



Tabak (left) and Steven Schiffer (1951–2000) at the Shikunei Elef dormitories, Givat Ram Campus of Hebrew University, 1970–1971.  
(Courtesy Robert P. Tabak)

# *American Jewish Students in Israel, 1967–1973: A Memoir and Exploration*

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Not all that is pertinent to American Jewish history has occurred within American geographical space. A focus on the Jewish historical experience *in* the United States does not mean limiting discussion *to* the United States.<sup>1</sup>

I was born and raised in the small Jewish community of Dubuque, Iowa. Some of my most significant Jewish encounters were through Reform Jewish summer camp and youth groups. My Jewish experiences deepened during my education at the University of Wisconsin in Madison beginning in 1968, and especially through my participation from 1970 to 1971 in the One Year program for overseas students at the Hebrew University (HU) in Jerusalem.

My year in Israel had a long-term impact on me personally, Jewishly, and politically. However, this is not only an individual memoir. My story was part of a larger picture. Following the Six Day War in 1967,

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\* This article is dedicated to the memories of Michael Masch (1950–2021) whom I met in Israel, and of my nephew Zach Tabak (1992–2018). Research was made possible by a 2017–2018 research fellowship from the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter AJA). I am grateful for the assistance and support of the AJA staff, especially Dr. Gary Zola, former archivist Kevin Proffitt, and Dr. Dana Herman. I also thank Rabbi Alan LaPayover of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College's Kaplan Library, the staff of the Steven Spielberg Film Archives at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and the staff of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. I appreciate the comments and questions from participants in presentations at the AJA (2018); at the American Jewish Historical Society scholar's conference (2020); and in a virtual presentation I organized for friends and colleagues (2020). I also appreciate the comments and suggestions of the anonymous readers of this article. I benefited from editorial suggestions from Perri Schenker.

1 Eli Lederhendler, *American Jewry: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), xiii (emphasis in original).

thousands of American college-age young people went to Israel for extended stays. Most returned to the United States, where their experiences influenced American Jewish life. This study uses historical data and personal stories to illustrate a period of transformation for Israel and American Jews.

## Background

Small numbers of Americans attended programs in Palestine even before 1948 and in the early years of Israel's statehood. The published letters of Zipporah Porath, an American student at HU in 1947–1948, offer important insights, from a woman's perspective, into a year that included the United Nations vote to partition Palestine and the increase in violence between Jews and Arabs as the British prepared to withdraw in 1948. By spring of that year, she estimated that of five hundred American students at HU and the Technion in Haifa, "most of them have already left."<sup>2</sup>

Prior to 1967, Israel programs for post-high-school young people ("students" in my shorthand, whether or not they were in a formal academic program) included small numbers in Zionist youth group gap-year programs, work-study programs, and academic year programs for Americans in Israel, typically for the junior year of college.<sup>3</sup> HU's pamphlet recruiting American students for the 1964–1965 One Year program reported that in the program's tenth year, it had enrolled "since the program's inception over 200 students from almost 100 colleges and universities."<sup>4</sup> There were some tours and summer

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2 Zipporah Porath, *Letters from Jerusalem 1947–1948* (Scranton, PA: Temple Israel, 1998), 115. Porath stayed, joined the Haganah and was part of Israel's War of Independence. She married an Israeli and moved there permanently.

3 Tel Aviv University also had a smaller One Year program. Some U.S. colleges ran their own programs—in Brandeis' case in conjunction with the Jacob Hiatt Institute, 1961–1983. These typically had a few dozen students. A small American College in Jerusalem opened in 1968; most students were American, but there were some Arab and international students. "American College Begins Second Year in Jerusalem," *Detroit Jewish News* (17 October 1969): 6. The article reported 140 students. I am grateful to Dana Herman for this citation.

4 "Program for American Students at Hebrew University," (n.p.), American Friends of Hebrew University, Nearprint Collection, Box 1, AJA.

programs aimed at American college-age students, but these were quite small. In 1966, the national B'nai B'rith Hillel organization struggled to put together a single group of twenty college students for an almost seven-week summer visit to Israel. After experiencing the difficulties of leading this mostly female group, Yale Hillel director Rabbi Richard J. Israel concluded, "I find almost no reason for me to be here." He doubted whether Hillel should even sponsor such a program again.<sup>5</sup> Israel did not appear central to most American Jewish students, nor to Hillel.<sup>6</sup>

In May 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbors looked imminent. According to *Haaretz*, "The return of Egyptian forces to Sinai is a demonstration of force and pressure on Israel." On 18 May, the *New York Times* reported Israeli reserves were being mobilized. For American students at HU, it was a crisis. The eighty-three students on the 1966–1967 American One Year program in Jerusalem were gathered together, facing a decision about whether to leave in view of the impending war. Despite pleas from parents, all of them stayed.<sup>7</sup> Most surprising to later students is not the meeting itself but that all the Americans could easily fit into one auditorium.

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5 "Israel Travels," Richard J. Israel papers, MS-722, box 20, folder 1/19, AJA. 12 July 1966 report from Richard Israel to Hillel international staff member Alfred Jospe. There were tensions between young adults seeing themselves as independent and expectations of being in an organized program. Eighteen out of 20 participants were women. Note comment on difficulties visiting (Orthodox) synagogues, "the surfeit of women is a problem."

6 Other young American Jews participated in kibbutz ulpan, Sherut La'am, World Union of Jewish Students institute in Arad, and Zionist youth programs such as Young Judea, Bnei Akiva, and Habonim year programs. Many of these expanded significantly following the 1967 Six Day War. In 1966, 1,072 young adults from all countries participated in Jewish Agency long-term programs in Israel, which excluded universities and yeshivot. This number almost tripled to 3,022 the following year before declining to a number significantly higher than pre-1967. David Mittelberg, *The Israel Connection and American Jews* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1999), 139. Sherut La'am, a volunteer service year program, was one of the larger groups, including five hundred Americans from 1965–1967. See Naomi W. Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* (New York: Ktav, 1975), 122.

7 *Haaretz* (17 May 1967): 1 ("Israelis Indicate Partial Call-Up," *New York Times* (9 May 1967):1. Simon Herman, *American Students in Israel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 28ff.

In the wake of Israel's victory, American Jewish student experiences in Israel grew in popularity.<sup>8</sup> By the summer of 1970 approximately seven hundred students, almost all from North America, joined the One Year program at HU.<sup>9</sup> A slightly larger number of Americans were enrolled in other HU programs, such as graduate studies, *mechina* (preparatory studies), or as regular students—a total of more than 1,500 North Americans out of some 3,000 overseas students in a university with 16,000 regular students.<sup>10</sup> That same year, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) initiated a new requirement: a first year in Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Most of these rabbinic students were only two years older than the typical students there. Extended stays gave thousands of young Americans opportunities to develop more complex and nuanced relationships with Israel; a wider exposure to varieties of Jewish experience; and new perspectives on America and American Judaism.

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8 American Friends of Hebrew University pamphlet for 1969–1970 One Year program (compiled during the 1968–1969 year) reported 2000 overseas students, of whom approximately 1,000 were Americans (7). The 1971–1972 pamphlet reported 4,000 overseas students, with approximate 1,800 Americans (8). Pamphlets for 1972–1973 (8) and 1973–1974 (8) report 4,000 overseas students, about 2,000 of them Americans. Not all were enrolled in the One Year program. Pamphlets in Nearprint Collection, AJA.

9 A random selection of one hundred names from the 1970–1971 One Year roster showed ninety-six American addresses, two Canadian, and two from other countries. An Israeli film covering the same summer, *Late Summer Blues* (1987), shows a group of Tel Aviv high school graduates as they await being drafted during the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition.

10 On enrollment, see 1970–1971 “Program for American Students at Hebrew University,” American Friends of Hebrew University, 9, Nearprint Collection, AJA. HU reported the number of North American (U.S. and Canadian) students as one group. Correspondence, Israel 1970–1971, Robert Tabak papers, MS-846, box 3, L-S, AJA (hereafter RT papers). Papers include over 70 letters to family members, and dozens of letters to high school and college friends, rabbis, and youth leaders. I am grateful to my mother Phyllis Tabak z”l of Dubuque and San Diego and to my college friend Marlene Chertok of Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Cincinnati, who saved letters for decades. A small number of items, including papers related to draft counseling, are at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Robert Tabak papers, M86-086 (hereafter RT papers, WHS).

