement. They do not attempt to convince the Jews to move to Israel, but rather try to get them to lead religious lives. Indeed, they may feel they have a better chance achieving this goal in the FSU than if the Russian Jews left for abroad where they could more readily be adversely affected by modernity. They are seeking to have synagogue buildings that were expropriated in the past returned to the Jews for their own use (but they are not alone in this endeavor). Laws on the return of religious property confiscated by the State have been passed in Russia and Ukraine. According to the 1993 report of the Va'ad, many synagogues are being returned to newly emerging congregations, but the local newly formed Jewish communities do not have the funds to carry out the necessary renovations. In Samara and Omsk the local religious communities united with the cultural Jewish groups to restore the synagogues (*Annual Report*, 1993).

In a particularly creative stratagem, the Lubavitch representative purchases weekend tickets to a puppet theater in Kiev that was once a synagogue. The "theater" then operates as a synagogue for the entire Shabbat. A religious kindergarten is also operated by them in that city. The children who attend have the added benefit of receiving a bountiful supply of kosher food that is not produced locally, i.e., near Chernobyl. Indeed, that has led to protests against the kindergarten by Kiev residents who complain about the special treatment accorded these children.

Yeshivahs operate in various cities, including Moscow, Tbilisi, Kishinev, Alma Ata, and St. Petersburg. These schools are supported by various Jewish groups in the

United States, Canada, Israel, and Europe. Obviously, the quality of studies varies and is not on the level of such institutions in Israel or the United States, but the yeshivas do attract native residents who are interested in becoming Orthodox Jews.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint) is also particularly active in fostering local Jewish communities in the republics. The Joint supports many cultural programs, including professional performing groups, and sponsors Jewish book and radio projects. It trains teachers in all areas of Jewish art and sponsors union-wide contests to promote Jewish culture, such as a Jewish song contest in May 1994.

In the field of education, the Joint provides educational material to some 200 schools, of one type or another, serving 17,000 students. It conducts seminars and training programs for Jewish teachers on how to present and teach Jewish topics. The Joint also underwrites the budgets of the Jewish University in Moscow, St. Petersburg Jewish University, and the International Solomon University in Kiev. Although the Jewish content of these universities may be limited, at least they provide a milieu for Jews of university age and an opportunity to mingle and meet. (However, anti-discrimination laws now enable non-Jews to enter these universities as well.) The Joint also supports Israel's Open University program in the FSU, which offers Russian-language correspondence courses on the Holocaust, the history of East European Jewry, and an introduction to the Talmudic period. It also publishes religious materials in Russian (including Orthodox and Reform prayer books). Over 100 libraries in Jewish schools, universities, cultural and religious societies, and synagogues in 75 cities have been among the recipients of the approximately 500,000 books it has distributed in the FSU. The Joint also provides educational material to Jewish elementary and high schools that they have helped establish in many areas.

Many of the Joint's activities are Israel

oriented. For example, for the past several years the Joint has conducted a religious and cultural program centering on the Jewish holidays that involved sending emissaries from Israel to lead High Holiday services on Rosh Hashanah and Pesach seders, in addition to teaching Hebrew and Israeli culture. The Joint has supplied many of the products used during the holidays, including Israeli wine, *matzot*, and *lulavim* and *etrogim* on Sukkot.

There seems to be a contradiction between the Joint's Israel-oriented activities in the CIS and the attempt to foster a local Jewish community. Asher Ostrin, the Israel-based director of activities in the CIS, explains that the Joint is interested in Jewish continuity. It maintains that the primary method of ensuring Jewish continuity in the CIS is by bringing Jews to Israel. However, it is not realistic to expect all former Soviet Jews to emigrate at this time, and for this reason, the Joint is willing and interested in helping establish Jewish communities as a secondary measure. The purpose is to keep the Jews in a Jewish environment. For this reason the Joint is helping develop local institutions to handle the needs of the Jewish community, rather than providing assistance (such as welfare) directly. As another example, it is trying to ensure the establishment of bakeries that can manufacture all the *matzot* needed throughout the FSU each Passover, rather than importing it.

