Ideas in Circulation

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Ideas in Circulation **looks this time at how the Jewish establishment copes with groups of 'deviant' Jews; Jews who leave Israel; a symposium on the future of American Jewry; the demographics of Orthodoxy; the relationship between Orthodoxy and *aliyah*; and a reaffirmation of 'Centrist' Orthodoxy.**

1. Dealing with Deviance

Leo Rosten tells the story of three Jewish matriarchs sitting on the beach in Miami, *shepping nachas* from their children. 'My son,' says one, 'is in advertising, and he sends me $100 a month.' '*My* son,' says the second, 'is a lawyer, and he sends me $200 a month.' 'That's nothing,' says the third. 'My son pays $100 every week to see a psychoanalyst. And what do you think he talks about all the time? *Me!*'

This latest variant on the Oedipus-Schmoedipus theme fondly reveals one of the great Jewish defence mechanisms: our ability to translate away potentially threatening facts into reassuring categories. If that fails, there is always the alternative strategy: simply to deny that the problem exists. 'My son, the doctor, is a homosexual? *Impossible!*' This yields the unshakable syllogism: Deviance exists. A deviant is not a nice Jewish child. But all Jewish children are nice. Ergo, deviance doesn't happen *to us*.

All of which is currently being put to the test. In recent years Anglo-Jewry has been faced with unnerving evidence that some Jews are homosexuals; that some have already been claimed as victims of AIDS; and that drug and alcohol abuse exist in the Jewish community. Two *Jewish Chronicle* surveys, one which drew a picture of teenage Jewish decadence, another which revealed their abandonment of Judaic sexual ethics, were greeted with disbelief or studied indifference. A group of 'caring profesionals' met recently at Yakar to discuss alcoholism (see Simon Wiseman's article elsewhere in this issue) and complained of ostrich-like attitudes in the community. Earlier in the year, cases of child abuse were reported among Jewish families. What we assumed happened only to others, turns out to happen to us. Jews are not immune. And before we can respond *practically,* we have to be able to cope *psychologically* with facts that contradict our stereotypes.

The problem is brilliantly analysed in a recent paper by one of the most gifted of American-Jewish sociologists, Steven M. Cohen ('Israeli Emigres and the New York Federation: A Case Study in Ambivalent Policy-making for "Jewish Communal Deviants" ' in *Contemporary Jewry,* volume 7, edited by Arnold Dashevsky, Transaction Books, 1986). Cohen's starting point is a quite different phenomenon: Israelis who have left the country and are living in New York. But his interest is in the general circumstance of Jews who deviate from the expectations of the organised Jewish community. Jews are supposed to go to Israel, not to leave it. They present the community with the same kind of problem as do the never-married, the intermarried, one-parent families, Soviet Jews who settle in America instead of Israel, and others. They do not fit the projected pattern. How does the community respond?

Cohen describes the stereotype thus: "In the ideal world of organised Jewry, Jews should marry Jewish spouses of the opposite sex, stay married, and have children quickly (and plentifully). The American-born also should live in areas of high Jewish density with established networks of community services that they ought to use and support. The international refugee, though, ought to settle in Israel. When significant numbers of Jews fail to conform to these expectations, lay and professional communal leaders typically manifest a variety of now-classic reactions."

Cohen lists seven such responses, three to do with attitudes, four with policy. The first is *denial.* The problem simply does not exist. In the early 1970s, some leaders denied that Jewish homosexuality, or young Jews joining cults, or Israeli migration to the USA, were numerically significant or worthy of attention.

The second reaction is *cover-up.* The problem exists, but it would be damaging to the Jewish community to draw attention to it. This has occurred in relation to drug and alcohol abuse, violence in the family, and in an earlier period to Jewish criminals.

The third is *exaggeration.* A problem, having been suppressed, suddenly surfaces as a crisis of epidemic proportions. Cohen describes how intermarriage rates and the American-Jewish demographic decline have been wildly exaggerated. One famous study estimated that in the next century there would be only 10,000 Jews left in America (more reliable estimates calculate over four million). Another spoke of an intermarriage rate of 48% (the actual figures indicated 32% and the true rate is probably nearer to 25%). Exaggeration seems to be natural reaction to denial and cover-up.

At the level of policy, one response is *malign neglect,* which says, in effect: deviant Jews are bad Jews and therefore do not deserve communal help. Cohen cites the example of Soviet-Jewish emigres who go to the States. The Israeli government has put pressure on

HIAS not to assist them, for by rights they should have gone to Israel.