11 At the end of the year, Rabbi Ezra Spicehandler, dean of HUC Jerusalem, called the new program a “qualified success.” Spicehandler interview transcript, 1971, 8, SC-11842, box 1, folder 12. AJA. Also, Yair Walton, “The Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion’s Year-in-Israel program at 50: toward a retrospective historical analysis,” rabbinical thesis, HUC-JIR, 2021.

Prior to 1973, few American men and women were involved in Orthodox yeshiva study in Israel. The first institutions aimed at “returnees” (*ba’alei teshuvah*) to Orthodox Judaism, such as the Diaspora Yeshiva on Mt. Zion near the Old City of Jerusalem, opened in this period. However, they were relatively small and marginal. Similarly, a few programs aimed at American Orthodox students opened. For example, Machon Gold in Jerusalem was founded in 1957, and by 1970 it was a study center for women. The flourishing of these programs, typically as a post-high-school gap year, often under haredi (“ultra-Orthodox”) leadership, took place only after 1973.<sup>12</sup>

### Jewish Student Experience in Israel, 1967–1973

Following the 1967 Six-Day War, the number of American Jewish students in Israel significantly increased. HU grew to an annual count of

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12 See <https://www.jpost.com/in-jerusalem/fabled-diaspora-yeshiva-celebrates-milestone-459376/>. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 February 2019 (accessed 9 February 2022) on this yeshiva, founded in 1967, sometimes identified as a “hippie yeshiva.” Few *ba’alei teshuvah* programs existed before 1973. From 1978 to 1982 “the number of regular yeshivot that claimed to have *ba’al t’shuva* programs in Israel jumped from four to forty.” M. Herbert Danziger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 338. For Machon Gold, see 336, n.81. Steven Bayme states that “since 1967” an Israeli gap year for Orthodox young people became normative: see “The Looming Orthodox Ascendancy: Policy Implications,” *American Jewish Year Book* (2016): 33. However, Heilman reports that only a few American Orthodox Jews joined Israeli yeshivas in the 1950s, and not many before the Six Day War. Samuel Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Orthodoxy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 112–113. A 1971 report shows enrollment at Gold College for Jewish Teachers (women) growing from sixty to ninety from 1970–1971, but most were not from the United States. Jerusalem Torah College saw a small uptick of Orthodox men from 1969–1971, mostly from the United States. The number of year-long study programs at Israeli yeshivot grew from 130 in 1970 to 200 in 1971, mostly for students from the United States. *Report of Actions December 1969–March 1971* (World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency, 1971), 76–77. <https://www.bjpa.org/bjpa/search-results?Publication+Date=1970&search=Report+on+Activities> (accessed 13 July 2017). In following years special programs for American Orthodox students grew. A pluralistic co-educational program for college and post-college young people, Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies, opened in Jerusalem in 1972. Pardes prospectus, 1972, Michael Strassfeld papers, MS 1218, box 6, folder 40, University of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia, PA.

some three thousand to four thousand overseas students, around half of them American. These students interacted with Israeli students and society. Many had Israeli roommates. But they also operated in a circle of overseas students, mostly English-speaking. Most experienced Israel in the company of other Americans.<sup>13</sup>

A number of factors influenced and characterized these experiences. First, almost all of the students had been affected by the rise of American student activist movements, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and a growing counterculture. A great many were on the left and often for the first time in contact with significant numbers of like-minded students who were not ambivalent about being Jewish. Discussions questioning American Jewish affluence and the deficiencies of American Jewish life opened many to the possibility that life in Israel might be more meaningful or authentic.<sup>14</sup>

Second, an increased interest in travel, including extended programs in Israel, coincided with expansions of air travel with lower-cost options. In 1965, approximately eighty American students heading to HU bonded during their journey by ship from New York. Only a few years later, sea journeys sounded quaint. By 1970, many arrived on student charter flights, others on scheduled airlines. While this was an

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13 Ira Jay Sheier concluded, based on surnames, that of Americans on the One Year program at HU in 1970–1971, “nearly 100 percent of the students were Jewish.” Sheier, “Academic Problems of United States Students at Hebrew University,” doctoral diss. (Indiana University, 1973), 73. There were some exceptions. After a group ulpan experience, WUJS and Sherut La’am placed many participants in work positions in towns where there were few other English speakers. See, for example, *JTA Bulletin* (16 July 1969) on the departure of ninety-five college graduates in this program. <https://www.jta.org/archive/sherut-laam-program-sends-additional-group-of-95-youths-to-israel-for-years-service>, accessed 9 May 2023). At that date, 1,100 people had participated in the program since 1965. I am echoing Marsha Rozenblit’s comment about Jews in Vienna in the late 19th century, “Jews experienced assimilation in the company of other Jews.” *The Jews of Vienna: 1867–1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 3.

14 For example, Rachel Kranson, “‘To Be a Jew on America’s Terms is Not to Be a Jew at All’: The Jewish Counterculture’s Critique of Middle-Class Affluence,” *Journal of Jewish Identities* 8, no. 2 (July 2015). Kranson discusses those making *aliyah* (70) but does not mention those who returned.

international phenomenon, there was a massive increase in air travel to Israel, with passengers doubling from 1970 to 1971.<sup>15</sup>

Third, in this pre-Internet, pre-cell phone era, students were relatively isolated from direct American influences and experiences. Phone calls home were inconvenient, rare, and expensive.<sup>16</sup> News about the United States came from the Israeli press, including the English-language *Jerusalem Post*; Hebrew publications; Israeli and international radio broadcasts; and occasional issues of publications such as the *International Herald-Tribune*, the international editions of *Time* or *Newsweek*, or European newspapers. Mail or clippings from home would take at least a week to arrive.

Fourth, Israel offered new Jewish experiences. For example, the HU program was centered around intensive Hebrew immersion, beginning with a summer ulpan. English was less ubiquitous in Israel than it is today. Students encountered varieties of Jews—among international students and among Israelis—whom they had not met before. Rabbi Ezra Spicandler, dean of HUC-JIR in Jerusalem, reflected,

Of course a city like Jerusalem is a living museum of Jewish life. It is true that boys who come from Brooklyn, maybe Chicago [have met] Hassidim[,] have perhaps met Jews from Arabic speaking countries,

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15 I am grateful to Pamela Nadell for pointing out this international phenomenon. On Israel's increase in air passengers between 1970 and 1971—485,000 to 1,057,400—see <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=IS.AIR.PSGR&country=>, accessed 3 February 2021. Other countries experienced smaller travel increases, and Israeli air travel increased after 1971 at a much more modest rate. On direct flights from New York that began in 1971, see Anshel Pfeffer, “Bye Bye, Queen of the Sky: How El Al’s 747 connected Israel and the Jewish world,” *Haaretz* (12 May 2019), <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-boeing-747-queen-of-the-sky-el-al-jumbo-connected-israel-new-york-city-and-jewish-world-1.7187923> (accessed 30 November 2020). On journey by ship, see Herman, *American Students*, 26–28.

16 A phone call home at Thanksgiving 1970 involved making a trip to the central post office in downtown Jerusalem, scheduling a call, and paying \$23 for a roughly half-hour call—an amount equivalent to a week and half’s expenses for food and equal to about \$161 in 2021 dollars. Robert Tabak (hereafter “RT”) to family # 45, 4 December 1970, Correspondence 1970–71, MS-846, box 3, RT papers, AJA. All letters from RT are to his family unless an individual name is specified.



but the average American Jewish young man, the average student in college has had no such opportunity. Here there are all the various communities.... He lives a Jewish experience at Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. He is able to be impressed, for example, with the significant work that has been done at the university and at other places in Israel in the area of Jewish culture. The degree of exposure varies with the student.<sup>17</sup>

Many students also met Palestinians in a period before tensions had fully developed.

Before 1967, long-term programs in Israel were a peripheral phenomenon. Extended visits to Israel became a mass experience after the Six Day War. Each year between 1967 (and beyond) thousands of American post-high-school young people traveled to and returned from Israel.<sup>18</sup> Ten-day whirlwind trips did not exist; most came as tourists or on summer programs or other shorter visits, but many came on long-term programs, usually nine to twelve months in length.<sup>19</sup>

Israeli university programs (and even more so, the various yeshiva, kibbutz, and work/study programs organized by Israeli organizations) differed from general overseas study programs. In addition to the academic program, there were goals specific to the Jewish and Zionist orientation of the programs. Hyman Kublin, chair of HU's study abroad program, wrote that a primary goal for 1970–1971 participants was “to deepen their Jewish knowledge ... [and] to strengthen the identification

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17 Ezra Spicandler interview transcript, 1971, 8, SC-11842, box 1, folder 12, AJA.