Many specifically religious activities are taking place in the FSU, and some have been quite successful. For example, Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, a Carlin Chasid, has moved from Brooklyn to Kiev. His religious orientation is a blend of *Haredi* extremism with a measure of American pluralistic tolerance. His American background, combined with his own savvy, has enabled him to establish rapport with a non-Jewish government and with a non-religious Jewish population. Rabbi Bleich has taken over one of the oldest synagogues in Kiev and had it restored. He supervises a kosher meat slaughtering

system, runs a bakery that makes and distributes *matzot* throughout the former Soviet Union, and otherwise obtains and distributes kosher food. Those who keep kosher receive assistance from him, which includes instructions for the parents on how to maintain a kosher corner in the kitchen and a weekly generous package of kosher food for the child. Rabbi Bleich's success and his good rapport with Jewish and civil authorities have led to his election as Chief Rabbi of Ukraine.

As much as Rabbi Bleich has done for Jewish life in Ukraine, he professes to be as willing for the Jews to leave as he is in establishing a dynamic native Jewish communal life. He offers Jewish girls a prize of a trip to Israel if they observe Shabbat for an entire year. Rabbi Bleich has an advantage in Kiev, if one can morally call it an advantage, in that many local parents are worried about the impact of Chernobyl on their children, and they are therefore more likely to let their children be influenced by a program that might allow or enable them to move away, even without them. (The same motivation inspires at least some of the parents of the children enrolled in the Israel-sponsored Naaleh program, which is designed to bring up to 5,000 youth from the FSU to Israel annually, even without their parents.²)

It is interesting to observe parallel activities on the other side of the religious spectrum. The World Union for Progressive Judaism has established a center in Moscow and currently allocates \$500,000 toward the establishment of Progressive Judaism in the former Soviet Union. The World Union conducts regular seminars for Jews from various republics and is training local per-

sons to be rabbis. It claims that the great interest shown in Reform Judaism in the FSU is because people are interested in a movement that allows them to decide religious issues for themselves. Rabbi Ariel Stone, a Reform rabbi from the United States, formerly based in Kiev, notes that the movement has had some difficulty in attracting adherents precisely because of the lack of rigid doctrine. She explains that it seems easier to find lost souls seeking an authority who will tell them what to do than to locate people who want to question along with you.

It is not surprising, given the tremendous market in the CIS, that the Conservative movement is also attempting to make inroads there. Among its endeavors are the establishment of Sunday schools to function similarly to American Hebrew schools. It is also actively involved in a summer camp program in the FSU.

Other religious activity in the former Soviet Union includes Bnei Akiva youth who have been sent as teacher-youth leader emissaries throughout the republics. Different yeshivahs and women's academies in Israel have "adopted" various cities in the republics, and the students spend several months at a time in the adopted cities reaching out to the local youth. The many activities of Bnei Akiva include seminars that are held almost weekly in Moscow for youth who come from all the republics. Up to 400 teenagers participate at a time, and for as many as one-half of them, this is their first encounter of any type with anything Jewish.

The message carried by the Bnei Akiva youth is both Zionistic and religious. They are geared to teaching Russian youth about religious life, but their primary aim is to inspire these youth to come to Israel. The view of Bnei Akiva is that the former republics are a Jewish wasteland and that there is no Jewish future there. In fact, the strong presence of the Bnei Akiva youth is so impressive that some non-religious (and even anti-religious) elements in Israel have looked upon the Bnei Akiva youth with

²On the state level, Jewish activity instigated from abroad runs the risk of being perceived as foreign intervention in the internal affairs of the republics. This can lead to a backlash among the governments involved, as well as among the local population. The roots for this scenario are already in place. The Naaleh program was criticized by the Ukrainian authorities and by individuals as child snatching, as a form of brain drain.

envy, if not fear. The charge raised is that the Bnei Akiva movement is brainwashing Russian youth to adopt Orthodox Judaism. The desire to counter Bnei Akiva's influence has led for calls for the Israeli army to send soldiers who are specifically non-religious to the republics of the FSU to serve as youth leaders.