An alternative strategy is *benign neglect,* which allows deviants to use existing services, but refuses to make special provisions on the grounds that this will only encourage and legitimate them. Some synagogues have resisted providing special services for young singles and the divorced, arguing that these would weaken the image of the Jewish family.

A third policy is *containment,* the Canute-like option of attempting to reverse social and demographic trends. Thus policy-makers have attempted to devise incentives for Jews to have more babies, *shadchanut* programmes to curb non- and inter-marriage, and reimmigration programmes to persuade Israeli emigres to return. Cohen's view is that all the evidence is that such social engineering has never succeeded in reversing trends. The programmes are valuable in their own right, but will not achieve their objectives.

What all else fails, the fourth option is *accommodation.* Deviant groups eventually form their own organisations (separation) which often gain a *de facto* acceptance (integration).

Cohen has provided a perceptive account of the way the American-Jewish community slowly comes to terms with painful realities, much of which rings true of Anglo-Jewry too.

His own sympathies are clearly in the direction of acceptance and accommodation. Leaders, though, must struggle with other issues: preserving Jewish values and norms, projecting the ideal as well as the real, maintaining a distinction between compassion and legitimation (the word 'acceptance' is fatally ambiguous in this respect), and acting responsibly towards the future as well as the present. A fine analysis, but we may legitimately dissent from its conclusions.

2. Wandering Israelis

Contemporary Jewry contains a series of informative essays about the problem Cohen addresses: Israelis in America. Paul Ritterband illustrates Cohen's analysis of the way denial and cover-up lead to exaggeration. Most estimates place the number of Israelis living in America at around 300,000, with some two-thirds in New York. Ritterband shows that the true number of Israeli nationals in New York is closer to 40,000. Nor is the popular image correct, that Israeli expatriates are secular and Jewishly uninvolved. In fact they are, on average, more strongly identified as Jews, more traditional and Orthodox, than other New York Jews. Orthodox Israelis, argues Ritterband, are rapidly integrated into traditional neighbourhoods like Boro Park and so become 'invisible'. Secular Israelis are more noticeable, and so are seen as typical.

Marcia Freedman and Josef Korazim address another misperception. Several studies had concluded that the archetypal Israeli in the States was highly educated and cosmopolitan. Israel was suffering from a 'brain drain', producing more intellectuals than it could employ. In fact, many Israeli immigrants are from another social stratum and are employed in diamond trading, retailing and car and taxi services. What attracts them? Jews in America have a marked preference for self-employment, more so than any other ethnic or religious group. The opportunities for self-employment in Israel are highly limited. It may therefore be that it is the chance to start a small business of one's own that draws Israelis to New York, especially those who already have relatives there.

But the most interesting discussion relates to the question of how Israelis and American Jews cope with the phenomenon of *yeridah* itself. The very term (*yeridah* signifies not just emigration but also 'going down') is judgemental and guilt-inducing. Israel is the place to which Jews go, not one which they leave. *Yordim* have described themselves as 'moral lepers'. The New York Federation, recognising that it had to provide services to resident Israelis, but not wishing to endorse their presence, arrived at a compromise programme which ended with the sentence: "Although Federation will continue to provide to Israelis the full range of services in its network, Federation does not intend to create a support situation which would *de facto* be viewed as an encouragement to immigration to New York, nor is its role vis-a-vis Israelis to respond to primary initial immigrant needs."

Yael Zerubavel provides a fascinating survey of the impact of *yeridah* on contemporary Israeli literature. Several novelists — among them Aharon Megged, Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua — have drawn portraits of this new type, the 'wandering Israeli' who shakes the assumption that the *sabra,* planted in the soil of his own land, had put an end to the medieval 'wandering Jew'. The 'wandering Israeli' suffers from claustrophobia. Israel represents pressure: of seemingly endless war and hostility, of the ideals of the early settlers which seem impossible to fulfill. One of the characters in Amnon Jackont's *Borrowed Time* says: "Anyone who stays here has to choose between a war that will eventually end up in disaster or a peace that will lead to assimilation and make all these wars that we've fought and will fight totally meaningless." They dream of escape. Significantly, wandering does not provide it. Away from Israel they are haunted by the same questions and doubts that plagued them there.