18 “Hebrew Univ, 70–71,” One Year roster, box 4, RT papers, AJA. The roster runs over 10 large pages with more than 650 names listed. American students were enrolled in other university programs, including preparatory year, regular undergraduate students, and as graduate students. See also *Hebrew University of Jerusalem, General Information, 1972–73*, “School for Overseas Students,” 278.

19 Rabbi Samuel Z. Fishman of national Hillel estimated a peak of 50,000 American students visiting Israel in the summer of 1971, two-thirds of them not part of any organized program. He does not cite a source. Fishman, “Changing Student Attitudes Towards Israel,” in *The Test of Time: A Commemoration and Celebration of Hillel's Fiftieth Anniversary*, ed. Alfred Jospe (Washington, DC: B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations, 1974).

of Jewish students with Jewish life and culture.”<sup>20</sup> The assumption (and apparent reality) was that the vast majority of Israel program participants were Jewish. Overseas students were required to take at least one course in Hebrew and one in Jewish or Israeli studies per semester. Most took considerably more.<sup>21</sup> An additional layer of informal education, including trips around the country and weekend seminars, encouraged participants to learn about Israeli geography and society. An implicit hope was that participants would consider *aliyah*, living permanently in Israel. These would not have been the aims of a program for American students in London, Athens, or Tokyo.<sup>22</sup>

Longer-term programs created continuing encounters with a new society: from riding Egged busses to shopping at Jerusalem’s Machane Yehuda or other open-air markets, to exasperating bureaucracy; experiencing the Jewish calendar (Shabbat and holidays) as part of the national calendar; encountering a variety of Jews (Israeli and from many parts of the world) and non-Jews. Almost all the longer-term programs included significant Hebrew language study. Student (and kibbutz and volunteer) programs gave participants an experience being “not a tourist.”<sup>23</sup>

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20 From “1970–71 Program for American Students at Hebrew University,” (n.p.) American Friends of Hebrew University, Nearprint Collection, box 1, AJA. Kublin was professor of history at Brooklyn College and a former dean at CUNY.

21 “Program for American Students at Hebrew University,” (n.p.), American Friends of Hebrew University, Nearprint Collection, box 1, AJA. Sheier, “Academic Problems,” 37, says most American students “majored” in Jewish studies at HU.

22 Daisy Verduzco Reyes, *Learning to Be Latino: How Colleges Shape Identity Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018) highlights these informal experiences. Reviewer Nilda Flores-Gonzales comments, “Reyes points to the hidden curricula—those lessons that are not part of the academic training of students—as the main factors having an effect on ethnic, racial, and political identities.” “Latino Students on Campus,” *Academe* (Spring 2019): 59.

23 The opening section of Daniel P. Reynolds’s *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018) reviews issues of tourism vs. other types of visits in recent literature. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers, many non-Jews, from around the world came to Israeli kibbutzim. There is anecdotal evidence that the smaller number enrolled in the work-study kibbutz ulpan programs were more likely to be Jewish. See the film *Apples and Oranges* by Yoav Brill (2021) on kibbutz volunteers.

Long-term students might share geographical and social space with short-term tourists and Israeli residents, but young Americans living in Israel were certainly not Israelis. They had not served in the army, and their Hebrew skills varied. However, as long-term visitors they occupied an interstitial space between tourists and residents. They were more likely to be interacting with shopkeepers, roommates, or neighbors in Hebrew on a weekly basis.

### Quantifying American Students in Israel

Books that discuss American Jewry in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as those that look at relations between American Jews and Israel, typically omit the experiences of tens of thousands of young North American Jews who studied and lived in Israel from 1967 onward. As Shaul Kelner has noted, the period between 1948 and 1990 has not “received more than limited attention.” For all age groups, from 1971 to 1990 the percentage of American Jews who had visited Israel rose from 15 percent to 25 percent, an increase of more than 500,000 visitors.<sup>24</sup> The few books and articles that touch on this period have focused on an unrepresentative group: the small percentage of those who stayed in Israel or made *aliyah*.<sup>25</sup> Only a minority of American Jewish young adults visited Israel (though it was a significant minority). However, by 1980, many of those American Jews under thirty-five who *had* visited Israel had lived there for between five and twelve months. The percentage of younger adults in Jewish leadership roles who had long-term Israel experiences was significantly higher than the general Jewish population.<sup>26</sup>

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24 Shaul Kelner, “Historical Perspectives on Diaspora Homeland Tourism: ‘Israel Experience’ Education in the 1950s and 60s,” *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 7, no. 2 (2013): 99–113; Kelner focuses on high school programs of fewer than eight weeks, 100. Visit statistics cited by Lederhendler, *American Jewry*, 298.

25 David Mittelberg, *The Israel Connection and American Jews* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), is an exception, focusing on the impact of Israel visits on American Jews, but the data is from the 1990s. Although many writers—including Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, Ava Kahn, Sara Yael Hirschhorn, and Jonathan D. Sarna—have addressed various aspects of American Jews spending periods of time in Israel or immigrating there, none focus on young adults who studied and lived in Israel and returned to the U.S. from 1967 onward.

26 Several U.S. Jewish population surveys ask *how many trips* one has made to Israel

Exact numbers for American students in programs in Israel can only be estimated. Some people stayed in Israel for more than one year. Others arrived informally yet stayed for a year on a kibbutz or in another setting.<sup>27</sup> In addition, not all programs may be included in available statistics.

Two studies—a dissertation about American students at HU and an Israeli government-sponsored longitudinal study—confirm that most-North American students returned home. The latter noted, “The percentage of those who remained in Israel ... is relatively low among students from North America.”<sup>28</sup> My preliminary estimate is that between 25,000 and 35,000 young American Jews participated in Israel long-term programs from 1967–1973, with approximately 21,000–28,000 returning to the United States.<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to determine the number making *aliyah*, but it is relatively low.

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(perhaps as a stand-in for depth of connection) but the question of *how much time* one has spent in Israel is seldom asked.

27 For example, in a later period, Shaul Kelner, who had been on a year of university study, stayed for an additional year of volunteer work. Kelner, *Ties that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), xxiv. Some American students were in multiyear degree programs or did two years of graduate study in Israel.

28 Sheier, “Academic Problems,” 26, found that at the end of the 1971–1972 academic year—one year after their program—16 out of 163 HU respondents were still in Israel. “Survey on Absorption of Students from Abroad who began studies in 1969/70, Third Interview” (Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1974), quotation from p. xi. See also “Survey on Absorption of Students from Abroad 1972/73, Students who began studies in 1967/70 (Fourth interview) and in 1970/71 (Third interview),” (Central Bureau of Statistics, Jerusalem, 1975).

29 Counting students is further complicated by the frequent references to “North American” students (including the US and Canada). The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption studies put North American, South African, and Australian students in one statistical group, though the numbers from the latter countries appear small. South African Jews were less likely to return home than Americans. Hebrew University figures (from annual “Program for American Students at Hebrew University” brochures for 1967–1973) report 11,000 American students total over this time. Zvi Schiffirin, Dean of Overseas Students, reported that the University “absorbs more than 40%” of those studying in Israel, including yeshivot (*Scopus* [Autumn 1970]: 4).

While there are numerous references to American Jews' growing interest in and attachment to Israel after the Six Day War, studies of personal encounters with Israel and Israelis are not prominent. Though American Jewish tourism increased, young people staying for most of a year or longer stand out. Eli Lederhendler wrote: "But personal visits to Israel, for example, were not widely popular: only small percentages of American Jews undertook such ethno-tourism."<sup>30</sup>

One of the few large studies to ask a question on length of time that American Jews spent in Israel included the contemporaries of young people who are the focus of this study. In a 1986 study, a group aged twenty-five to fifty were asked about visits to Israel. In this cohort (which would include those who had been aged eighteen to twenty-four in 1967–1973) 28 percent had visited Israel. Of those who had visited, 18 percent had spent "over three months" there.<sup>31</sup> This is just over 5 percent of all Jewish adults in the sample.

Little has been written or filmed about American students and other young adults in Israel from 1967–1973. *American Students in Israel* by Simon N. Herman (1970) is a sociological study largely based on data gathered before the 1967 war, after which both the numbers of Americans and the societal setting changed significantly.<sup>32</sup> A short

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30 Lederhendler, *American Jewry*, 298.