Bnei Akiva youth leaders in the FSU are joined by other religious and non-religious youth movement representatives from Israel, including Ezra, Betar, Hashomer Hatzair, and Habonim Dror. One way of maintaining harmony between them is to allocate them to different geographic locations. For example, each movement was allocated at least one summer camp held in the FSU in the summer of 1994.

The successful functioning of the youth movement leaders throughout the FSU is partially dependent on the individuals sent. One advantage is that these youth go for relatively lengthy periods, usually two months at a time, and thus have a chance to establish close relationships with the local youth. They are also replaced by a team from the same movement, so that some form of continuity is maintained. Another advantage of these youth emissaries is their age. They can more easily relate to the youth in the FSU, and according to some of the older emissaries who served in the FSU, the FSU youth particularly appreciate the willingness and readiness of the Israeli young people to take time off from their own career plans and devote it to them. This is in contrast with the "professional" emissary who is seen to profit from his or her service. The particular success of all the emissaries, however, is essentially dependent on their devotion to their task.

What is the actual impact of the youth activities sponsored by Israeli movements on FSU youth? A study conducted by the Jerusalem-based Guttman Institute (as reported by the Jewish Agency) on the Jewish youth who took part in summer camp activities in 1993 found that 71% of the youth expressed interest in participating in Jewish

activities at the end of the camp session (versus 59% in the beginning of the camp). Seventy-two percent expressed interest in learning Hebrew (versus 35% in the beginning), and 89% said they felt part of the Jewish people at the end (versus 79%). The actual impact may be much more long term and not measurable by such questions. The Jewish youth meet and come into contact with Jewish teenagers from many other areas. They apparently also keep in touch with them after the camp ends. The development of a social group of similar-aged Jews may be more significant for Jewish life in the future than any change (or lack of change) as gleaned from a questionnaire. In addition, the impact of the Israeli teenagers who work in the camps as counselors may be more significant as role models than any particular program or activity they undertake.

Another effort on the part of Israel to instill Jewish and Israeli culture in the FSU is sending Jewish Agency emissaries who work as teachers, instructing children and youth in the Hebrew language. In addition, Israeli cultural centers are operating openly and providing information about Israel and Judaism. The material now available in these centers was considered illegal by Soviet authorities just a few years ago. In addition to printed material, the Israel centers offer computer-assisted programs for learning Hebrew and provide information about living in Israel.

The key word that characterizes the current situation in most of the republics is that everything is "open" and permitted. There seems to be a flurry of Jewish and Israeli activity in at least many of the primary cities throughout the countries. (There are at least 152 cities throughout the CIS that have a population of at least 1,000 Jews.) Yeshiva University and Touro College are active in the CIS. The Maccabi Israel Sports Association sponsored sports camps and seminars in St. Petersburg, Odessa, Novosibirsk, and Alma Ata in the summer of 1994 for about 400 youth. About 700 lo-

cal teenagers participated in summer seminars sponsored by Israeli youth movements in Kiev, Odessa, Riga, and Samarkand. Documents from the Center for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem testifying to the persecution and discrimination suffered by Jews during the Soviet period went on display in the central hall of the Writer's Union in Moscow this past June. For the past several years seders, sponsored in part by the Joint and Israel's Ministry of Religious Affairs and led by Israelis, have been held in a wide variety of cities throughout the former republics. The seder halls have been filled to capacity with Jews, many of them experiencing a seder for the first time.