3. Confused in Brooklyn

The light relief provided in this column last time, under the heading *Only in America,* seems to have struck a chord. Raymond Cannon, newly elected chairman of the United Synagogues's Board of Education, was in California recently and sent us the following entry from the *Dear Ann* page of the *Los Angeles Times* (15 May 1987):

"Dear Ann, I am of the Jewish faith but am ashamed to admit that I do not know much about my religion ... I became aware of my ignorance when I started to date a man who is deeply religious (Jewish also).

" 'Jacob' works with a furrier and we see each other weekends. He says it is against his religion to carry money on the Sabbath, which begins Friday at sundown and goes through Saturday. This means whenever we eat out on Friday night I have to pay. Also I am not that crazy about kosher food, and we eat only at strictly kosher restaurants.

"The most serious problem, is that Jacob says he cannot ride on the Sabbath, so we have to walk everywhere. When the weather is bad (rain, snow, ice) I find it very unpleasant.

"A Christian friend suggested that Jacob might be using religion to have things his way. Will you please tell me if what he says about the restrictions are true?

(Signed:) *Confused in Brooklyn.*"

A week later his eye was caught by an advertisement in the same paper for: "Authentic Israeli Paratrooper briefcase. In no way resembles the usual stiff and formal item. Made with Israeli ingenuity of sturdy cotton canvas for paratroopers who take along their paper-

work when called away on business (to Entebbe, for example)."

In the meanwhile, *Moment* magazine, which started us off in pursuit of the *tsetumlt,* continues to offer some prime examples. No-one is quite sure what to make of one advertisement. *Tfilah* means prayer; *tvilah* means immersion in a mikveh. A congreation in Whitestone, New York, recently advertised for "a cantor and/or *ba'al tvilah.*" (*Moment*'s comment: Sing or swim.)

And where else but in America could you find a service like the one offered by the Livingstone Car Wash of New Jersey: "Is your car kosher for Passover? If not, bring it to us! You've cleaned every room in your house, scrubbed every crumb out of your kitchen cabinets, but what about the car? Cookies ... Pretzels ... Potato Chips ... We know where to find them, and just how to get rid of them. Bring us your car and we'll remove your chumitz. Remember ... when you bring your car to a nice Jewish Boy who owns a car wash or two ... he knows what to do."

Or like the Dairy Planet, a kosher restaurant in New York, which offers to cater for special occasions, like "bar/bat mitzvahs, sheva brochos, retirements, weddings, divorces etc."

Or like Dr Arnold Feldman who advertises: "Do you suffer from D'VAR TORAH ANXIETY? With my help you can now overcome this crippling disability. Yes!, you will stand on the bimah filled with confidence and poise." He adds that he is "the only psychiatrist specializing in D'var Torah Anxiety outside of Jerusalem and Brooklyn".

Finally, an American feminist was not amused by the following announcement of a New York Talmud class: "Talmud for Everyone — Men Only."

4. American Jewry Examines its Future

In the last issue of *L'Eylah* we looked at *Anglo-Jewry Towards the Year 2000.* The latest issue of *Judaism* (36:2, Spring 1987) is devoted to a simliar exercise for American Jewry. Entitled *Jews and Judaism in the Twenty-First Century: Problems and Perils,* it brings together the views of eighteen contributors who collectively contemplate the crystal ball. There are pessimists and optimists, but all argree that there are some major problems to be faced.

Sidney Goldstein's article on population trends confirms recent findings that the American Jewish community is marrying less and later, having fewer children, divorcing and intermarrying more. Yehuda Rosenman traces the factors that have eroded the Jewish family: urbanisation, changing patterns of employment, longevity (increased life expectations may, he suggests, lead to higher divorce rates), feminism, the weakening power of religious values in a secular society, and personal confusion as to what to expect from marriage. This last component was revealed in a recent study of the causes of Jewish divorce, which "showed a lack of clarity about the reasons for most of them, and many of the couples could articulate only vague notions of incompatibility and the fading of romantic love."

Jews are, in short, prone to the ills of modernity — only a little more so than everyone else. The one group that has successfully resisted all the trends is Orthodoxy, especially the ultra-Orthodox. Louis Bernstein's survey of American Orthodoxy reflects this newfound strength. But he recognises a critical problem: Orthodoxy's deep inner divisiveness. Yeshivah leaders do verbal battle with Hassidic leaders; Hassadic groups fight among themselves; both cast doubts on 'modern' Orthodoxy, which itself is split into several factions and organisations. "It is easier," says Bernstein, "to persuade Assad to meet Peres than to get the leadership of the Orthodox sysnagogue bodies to agree on anything of major substance."