31 Steven M. Cohen, "Jewish Travel to Israel: Incentives and Inhibitions Among U.S. and Canadian Teenagers and Young Adults" (Jerusalem: Jewish Agency, 1986), 14, 78, 85. Cohen holds a troubled position as a social science researcher because of accusations in 2018 by women colleagues of sexual harassment and assault. Cohen apologized for the behavior but did not dispute the allegations. Not all survey participants who stayed "more than three months" stayed for six to twelve months, but it was a significant proportion of all people in that age cohort. Few if any programs were longer than three months but shorter than five or six months. This sample had more than eight hundred respondents, about 10 percent of whom were Orthodox. A smaller Canadian sample reported much higher numbers: 68 percent of adults had been to Israel; of these 31 percent had lived in Israel over three months; see 98, 105.

32 As this article was being edited, I learned of Rachel and David Biale's book, *Aerograms Across the Ocean: A Love Story in Letters, 1970–1972* (Wildcat Press, 2021). David Biale was an American student volunteering at a kibbutz; Rachel Biale was Israeli. See also Sheier, n. 14, which covered students at HU in 1970–1971.

Israeli film, *Milk and Honey Experience*, shows Americans during their 1970–1971 year at HU. The film uses fictionalized American Jewish characters (and a real visit to former prime minister David Ben-Gurion at his home in the Negev) as a framework for discussing the conflicts and “pulls” of Israel and America.<sup>33</sup> Academic articles are significantly more recent, often focusing on specialized groups such as medical or yeshiva students. There are a handful of articles looking at undergraduates in later decades.<sup>34</sup>

This current study ends with the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, which disrupted what had become a somewhat predictable pattern of students coming to study. Some American students returned home, while others arrived to volunteer. Programs were cancelled or started late, as young Americans served in various roles, from delivering bread to working in agriculture to entertaining Israeli troops. In addition, the shock of the war, including the initial Israeli defeats and significant casualties, left a changed Israeli mood from the previous years of optimism.<sup>35</sup>

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33 *Milk and Honey Experience* (34 min, directed by Yehuda Judd Ne’eman, 1971). I was present at its premiere in 1971 at a Hebrew University dormitory social hall. Personal communication, Judd Ne’eman, 15 March 2021. Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archives at Hebrew University, <https://youtu.be/Hm2uDkR6qrk> accessed 6 April 2021. The filmmaker later chaired the film program at Tel Aviv University and received an Israel Prize for film. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-prize-winner-for-film-judd-ne-eman-dies-at-84-1.10244302> (accessed 27 November 2021).

34 For example, Jacob Halpern, “Adjustment Difficulties Experienced by American Students in Israel,” *Journal of Jewish Education*, 61, no. 1 (1994): 1, 30–34; Jacob I. Halpern, “Adjustment Difficulties Experienced by American Students in Israel,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* (1 January 1993): 15–25. Erik Cohen, “Tourism and Religion: A Case Study, Visiting Students at Israeli Universities,” *Journal of Travel Research*, 42, no.1 (August 2003). Michal Muszkat-Barkan and Lisa D. Grant, “‘Like a Distant Cousin’: Bi-Cultural Negotiation as Key Perspective in Understanding the Evolving Relationship of Future Reform Rabbis with Israel and the Jewish People,” *Journal of Jewish Education* 81, no. 1 (January–March 2015): 35–63. All focus on a later period.

35 Programs starting late 1973: “The start of the academic year, scheduled for November 4, 1973, did mark the beginning of classes at the School for Overseas Students.... We have already been impressed and moved by the spirit of volunteerism.” Avraham Harman, Hebrew University president. Assistant Dean of the One Year Program Yaron Singer wrote that the war had increased “the natural barrier between the Overseas student and the Israeli society.”

## Jewish Life on an American Campus

Student life at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, a center of leftist political activism in the 1960s and early 1970s, has been extensively studied.<sup>36</sup> Most general sources make only brief references to Jewish experiences.<sup>37</sup> Few studies have focused on specifically Jewish aspects of student life in Madison.<sup>38</sup>

Hillel at UW had a tradition of Jewish social activism under the leadership of Rabbi Richard Winograd. For example, the Black studies strike early in 1969 was endorsed by Hillel.<sup>39</sup> During some of the student demonstrations, including clashes with police and national guard troops, Hillel served as a first aid center and coordinated volunteer medics.<sup>40</sup> Hillel sponsored a bus to the 1969 antiwar March on Washington

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He follows with examples of student volunteer activity during and after the war. *Hapisga, Ktav eit tohmit had-shanait* 5734/1974, Hebrew University School for Overseas Students, n.p. (copy at National Library of Israel).

36 The University of Wisconsin is used as a case study because that was the author's college.

37 One exception is Paul Breines, an undergraduate and graduate student at UW from 1959–1972, who wrote, “The yeast in the whole [leftist] scene had been the New York Jewish students in Madison who, for example, had provided me as a young, suburban, assimilated, and sometimes self-hating Jew, with a new sense of place, belonging, identity.” Breines was also a Freedom Rider in the South. Paul Breines, “The Mosse Mileu,” in *History and the New Left: Madison Wisconsin, 1950–1970*, ed. Paul Buhle (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 250.

38 Sources include the documentary *Kibbutz Langdon, USA* (ABC Directions, 1974), about a kosher Jewish co-op *bayit* in Madison in a former fraternity house, Jonathan Z.S. Pollack's “‘Where Have All the Cohens Gone?': Jewish Radicals, Restrictions, and Renewal at the University of Wisconsin, 1964–1972,” *Journal of Jewish Identities* 8, no. 2 (July 2015), and Jonathan Z.S. Pollack, *Wisconsin, The New Home of the Jew: 150 Years of Jewish Life at the University of Wisconsin–Madison* (2019), available at <https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/A746I6CNBBR4RC8D>.

39 Winograd was an activist young Conservative rabbi (d.1974). He had marched in Birmingham for civil rights. “Bearing witness: A controversial 1963 trip to Birmingham by 19 rabbis,” *Southern Jewish Life* (2013), <https://sjlmag.com/2013/05/03/bearing-witness-a-controversial-1963-trip-to-birmingham-by-19-rabbis/> (accessed 5 April 2021). Hillel meeting resolution and vote (24 yes, 6 no, 5 abstain) to endorse Black studies strike, 13 February 1969. “Univ of Wis Hillel, 68–72,” box 5, RT papers, AJA.

40 “Medic” certificate issued by Hillel, May 1970, *ibid*; “Hillel ‘Hospital’ Is Kept Busy: Over 1,200 Treated at Center, Units,” *Wisconsin State Journal* (9 May 1970), MS2005-052, box 7, folder 7, Hillel papers, WHS.

(November Moratorium), leaving earlier than other buses from Madison so participants would not travel on Shabbat.<sup>41</sup> It also sponsored a variety of voices from Israel, some critical of the government, including kibbutz educator Muki Tsur and left-wing journalist Amos Kenan.<sup>42</sup> Additionally it was, of course, involved with concerns more specific to Jews. In February 1969 following the execution of Iraqi Jews accused of being “Zionist spies,” Hillel organized a mass protest.<sup>43</sup>

The Jewish population at UW also experienced its share of problematic incidents. In April 1969 several UW Jewish students were listening to a late-night news report from the CBC. The Canadian broadcast was interrupted by an “announcement” that Israel had been attacked by Arab countries using nuclear weapons. In the middle of the night, dozens of panicked students gathered at Hillel. After multiple overseas calls to Israel during the night, it was confirmed that this was a hoax perpetrated by UW students. But the depth of pain indicated the significant connection many felt with Israel.<sup>44</sup> Also in the spring of 1969, under pressure from state legislators, the university board of regents cut out-of-state enrollment from 25 percent to 15 percent of undergraduate admissions—a serious blow to the UW Jewish community. This policy exposed anti-semitism, including from state legislators who blamed “New York Jews”

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41 Hillel Council, unanimous endorsement of October (1969) Vietnam moratorium, *ibid.*

42 Hillel in Madison continued its activism in 1969–1970 under the leadership of interim director Rabbi Moshe Adler. Adler was an Orthodox rabbi and social activist in his first Hillel post. Hillel reports, Muki Tsur, 21 November 1969, Amos Kenan, 21 February 1970, MS-2005-052, box 9:10, WHS.

43 One of the moving speeches at this protest was by student activist and city alderman Paul Soglin, who did not usually talk about his Jewish identity. Soglin was later mayor of Madison three times. “Iraqi Protest,” MS 2005-05, box 4:73, B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundation papers, WHS.