It is difficult to assess how much of the Jewish activity in the FSU is sponsored from abroad and how much is local. Some Israeli sources maintain that the bulk of the activities are foreign sponsored and financed, but there are no independent data available on the subject. Many of the local Jewish cultural and religious associations throughout the republics seem to be perpetually in formation or reorganization, as their Jewish communities undergo "rejuvenation," according to a Jewish Agency report issued in May 1994 that details the Jewish communities in the republics that constitute the CIS. Many of them are affiliated with the Va'ad, the umbrella organization located in Moscow.

PROGNOSIS FOR THE FUTURE

All in all, this description of so much activity in a few paragraphs might give the impression of a vibrant Jewish life. This, however, is not necessarily the case. As some familiar with the scene in the FSU point out, the Jewish quality of the activities varies. One might wish to identify as a Jew for no better reason than to have a family member receive assistance from the Joint. In addition, hardly anyone claims that more than 20% of the Jews in the FSU are currently involved in any real Jewish activity.

The years of Soviet rule have clearly taken their toll, as Jewish identity and knowledge have waned.

The question of the future of the Jewish community is not only whether Jewish institutions may operate at present but rather what their potential effect can be in the future. Robert Brym (1994), a sociologist at the University of Toronto in Canada, has recently completed a study of the identity, feelings of anti-Semitism, and emigration plans of the Jews of Moscow, Kiev and Minsk that sheds light on this question.

Brym conducted a survey of a representative sample of 1,000 persons in 1993.³ He estimates that 1,144,000 people in the entire territory of the former USSR in 1993 identified themselves as Jews, were registered as Jews in their internal passports, or had at least one parent who was so registered. His calculations differ from the estimate of the Jewish agency by less than 10,000. Russia and Ukraine had by far the largest Jewish populations (435,000 and 389,000, respectively) followed by Belarus (92,000).

An initial analysis of Brym's data would seem to indicate that the Jews are interested in achieving a stronger Jewish identity. Some 95% desire a Jewish cultural revival, and 73% of the respondents said they would like to have more contact with Jewish culture. These questions, though, are discounted by Brym himself as being too broad and general to indicate specific Jewish interest. Regarding more micro-level questions, Brym found that less than 20% of the Jews of the three main cities he studied

³The population listing from which the respondents were chosen was provided by the police in each of the cities, who prepared (for pay) a list of families having common Jewish surnames. The use of distinguished Jewish names (djm) to identify Jewish families for such surveys is a common cost- and time-saving practice in the West. Its disadvantage is that it probably fails to identify and locate the more marginal and unidentified Jews who are more likely to have changed their name to pass as non-Jews. In such a case, one can easily assume that the Jewish identity of those Jews who were not surveyed would be less developed than those included in the study.

have a working knowledge of Hebrew or Yiddish, belong to or participate in a Jewish organization, have a Jewish upbringing, are giving their children a Jewish upbringing, or celebrate Shabbat or the High Holidays.

It is possible that, current practice aside, the Jews are anxious to have more Jewish involvement in their lives. After all, how much Jewish identity could any resident of the CIS have at the present time, especially considering the behavioral measures used? Indeed, the measures used seem well suited to the West, but less suited for the Jews in the FSU. One measure of Jewish identity utilized in the West is visits to Israel. Over 52,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union visited Israel as tourists in the first half of 1994. Considering that only 27% of the Jewish respondents in his survey said they feel part of the Jewish community, Brym nevertheless concludes that "while there is a surprisingly widespread desire for a revivification of Jewish life in Moscow, Kiev and Minsk, it is doubtful whether any more than a third of the population wants to get personally involved."