One of the greatest sources of Orthodoxy's strength, noted in Alvin Schiff's survey of the Jewish Day School, is its commitment to education. Despite the fact that both the Reform and Conservative movements greatly outnumber it in terms of synagogue membership, Orthodoxy contributes no less than 80% of the Jewish Day Schools in America. Reform represents some 2%. Both Schiff and Bernstein identify the key problem as the shortage of well-trained teachers. Bernstein notes the absence of an Orthodox teachers' institute. Schiff argues that the salary-scales and status of the profession must be raised. One issue that appears only between the lines of several of the articles is that the shift towards the day school has polarised the educational experience. In 1962 there were 540,000 Jewish children in part-time classes, plus 60,000 in day schools. In 1986 the figures were 240,000 and 130,000 respectively. Either this represents an alarming drop in the number of Jewish school-age children, or an equally alarming rise in the number who receive no Jewish education at all.

The contributors offer their various prescriptions and prognostications, mostly at variance with one another, but generally purposeful and quietly confident. Seen with Anglo-Jewish eyes, American Jewry seems both creative and chaotic, more than making up in vitality what it loses in coherence. No-one predicts any rapid disintegration, any civil war between Orthodoxy and Reform such as had been envisioned by Reuven Bulka and Irving Greenberg, nor any mass movement of *aliyah.* As it nears the twenty-first century, American Jewry seems to have liberated itself from the crisis-laden rhetoric of recent years. Sober optimism is the order of the day.

5. The Demographics of Orthodoxy

How typical *is* America? This is the question raised in an important study by Professor Daniel Elazar ('Who is a Jew and How? The Demographics of Jewish Religious Identification', *Jerusalem Newsletter,* 24 September 1986). Two interconnecting images prevail about Israel and the world Jewish community. One is that Orthodoxy yields a great deal of influence over such Israeli issues as 'Who is a Jew?' and the allocation of funds to religious institutions. The second is that this influence is out of all proportion to Orthodoxy's numerical strength. For it is assumed to represent no more than 10-15% of Jews. Hence the "popular image of a tiny embattled minority seeking to impose its will on the vast majority of world Jewry".

The image, argues Elazar, is false on two counts. First, it ignores the distinction between Jews by birth and *affiliated* Jews. Second, it quite wrongly takes the American situation as typical.

Elazar's calculations are somewhat involved. But they can be summarised as follows. Of the approximately 13.5 million Jews in the world how many are 'religious', that is, "who see themselves as being religious — Orthodox and non-Orthodox — and who actualise their self-perception in some positive way"? Looking at the position country by country Elazar arrives at an estimate of between 8 and 9.5 million (between 60% and 70%). How many of these are non-Orthodox? The estimate is 2.5 million synagogue members and 1.25 million sympathisers in the United States, and 250,000 in the rest of the world. In other

words, taken globally, non-Orthodoxy represents less than half of those who identify themselves as religious.

But these figures themselves tell only half the story, for they incorporate a great many Jews whose attachment is purely nominal. When these are excluded the picture is even more favourable to Orthodoxy. Taking the American Conservative movement as an example (a movement far larger than Orthodoxy in terms of synagogue membership), Elazar reports an estimate made by himself and Charles Liebman that there are no more than 40-50,000 Conservative Jews in the world who "live up to the standards of observance set by the Conservative movement". In terms of practising members, therefore, the entire movement is "only the equivalent of a fair-sized Hassidic sect". He adds: "It may be hard to believe, but it is important to note that at the late 1984 wedding of two scions of the Satmar dynasty, the number of Jews packed into a single Long Island stadium for the nuptials equalled the whole body of authentic Conservative Jews."

Even taking a far looser criterion of commitment — synagogue membership only — this yields some 2.5 million Reform and Conservative Jews worldwide, as against 2.2 million Jews wholly committed to Orthodoxy and several million others, semi-observant, who nonetheless identify with it.

The popular image of an Orthodox minority is thus based on a failure to distinguish between Jews, religioiusly affiliated Jews, and religioiusly activist Jews. On the two latter criteria, Orthodox Jews are in a majority worldwide. The vast majority of Reform and Conservative Jews are concentrated in America, which constitutes less than half of world Jewry. And America, as Ben Halpern once said, is different.