44 The news “report” said that Tel Aviv had been destroyed by tactical nuclear weapons, Arab forces were advancing, and that the United States had imposed a news embargo on all American media. Additional “CBC updates” provided more details. Hillel subsequently identified the student “broadcasters” who had faked the story, met with them, and tried to get them to apologize rather than be reported to the Federal Communications Commission. The offending students apparently saw this as a harmless prank. Hillel reports, MS 2005-05, box 2, folders 48 and 50, B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundation papers, WHS. So far as I can determine, this incident has never been reported before.



as outside agitators. Supported by Winograd, the student-led Coalition for Open Enrollment organized protests against this reduction.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to the tradition of social activism at UW's Hillel, some Hillels were politically conservative, focusing on religious services, holidays, and sometimes kosher food while avoiding or even being hostile to political and social developments. For example, at the University of California-Berkeley, also a center of political dissent with some 4,500 Jewish students, Hillel was not activist. Student activists, including Zionists, formed the Union of Jewish Students at Berkeley. "UJS was founded almost explicitly as a sworn enemy of Hillel and designed to function as a separate alternative to Hillel from the start."<sup>46</sup>

In addition to Hillel and grassroots student activity, there were other sources of support for Israel and an expanded role of Jewish life and learning among young American Jews; these were often tied to a progressive political approach. The work of the American Zionist Youth Foundation—funded by the Youth and Hechalutz Department of the World Zionist Organization in Israel—in financing and supporting a growing Jewish counterculture was significant. Programs such as Jewish Free Universities, Jewish student newspapers, coffee houses, and other activities—often bypassing Hillel—were supported by a network of employed representatives.<sup>47</sup>

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45 Coalition for Open Enrollment obtained a hearing with the university's board of regents, though the policy was not changed. See Pollack, "Cohens." Pollack errs in describing COE as a faculty effort; it was student led. See also Coalition for Open Enrollment papers, M86-086, RT papers, WHS. Jewish enrollment at UW declined from about 4,000 in 1967 to 1,300 in 1970. Pollack, *Wisconsin: New Home*, 109.

46 Matthew Maibaum, "The Berkeley Hillel and the Union of Jewish Students: The History and Functions of an Intergroup Conflict," SC-2361, 20, 22. AJA. Maibaum says that most UJS members were "progressive leftists" concerned about human rights. "Jewish crises" were not a priority for SJU (24). Funding and support came from the "World Zionist Youth Foundation" (17), an apparent error by the author. For another critical perspective, see Joanne Jacobson and Jeanne Malter, "What's the matter with Hillel?" *Kadima* no. 2 (February 1971). *Kadima* was a Jewish student newspaper at the University of Illinois, where Jacobson was a student. Malter was a student at Indiana University in Bloomington. They called for a Hillel less focused on being "religious" and more committed to "sending as many Jewish students to Israel as possible."

47 For example, an American Zionist Youth Foundation report for 1971–1972 cites: "Activities among the Jewish student body are conducted by 43 student representatives

Only a few years after the Six Day War, American and other Jewish students began questioning the impact of Israel's victory. Some Jewish student activists developed an insistence on rights for Palestinians. For example, at the World Union of Jewish Students conference in Arad, Israel, in the summer of 1970 a resolution on Zionism was passed that said:

I. Zionism is the national and also by virtue of its territorialistic aspect the social liberation and emancipation movement of the Jewish people: it is to be realized in Israel.

II. This goal can only be realized if the national rights of the Palestinian Arabs are considered so that they be recognized to be a consequence of Zionist ideology.<sup>48</sup>

### **My Beginnings in Israel**

Use of an individual's experiences runs risks. My approach is to use well-documented personal experiences to illustrate larger themes about the interactions of young American Jews in and with Israel following the Six Day War. I try to be critical of my own perspective, both what I saw, and what I failed to notice. I have relied heavily on contemporary writings, including the draft of a pamphlet I wrote in Israel for American Jews facing conscription in the United States. In addition, in 2018 I conducted a qualitative survey of American Jews who had spent an

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on the various campuses as well as by liaison officers with volunteer groups on about 200 campuses." The report references new courses in Hebrew and Jewish studies; new Jewish Free Universities; "underground" student newspapers; Israeli-type coffee houses; and "Zionist Houses," whose members live together and that function as meeting grounds for Jewish students." *Report on Activities from October 1971 to September 1972* (World Zionist Organization, 1973), 30. "The Free University of Judaic Studies at Boston University: The First Year: A Descriptive Analysis [1970–71]," Nearprint Collection, AJA. See also <https://www.mbar-on.net> (accessed 22 February 2021). The role of the AZYF and especially Mordechai (Morele) Bar-On in building this network on U.S. campuses designed to bypass Hillels needs more study. I am indebted to Michael Masch z"l for this insight.

48 *Network* 2, no. 1 (14 October 1970): 3. The vote was 69 for, 13 against, 18 abstentions, 9 not voting. While not using the words "Palestinian statehood," this was an early and significant statement. I am not certain that I heard of it while I was in Israel.

extended stay in Israel during this postwar period. While emphasizing contemporary documents, I have added from memory some additional points on chronology, geography, or the identity of speakers.

My experience as an American Jewish student in Israel is both illustrative and unrepresentative. I was born in 1950 and raised in the small city of Dubuque, Iowa, with a population of about 50,000. There were perhaps sixty Jewish families and a single small synagogue.

When I was twelve, my younger brother Larry and I went for a few weeks to the Reform movement's summer camp (later Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute) in Oconomowoc, WI. It was a formative experience, and I went back every summer through 1966 and worked at the camp for two summers after graduating high school in 1968. My camp encounters with peers, rabbis, Israeli counselors, and visiting speakers enhanced my Jewish awareness.<sup>49</sup> I also became active in the regional Reform youth group, the Northern Federation of Temple Youth (NoFTY). In the summer of 1967, I participated in the National Federation of Temple Youth's Chicago Mitzvah Corps, a learning and service project encountering urban poverty and injustice. I served as NoFTY regional president my senior year of high school, 1967–1968.

When I entered UW in the fall of 1968, Hillel became a center of my life. I spent most Friday nights and Shabbat mornings there. When UW reduced out-of-state student enrollment, I helped organize opposition as a member of the steering committee of the Coalition for Open Enrollment. In 1969–1970 I frequently had Shabbat lunch along with other students at the home of interim Hillel Rabbi Moshe Adler and Rachel Adler (then married). This was my first regular involvement with combined traditional Shabbat observance and social activism.

UW-Madison did not have a Jewish studies program then, but it did have a large Hebrew department.<sup>50</sup> I took first-year Hebrew during my

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49 Dubuque had one synagogue, perhaps 60 Jewish families, and no more than 15 Jewish students who were in college at any point between 1967 and 1973. I was the only Jewish student in my high school class of about 750. The congregation was served by student rabbis from Hebrew Union College who visited biweekly.

50 In the fall of 1969, the UW Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies reported 450 undergraduates and 70 graduates enrolled in Hebrew language courses. That year, UW was

sophomore year. I also took George Mosse's Modern European History course, which explored the rise of Nazism. From Mosse I took an awareness of and skepticism about the power of "myths and symbols."<sup>51</sup>

I made plans to attend Hebrew University's One Year program.<sup>52</sup> As with many American students, my 1970 trip to Israel began with a stop in Europe, including Holocaust landmarks. I visited Dachau, followed by a stop in Czechoslovakia, two years after the Soviet invasion had crushed the "Prague spring." I visited Jewish sites as well as Terezin concentration camp. I met an international group of young Jews. Peter, a Czech Jewish medical student, invited me to spend time with him and his parents, both Holocaust survivors.<sup>53</sup>

I arrived in Israel in July 1970 with a Hebrew vocabulary that let me count to ten but not to twenty. I was bussed with about 120 other students to Ohalo, a teachers' seminar on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. We began intensive Hebrew study (ulpan) at this subtropical center, up to six hours a day, plus field trips and informal activities. By August I understood more spoken Hebrew and was working on written sources and news broadcasts.<sup>54</sup>

in "second place in the United States, after Brandeis," in the number of students spending a junior year in Israel. University of Wisconsin, Facts and Figures, M2005-02, Box 6:31, Hillel papers, WHS. For the 1971–1972 year, for example, the American universities with the most students at HU were Brandeis (111 students), Stern College for Women (88), and Brooklyn College and UW, which tied at 84 students. Pamphlet for 1971–1972, box 1, American Friends of Hebrew University, Nearprint Collection, AJA. Two UW courses, one in American Jewish literature and one in modern Jewish history, were offered around 1970 and 1971, each drawing hundreds of registrants. Richard Winograd, "Hillel Program Report, 1971–2," MS 2005-052, box 5, folder 21, WHS.