Several factors determine the Jewishness of Jews in the FSU. Area of residence is one such variable—people who came from areas more recently incorporated into the USSR are less assimilated. In addition, people who are 60 years or older are more involved in Jewish life than people under 60, probably because they are more likely to have been exposed to Jewish culture in their youth. Natural demographic processes, combined with the emigration of those youth who are more Jewishly oriented, will also have an impact on Jewish life in the future. Related to this is Brym's finding that high levels of Jewishness are related to a series of factors indicating a pessimistic outlook of one's future. This supports the impression of Israeli emissaries in the FSU. Traditionally, students of religion have found an interaction between feelings of deprivation and religiosity. Brym does not call it religiosity, but rather ethnicity, arguing,

ethnicity is reinforced among people who feel they cannot advance on their individual merits. Especially if they believe that discrimination against their ethnic group is an important reason for their blocked mobility, people tend to view their individual interests as identical with their group interest. They are then inclined to seek collective, ethnic means of improving their situation (Brym, 1994b).

The relationship between anti-Semitism and Jewish identity is not clear. For example, attacks on Jews in the Republic of Georgia could be attributed to anti-Semitism, but in fact the acts have been explained away by the authorities as "simple crime." According to a report in the Russian newspaper *Vesti* (August 3, 1994), the increase in crime against Jews in particular only stems from the fact that so many of them have sold their possessions in preparation for their move to Israel and that they therefore have become targets for criminals. Indeed, the government of Georgia has denied that the incidents could even be thought of as motivated by anti-Semitism since "traditional anti-Semitism" no longer exists in the country. As it happens, the explanation is indeed quite accurate.

A. Levinson, who works for the Moscow-based All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research, told me that a study conducted by him and L. Gudkov indicated that anti-Semitism is not a problem in the FSU, although it could be a problem in the future. Their study was based on a random sample conducted in Russia, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Estonia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. The data have since been published (Gudkov and Levinson, 1992, summarized in Brym, 1994b), and they are less reassuring than one might have wished. Between 33 and 55% of the respondents (depending on the republic) do not approve of Jews as workers; 23 to 38% are unwilling to work in the same group with Jews. Between 65 and 75% maintain that Jews avoid physical work, 40 to 53% say that Jews value mak-

ing money and profit above human relations, 34 to 68% are unwilling to have Jews as members of one's family, and 25 to 45% often have negative feelings toward Jewish parties and organizations.

Actual negative feelings toward the Jews, beliefs in Zionist conspiracies, and even preference for the old, Stalinist order are relevant to this discussion because they serve as the all-important framework in which a vibrant Jewish community can or cannot develop. Historically, it is improbable to expect Jews who initially have a weak ethnic and religious identity to develop a strong sense of community when they think that they can break out of their ethnic mold and join the mainstream. For this reason, the perceptions of the Jews regarding the situation are even more relevant than the actual reality. Over 95% of the respondents in Brym's study responded affirmatively when asked if they believe that anti-Semitism exists in their country. (The corresponding figure in Margulies and Singer's (1993) study was 92%.) The main source of anti-Semitism is attributed to ordinary people by 38% of the respondents; nationalist organizations such as Pamyat by 25%; state policy by 23%; articles in the press by 10%; and envious people by 5%.

Over 30% of the Jews in each of the cities studied by Brym say they are very frightened of anti-Semitism, and another 40% are somewhat frightened. It was particularly the less assimilated Jews who are more frightened. Those Jews who have personally witnessed anti-Semitism and those who have a stronger Jewish identity are more willing to emigrate, specifically for Israel. Although the primary factor motivating emigration from the CIS is economic, the primary factor inhibiting emigration is cultural affinity for their homeland. These findings are quite similar to those of Margulies and Singer (1993), even though their data were based only on people who had already registered to leave (although they had not yet done so).

Therefore, those most Jewishly involved will leave the CIS, and the persons with the

greatest propensity for staying in the CIS are those who see themselves as having the greatest chance of becoming fully integrated in society, economically and culturally. These persons are the least involved in Jewish life. Of the estimated 500,000 Jews who will remain in the territory of the former USSR in the year 2000, Brym (1994b) writes: "What was the largest Jewish community in the world in 1900 will constitute less than 4% of world Jewry at the end of the century. The Jews who will remain will for the most part be old, highly assimilated and dwindling quickly in number." Indeed, data from a variety of sources indicate that the increased availability of economic opportunities abroad will further deplete the number of Jews in the CIS.