Elazar is a political scientist of immense prestige. His findings may occasion no surprise in Anglo-Jewry, where Orthodoxy has long held the clear majority of affiliated Jews. But his conclusion is significant: "The power of the Orthodox, then, is not only the power of a determined minority; it is the power that flows from real numerical strength vis-a-vis the other movements."

6. Orthodoxy and Aliyah

Two recent studies shed light on a further aspect of Orthodoxy's relation to Israel: *aliyah*. Support for and identification with Israel is a major constituent of almost every form of American Jewish life. But the *aliyah* rate has always been low. It rose in the late 60s and early 70s to around 5,000 a year. but it has since been falling and in 1985 was only 1,915.

Arnold Dashefasky and Bernard Lazerwitz ('North American Migration to Israel: Stayers and Leavers', *Contemporary Jewry,* volume 7) find that religious identification plays a major part in the decision to go to Israel. Those who do are eight times more likely to have had a Jewish day school education, 4.5 times more likely to attend synagogue weekly, and three times more likely to be Orthodox than the American average. Chaim Waxman ('American Aliyah: Dream and Reality', *Morasha* 2:3, Winter-Spring 1987) likewise notes that, though precise data are not available, it seems that "a majority of those Americans who went on aliyah and a majority of those who have active files in aliyah offices throughout the country are Orthodox."

This represents something of a change from the pre-1967 pattern, in which religious motivation was not found to be a significant factor. Waxman concludes that "Orthodox Jews, who comprise only about 10-15 percent of America's Jews, are very greatly overrepresented among the annual number of American olim, and their percentage is increasing."

Why? Waxman suggests that those who are likely to choose to live in Israel are Jews whose Jewishness is central to their identities, and these are more likely to be Orthodox than otherwise. In addition there is the impact of the growing tendency of young Orthodox Jews to spend at least a year in yeshivah in Israel. This may lead to a desire to settle there. Both studies, however, note that religious identification is neither a sufficient condition of aliyah, nor a key factor in the decision to stay or return. Economic conditions are the critical variable, along with occupational mobility, and the realities of integration into Israeli society.

Waxman concludes, though, that American Jewry has de-emphasised *aliyah* because of its association — especially in secular Zionism — with *shelilat ha-golah* (denigration of the Diaspora). American Jewry values Israel, but not at the cost of devaluing itself. A more successful approach than the secularist one of arguing the emptiness and terminal condition of Diaspora life, is the religious alternative of seeing *aliyah* as a mitzvah, a spiritual imperative. Some rethinking of Israel's approach to *aliyah* seems called for.

7. Centrism Reaffirmed

Norman Lamm, whose plea for moderation and tolerance in Orthodoxy we published in the last *L'Eylah,* adds more substance to the argument in the latest issue of *Tradition* ('Some Comments on Centrist Orthodoxy', *Tradition* 22:3, Fall 1986).

Centrist Orthodoxy represents a genuine Torah response to the radical challenges of the last several generations. They are: "modernity — its openness, its critical stance, its historicism; the democratic experience which, most recently, has raised the serious challenge of the new role of women in family and society; the growth of science and technology, and the scientific method applied to so many fields beyond the natural sciences; almost universal higher worldly education amongst Jews ...; the historically wrenching experience of the holocaust; the miraculous rise of the State of Israel; and the reduction of believing Jews to a small minority of the Jewish people — a condition unknown since the darkest period of the biblical era."

What, then, are the defining characteristics of 'Centrist' Orthodoxy? First, *Torah u-Madda,* a synthesis of Torah and worldly knowledge. It rejects the view that 'worldly wisdom' or secular study is to be permitted only *de facto,* as a means to earning a livelihood. Instead it enhances our understanding of Torah. "Torah remains the unchallenged and pre-eminent centre of our lives, our community, our value system. but centrality is not the same as exclusivity."

Second is an advocacy of moderation, "the result neither of guile of indifference nor of prudence; it is a matter of sacred principle". Maimonides describes the "middle way" and the "way of the Lord". And though he relates it to individual moral character, there is no reason not to apply the same considerations to social and political issues too. As an example, Lamm cites Maimonides' conciliatory attitude towards the schismatics of his day, the Karaites, despite his negative attitude to their halakhic status.

Lamm reminds us of the original Biblical context of the phrase "the way of the Lord", namely Abraham's plea on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gemorrah. He wryly contemplates what Abraham's