51 Coalition for Open Enrollment files, RT papers, WHS. Also, Hillel papers, "UW Out of State Enrollment Quota," MS 2005-52, box 6:53, WHS. RT correspondence to Rabbi Stanley Davids, Milwaukee, and Jonathan Weinberg, NoFTY social action chair, Correspondence, U Wis 68–70, box 3, RT papers AJA.

52 My preparation included a meeting with Mark Solomon, a University of Iowa student from Dubuque who had attended Hebrew University in 1968–1969. It is noteworthy that a tiny Jewish community sent two college students to Israel in this short time span.

53 Letter #6, 13 July 1970 (en route to Geneva), box 3, RT papers, AJA.

54 Other American students studied that summer at Sde Boker or started their studies in Jerusalem. Most students at Ohalo were North American; a few were from the UK, Australia,

I wrote to my family about my class routine, the climate, field trips, my first outing to nearby Tiberias. I commented on the lack of news: the *Jerusalem Post* was “weak on news outside Israel,” plus we heard “scanty news headlines” three times a day in English on the radio. *Time* and *Newsweek*, which had international editions, didn’t always arrive at the canteen. “We’re beginning to work on the news (radio) in Hebrew in my class, but it’s difficult.”<sup>55</sup> Later in the summer ulpan I wrote, “I’m finding that I can understand a good deal of spoken Hebrew though I am very non-fluent when speaking myself and the news on radio and the newspaper are still too hard for me.”<sup>56</sup>

In July, we made our first trip to Jerusalem, visiting HU, the Old City, and the Western Wall. I was very conscious of our bus route through the West Bank. En route to Jerusalem I noted “poor, rugged country ... rocks in both Israel and occupied Jordan mark fields and are piled in corners, fences, and other places. The bus to Jerusalem [went] from Tiberias to Afula [then] through the occupied territories—Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah which is the shortest route there. There is only a police roadblock marking the border but the Israelis are very security conscious.” Of the city as a whole, I wrote, “I went to the Western Wall, too—the wall of the Temple of 19 centuries ago.... I know now why the city is called ‘Jerusalem of gold’—almost all the buildings from the newest to the oldest are made from light brown stone.... The Old City is full of small markets, noise, and narrow, crowded, and somewhat dirty.”<sup>57</sup>

During that summer I went for Shabbat to Safed with one of my American roommates, where we stayed at a youth hostel and attended a Sephardi/Mizrachi synagogue.<sup>58</sup> I acquired my first set of tefillin, from an English Jewish student who had an extra set. I encountered new foods, as I wrote in August 1970 explaining falafel to my thirteen-year-old

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South Africa, or Latin America. Letter #17, 6 Aug 1970, Correspondence, Box 3, RT papers, AJA.

55 Letter #11, 19 July 1970, RT papers, AJA.

56 Letter #21 to family, 19 August 1970, RT papers, AJA.

57 Letter #14, 28 July 1970, RT papers, AJA.

58 Letter #17, 6 Aug 1970, RT papers, AJA.

brother David.<sup>59</sup> At the end of the summer, many of the uplan students spent a few days on a left-wing kibbutz, Bar Am, near the Lebanese border. This was my only extensive kibbutz visit, despite its central role in the mythology of Israel. Besides picking apples, I met several times with a “host family.” Before leaving the United States, I had resolved to keep kosher in Israel. When we arrived at the kibbutz, we were asked “How many *dati'im* are there?” in Hebrew. It was an anxious moment for me. I knew “*dati*” was literally “religious,” but in modern Hebrew it meant “Orthodox.” I was religious, but definitely not Orthodox, so I did not raise my hand. I was surprised at the nonkosher food on the kibbutz (what looked like ham to me), but I ate vegetarian food and fish. While most of the American students were not Orthodox, I wrote that a “surprising number of the kids who are here” did keep kosher.<sup>60</sup>

Not everyone experienced Israel in the same way. One of the ulpan students was an American of Lebanese Christian background. He spoke Arabic, and when he visited Arab communities in Israel, he learned about the “prejudice of Israeli Jews.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Jerusalem, Jewish Diversity, and Reassessing Jewish Denominationalism**

We moved from Ohalo to Jerusalem in September, joining students who had been in other locations. I began exploring the religious diversity of Jerusalem. I was struck by the special Shabbat atmosphere of the city.<sup>62</sup> On my first Shabbat in Jerusalem, I went to services at the nearby Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) campus but it was closed, so I walked to HUC instead. The next week, I walked to Har-El, a Reform synagogue in the Rehavia neighborhood.<sup>63</sup>

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59 Letter #20 to David Tabak, 17 Aug 1970, RT papers, AJA.

60 The “*dati*” question is from memory. Kibbutz visit, letter #23, 26 Aug 1970, RT papers, AJA.

61 letter to Larry Tabak, #19, 16 Aug 1970, RT papers, AJA. While students with an Arab American background were rare, there were some non-Jewish American students on the One Year program.

62 Letter #27, 6 Sept 1970, RT papers, AJA.

63 Unnumbered letter, 13 Sept 1970, RT papers, AJA. I visited all the non-Orthodox

On Rosh Hashanah, I went to the Orthodox campus synagogue and to HUC.<sup>64</sup> For Yom Kippur, the overseas student office arranged for me and another American student to have dinner with a local family. The adults did not attend their nearby Orthodox congregation, but I went to Kol Nidre with their young son. A few days later, I wrote:

Yom Kippur is the one day the whole city (Jewish part) is totally enveloped in the holyday and its holiness—even the Israel Broadcasting Service which doesn't stop on Shabbat goes off the air at 2:00 PM the day before. The buses stop then and while there is little traffic on Shabbat there was so little that a single car moving was out of place. After services (which we had to stand up for—everyone who only comes once a year comes on Kol Nidre—even many non-religious people fast) we returned to their house [the host family] and had a long talk (in Hebrew) about Israel peace, student protest in the US, etc—very nice and good practice for my Hebrew. Went to services on campus YK morning and at 3:00 PM walked to the [Western] wall for mincha and Ne'ilah (ended about 6 PM) but buses didn't start running until 7:30 PM.<sup>65</sup>

I occasionally explored Jerusalem's Jewish landscape. In September I wrote, "Last week (Sat) went to services the very small but beautiful and ornate Italian synagogue—a kid had his bar mitzvah and they gave me an aliyah."<sup>66</sup> Soon I discovered the independent non-Orthodox congregation that became my main "home." I wrote in October, "I again went to the Conservative-Reconstructionist congregation Mevakshei Derekh ("Seekers of the way") on Sat. They asked me if I wanted to join—it costs only 5 pounds for students—I think maybe I will as I really like the

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congregations in Jerusalem, which numbered around five including HUC and JTS. The two Conservative affiliates (JTS and Emet veEmunah) had separate seating for men and women. Har-El is the oldest Reform congregation in Israel.

64 Letter #31, 4 Oct 1970, RT papers, AJA.

65 "HU arranged for me and another American student to eat with a family in Jerusalem on Erev Yom Kippur. The husband and wife, originally from Germany, did not go to synagogue, but their little boy went [with] us to a synagogue near their house." Letter #34, 12 October 1970, RT papers, AJA.

66 Letter #41, 10 Nov 1970, RT papers, AJA.

congregation and their services, though I still want to visit various synagogues in Jerusalem”<sup>67</sup> Jack Cohen, Hillel director and Reconstructionist rabbi, was among the founders of this Hebrew-speaking congregation. Mordecai Kaplan, then living in Jerusalem, attended regularly.