CONCLUSIONS

Obviously, the number of Jews remaining in the CIS depends on emigration rates, which depends both on the success of absorption abroad and the conditions in the FSU. Surveys in Israel indicate a rise in dissatisfaction with life in Israel, and only a third of the immigrants from the CIS now recommend to their brethren that they follow in their footsteps (*Nasha Strana*, July 24, 1994); however, these survey findings fluctuate from time to time.

The economic situation in the CIS has both a negative side and a positive side. Jobs are no longer secure, as they once were, but the economic opportunities are now greater than ever before, if one knows how to maximize them. The face of Moscow has been changed. Once a bleak city decorated only by large posters of its leaders and slogans, it is now covered by advertisements and billboards announcing the latest Western imports. (There are now 2,000 advertising agencies in Moscow, a city in which advertising as it is known in the West was not to be found just ten years ago.) The political situation is fragile and changes quickly.

However, more important than any objective condition are subjective perceptions

regarding the current situation at any given time. That these perceptions have a strong impact on migration decisions was found even among those persons already registered as potential immigrants, in a study by Margulies and Singer (1993) of 1,150 potential immigrants. It is generally accepted by Israeli authorities that the relatively small emigration from Russia in the summer of 1994 was due to the widespread perception that the situation in the FSU was basically stable and tending toward improvement. The opposite is the case in Ukraine, and Jewish life there is a society in motion.

What are the implications for Jewish life in the former Soviet Union? A critical mass of persons is necessary to serve as a nucleus around which Jewish activity can take place. The number of cities with a population numbering more than 1,000 Jews will certainly decline from the current figure of 152. Data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey indicate that small-town Jews have attenuated Jewish identity. The resources for building and maintaining Jewish identity are just not available. We can expect the same in the CIS.

The motivation for affiliation as a Jew is also problematic. How many will affiliate because of some materialistic interest, and what does this mean for the nature of Judaism in the FSU? Will those searching for roots turn to a traditional form of religion, or will the FSU serve as a new model for Jewish identification?

I conclude that, despite all the effort invested in the CIS, a strong communal life will not develop even in the larger cities because of simple demographics. There will just not be enough young Jews interested in maintaining a Jewish community. As Robert Brym (1994a) notes, the Jewish birth rate is now negative—Jews are not replacing themselves, even if migration figures were not included. There are no factors that indicate this situation will change in the foreseeable future. Some Jews might return to the CIS from Israel, but not in enough numbers to make a serious increase in the

size of the Jewish community. Some Israeli authorities give Jewish life in the CIS no more than five or ten more years. Although political orientations have an impact on such perceptions, objective assessments bear them out. Brym writes (1994b), with appropriate reservations, that in the year 2,000, "Given that the younger and more Jewish Jews are the most likely to emigrate, and that they are continuing to do so in large numbers, one cannot possibly be optimistic about the prospects for the Jewish community in the CIS in the next century."

Because of the demographic situation, the impact of the activities in the CIS, which are a major focus for Jewish organizations throughout the world, may even hasten the dissipation process, rather than facilitating long-lasting local activities. The activities may heighten the salience of Jewish identity in the FSU and lead the newly identified to decide to leave for ethnic/religious reasons, as well as economic concerns.

Some may feel remorse about the negative future for Jewish life in the USSR, the largest Jewish community at the beginning of this century. However, "Let my people go," the biblical commandment that served as a rallying cry for Russian Jewry in the past, is a command that relates to a *people*, not to a mere aggregate of individuals. The *community* of Russian Jews should therefore not be seen as disappearing, but rather as simply continuing elsewhere.

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