Distance from America provided space for reassessment, including my ties to Reform Judaism. In April 1971 I wrote an extended letter to Paul Kent, a social worker in Minneapolis and advisor to my former region in NFTY. I was becoming critical of what I saw as the limited engagement of Reform Judaism with Israel. The letter detailed some of my observations and feelings about NFTY, Israel, and “other matters that I may bring to mind (and heart)”:

An observation, here at Hebrew U I think I know from 75–100 American and Canadian students well enough to know where they are from and their congregational background. (Some of this has come up



Anna Cohn (1950–2019) at Hebrew University, Mt. Scopus, 1971.  
(Courtesy Morris Faienstein)

67 Letter# 44, 21 Nov 1970, RT papers, AJA. The congregation, unaffiliated in this period, would probably not have chosen the terminology “Conservative-Reconstructionist” to describe its service. Five Israeli pounds (liras) was less than US \$2.00.



in some of my classes). Of these I can only identify nine (9) who come from Reform backgrounds.... None of the people I know come from Reform backgrounds in Chicago or Minneapolis<sup>68</sup> or Boston or NY or LA. A few of my friends think this percentage of my acquaintances may be too low; but in any case, everyone agrees that the percentage of kids with Reform backgrounds among the 3,000 [sic] North American students here is far below its relative numbers in the US.... But to me it shows the following failures in the Reform movement....

Failure to instill identity with the land of Israel.

Failure to teach Hebrew adequately EVEN AS COMPARED TO THE ONLY LIMITED SUCCESSES of the other religious movements.<sup>69</sup>

Failure to teach Aliyah as one of a number of viable Jewish lifestyles... (80% of the one year students from US, Can. are at least thinking about it; 15%-20% will probably stay or soon return permanently).<sup>70</sup>

Failure to deal with the concept of Galut (exile)... The need to confront the possibility that life/Jewish life in America may be un-whole or even un-viable.<sup>71</sup>

This letter reflected my process of looking more widely at varieties of Judaism that had started at UW and continued in Israel. I was wrestling with the possibilities of living in Israel contrasted with the possibilities of an active Jewish life in America.

I became more deeply interested in Reconstructionist Judaism at Hillel in Jerusalem and at Congregation Mevakshei Derech. "I was just

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68 An error, since my friend from NoFTY and fellow HU student Anna Cohn (1950–2019) was from Minneapolis.

69 Emphasis in original.

70 These percentages were personal impressions.

71 Letter to Paul Kent, 17 April 1971, Correspondence, box 3, RT papers, AJA. Copy also sent to Rabbi Stanley Davids in Milwaukee, NoFTY rabbinic advisor. There are brief response letters from both. RT's letter errs as there were about 3,000 *foreign* students at Hebrew University, and about half of these were from North America. An impetus for the letter was meeting three younger friends from NoFTY then college freshmen or finishing high school, while they were visiting Jerusalem.

at Hillel this evening for a seminar on Reconstructionism. Jack Cohen gave me this form for the [late summer 1971] Hillel Seminar [a national gathering at a camp in Starlight, Pennsylvania] and ask[ed] me to refer it to you with his express recommendation.”<sup>72</sup>

Israel did not start my gradual disenchantment with Reform Judaism, but my distancing grew there. I was searching for a path that offered more openness to both tradition and Israel in an egalitarian framework.

Israel also offered other opportunities to meet Jews of varied backgrounds. In March I wrote, “This last weekend I was at a Hillel-sponsored seminar (in J’lem) on Soviet Jewry—It was a small group, about 30–35 Americans and we met with some new immigrants from Russia—the re-unification or at least re-meeting of the various segments of the Jewish people—with Hebrew spoken in Israel was very moving. We also talked with some non-college H.S. graduates (Israelis) who were also holding a separate seminar in the same place.”<sup>73</sup>

Most of the HU students and the educated elite that I met were Ashkenazi Jews, but the majority of Israel’s population was Mizrachi, most of whom I encountered were in service roles, such as storekeepers, maintenance, and cafeteria staff. I recall little discussion of non-Ashkenazi Jews beyond hearing disparaging remarks about “pushtakim” (roughly, “hoodlums”), Mizrachi young men who seemed to hang around downtown Jerusalem. The English-language *Lillit* examined the Ashkenazi-Sephardi “clash of two cultures.”<sup>74</sup> Some American students got involved with the Black Panthers, an Israeli protest group founded largely by Moroccan Jewish immigrants in Jerusalem, which first attracted attention in 1971.<sup>75</sup>

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72 Letter to Richard Winograd, UW Hillel director, 13 May 1971, Correspondence, box 3, Israel 70–71, “U-Z,” RT papers, AJA.

73 Letter #63 to family, 9 March 1971, RT papers, AJA.

74 Norman Tollinsky, “Cultural Imperialism,” *Lillit* 1, no. 5 (July 1971): 6. This Hebrew University student publication was not related to the American Jewish feminist publication *Lilith* (founded 1976).

75 While the name was chosen because of the Black American organization, there was no connection. One of my American classmates advised the group organizing demonstrations in Jerusalem that if they wanted international attention they needed signs in English as well as Hebrew. *Lillit* 1, no. 4 (May 1971) includes a four-part section on “Israel’s Black

## Israeli University Life



Tabak atop the University Library building on the Givat Ram campus, January 1971. Image originally appeared in the Dubuque *Telegraph Herald*. (Reprinted with permission from the *Telegraph Herald*)

Hebrew University sponsored trips and activities to familiarize students with the country. In October I went to Ein Gedi, near the Dead Sea, and the Negev with an HU group. I was both excited by the experience and simultaneously aware of the nationalistic imagery. “The first day we went to Masada (after waking up at 5 AM) an ancient fortress height above the Dead Sea where Jewish defenders committed suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. The place was excavated in 1964–5 ... and is an important part of the Israeli nationalistic myth: ‘Masada shall not fall again.’”<sup>76</sup>

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Panthers” (3–7), including a statement and a Haggadah excerpt from the Panthers. The July 1971, 1, no. 5 issue includes Gila Berkowitz, “Anatomy of a Riot,” on the demonstrations that spring.

<sup>76</sup> Letter #40, 8 November 1970, RT papers, AJA. Flyer (Hebrew) announcing spring programs including trips to Wadi Kelt (West Bank, near Jericho) and multiday trip to the Sinai, unprocessed, RT papers, AJA.

Israeli institutions reached out to engage the thousands of American students. There was a curiosity about their often-leftist views, as well as an effort to provide them with more varied information on Israel and the Middle East.<sup>77</sup> I wrote after one weekend seminar that about seventy-five English-speaking students

got to hear the official view point, and also where some people disagreed.... Some of it was bulls---especially most of the government propaganda leaflets handed out ... for example, all foreign office officials recognized privately that the Palestinians exist and have to play a major role in the Middle East settlement that will hopefully come some day... but publicly the most the Israeli government says is something like 'their interests can be considered' at a peace conference.<sup>78</sup>

In February 1971 seminars were offered on the Middle East and on Israeli society for the nominal sum of 10 liras. *Lillit*, an HU English-language magazine reported, "At a recent weekend seminar near Jerusalem, some of the most interesting discussions centered on the upsurge in Jewish and Arab nationalism in the last century."<sup>79</sup> Many students responded positively to presentations with a range of opinions, though I remained critical. "Also participated in seminars on Israel and the ME [Middle East] sponsored by Student Union and Foreign Ministry (I think I was one of a handful who refused to become a campus propagandist)."<sup>80</sup>

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77 Groups reaching out included the Youth and Hehalutz Section of the Jewish Agency, the Foreign Ministry, and the Histadrut labor federation. In 1971 these three institutions supported the establishment of an Israel Bureau of the Jewish Student Press Service to create a credible but friendly source of information for Jewish student newspapers in North America. I am indebted to comments by Gerald Serotta about these programs (personal communications, 15–16 March 2021).

78 Letter #48A to Larry Tabak, 21 December 1970; letter #59, 10 February 1971, both in RT papers, AJA.

79 Ads for seminars with speakers, *Lillit*, February 1971, #2, 24; report, *Lillit*, March/April 1971, #3, 15, editor's note. This magazine was published by the Students' Union of Hebrew University, 1971–1973.

80 Letter to Richard Winograd, UW Hillel, 29 April 1970, Correspondence, box 3, Israel 70–71, U-Z, Box 3, RT papers, AJA.

After living in a dorm temporarily in Jerusalem, I thought I would have to find an apartment to share. But in November, I moved into the uninviting Shikunei Elef dorms on the Givat Ram campus, which lacked amenities such as mirrors and heat.<sup>81</sup> The university administration was glad to announce the arrival of a small supermarket and three commercial washing machines on that campus.<sup>82</sup> I also acquired an Israeli roommate, which helped me to work on my Hebrew skills. “I have a roommate now—he’s in math and physics. His name is Yisrael [Fomberg]—he’s friendly and easy to get along with. He teaches one day a week in a high school.” “I get to practice my Hebrew because he doesn’t know very much English at all.”<sup>83</sup> I had informal contact in Hebrew with Israeli students in the dorm and cafeteria, but no close friendships.

Since the dorms (and many Israelis) did not have phones, dropping by or sending letters was the way to set up an appointment.<sup>84</sup> There were various lectures, films, shared meals, and conversations available. One issue of *Lillit* included invitations for students to share a Passover seder with an Israeli family; a “4 day spring tour to Gush Etzion and Mt Hebron” (on the West Bank); a lecture on ecology action to “save Jerusalem;” and a volunteer program to join the “many students who are working already in the underdeveloped areas of Jerusalem.”<sup>85</sup> I attended a few meetings of political groups—left-wing Mapam and Siah (the New Israeli Left). While I was curious about these Hebrew-speaking groups, I did not join or attend regularly. I also participated in wider events,

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81 Letter #41, 10 November 1970, RT papers, AJA.

82 The prefab dorms housed 1,300. Markets and washing machines were added earlier in 1970. “Aiding the Students,” *Scopus* (Autumn 1970): 25.

83 Letter #46, 7 December 1970, letter #47, 12 December 1970, both to David Tabak, RT papers, AJA. My roommate and I also acquired a university-issued kerosene space heater for the winter. To avoid asphyxiation, we had to run it with a window open.

84 Michael Weinberg postcard replying to RT postcard planning a time to meet, March 1971, Correspondence 1970–1971, T–Z, RT papers, AJA. Weinberg was in a program at Kibbutz Ramat Rachel on the edge of Jerusalem. There were occasional pay telephones on campus, but no individual phone service.

85 *Lillit*, #3, March/April 1971, 31–35.

such as one of the first large-scale Israeli protests for Soviet Jews held in Modi'in on Hanukkah 1970.<sup>86</sup>

Almost all students in Israel on university and other programs studied Hebrew. I continued with six hours a week of Hebrew instruction throughout the year. In December I wrote, "I'm beginning to be able to read articles in newspapers—editorials and columns are still pretty hard. Radio news is also a little easier."<sup>87</sup> Another important part of the Israel experience was an intense Jewish studies academic experience. American Jewish studies courses were expanding, but aside from a few colleges such as Brandeis, full programs were rare.<sup>88</sup> At the One Year program, students were enrolled in as many as nine courses. It was my first opportunity to engage with Jewish studies on a sustained academic basis.<sup>89</sup> All but two of my courses were in Jewish topics, including the Joseph story with rabbinic commentary taught in Hebrew by Nechama Leibowitz; Mishnah taught in Hebrew by Isaiah Gafni; modern Jewish history with visiting professor Lloyd Gartner; Jewish philosophy with Rivka Horowitz; and Middle Eastern history. These were my first serious encounters with rabbinic texts, and I was very engaged. The modern Jewish history course influenced me toward an eventual doctorate in American Jewish history. I cited one of the books assigned in this course, by historian Simon Dubnow, in my applications to rabbinical school. In philosophy I engaged difficult texts by Martin Buber

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86 I acquired a poster from the Mapam students reading "The right of self-determination is indivisible" in Hebrew and "For Every Man a Homeland" in multiple languages, promoting rights for various groups including Palestinians, Soviet Jews, and students in Franco's Spain. See Hillel Gruenberg, "Yesh Smol Ba-Kampus: The Triumph and Tribulations of Two Left-Wing Student Union Factions in 1970s Israel," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 8, no. 2 (2015): 33–58, esp. 38–39. I deliberately avoided meetings of the farther left anti-Zionist group Matzpen. Soviet Jewry demonstration at Hanukkah, letter #48A to Larry Tabak, 21 December 1970 and letter #49 to parents, 23 December 1970, RT papers, AJA.

87 Letter #51, 31 December 1970, RT papers, AJA.

88 Leon A. Jick and Judith Baskin, "Jewish Studies," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 11 (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2007), 317–318.

89 I was enrolled in eight courses plus Hebrew, and informally audited another course on Marxism. RT Transcript, box 4, "Hebrew University, 1970–1971," RT papers, AJA. Several of my academic papers are in this same location.

and Franz Rosenzweig. In my Jewish education class taught by Joseph Lukinsky—which included both Israelis and Americans—we studied two tragic massacres: My Lai in Vietnam (1968) and Kfar Kassem in central Israel (1956), where Israeli border police killed dozens of Arab civilians. We examined questions such as how to teach in a Jewish context about illegal orders and the claim that “I was only following orders.”<sup>90</sup>

Surprisingly, I did not visit Tel Aviv, the “first Hebrew city” and the country’s cultural center, until February 1971, more than six months after I arrived in Israel. I went to the Tel Aviv University campus and interviewed Simha Flapan, editor of the joint Arab-Jewish magazine *New Outlook*, and to visit with a Christian professor and his family from my hometown who were visiting Israel. I was unimpressed by the city. I described downtown Tel Aviv as “big, noisy, ugly, functional, traffic, no atmosphere—very much like many large Midwestern cities, but not as bad as New York which many Americans compare it to.”<sup>91</sup>

### **Americans Come to Visit**

Eleven months away from their child provided the impetus for some American parents to visit Israel for the first time. My parents, Sol and Phyllis Tabak, made their first visit in the spring of 1971. While they took some guided day trips, such as to Masada, I was their guide for most of their stay. Besides seeing Jerusalem, the Galilee, and Tel Aviv, one of the things that made the biggest impression on them was “to go to a restaurant Fri. eve where each group says kiddush before they eat.”<sup>92</sup> On the return flight they met the parents of one of my friends,

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90 On Joseph Lukinsky and social justice activism, see Riv-Ellen Prell, “Jewish Summer Camping and Civil Rights: How Summer Camps Launched a Transformation in American Jewish Culture,” University of Michigan Beilin lecture, 2006, n.p., [\\_https://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/belin/13469761.0013.001?view=text;rgn=main](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/belin/13469761.0013.001?view=text;rgn=main) (accessed 11 February 2021). Lukinsky’s course was “Education for Jewish Values in American Jewish Summer Camps.” Rabbinical school applications to HUC-JIR and RRC, January 1972, in box 3, Correspondence 1971–1972, RT papers, AJA.

91 Letter #58, 7 February 1971, RT papers, AJA. Tel Aviv is about 65 km (40 miles) from Jerusalem.

92 Postcard from Phyllis Tabak to Betty and Harvey Zuckenman in Dubuque, Iowa, from Jerusalem, 27 March 1971. Author’s collection. The senior Tabaks’ visit, including dinner at

Dale Kundin of New Jersey, who were also on their first trip to Israel. Students spending the year in Israel and speaking Hebrew were a bridge between Israel and visitors. My mother wrote, “Dad said after talking to them he is glad we weren’t on a tour. [My father] said, ‘You are a great guide.... Thanks for all your help and planning. We think we got to see part of the “real” Israel.’”<sup>93</sup>

Although I adopted some traditional approaches, I mostly followed a model of liberal Jewish observance. As stated previously, I had decided to keep kosher before I arrived in Israel.<sup>94</sup> I also stopped using vehicles on Shabbat. But while I acquired tefillin, I certainly did not use them daily or wear a kippah every day. Though I felt no dramatic transformation, my Jewish observance caused tensions with my parents. In spring 1971 my father suggested that if I did not get a job working in a Jewish summer camp that I consider traveling during the summer, as I would not be comfortable at home in Iowa. Presumably, my parents thought they would be uncomfortable with more than a brief stay by a son newly committed to kashrut and Shabbat observance.<sup>95</sup>

Not all visitors to Israel were Jewish. A Christian friend from UW, Paul Spalding, who was studying in Germany visited Israel in March. He accompanied me to Purim services at Mevakshei Derech and to visit ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim. I went with Paul to visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on the West Bank.<sup>96</sup> The opportunities to show my college friend and my parents around Israel, using my Hebrew,

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Sova restaurant in Jerusalem, is described in a letter from RT to Marlene Chertok, Pesach, April 1971, Correspondence 1970–1971, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

93 Phyllis Tabak to RT, 5 April 1971, Correspondence 1970–1971, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

94 Letter August 1970 from Rachel Adler and Rabbi Moshe Adler to RT discussing practical kashrut questions. Unprocessed RT papers, AJA.

95 Some students met non-Orthodox Jews for the first time. Others became more observant without becoming Orthodox. A student in Jerusalem in the 1980s reported: “I never wanted to alienate myself from my parents.... I knew what I wanted to do, but I had few role models for how to do this; no one in my extended family was observant and all of these [traditional] practices were foreign to my family.” Laura Levitt, *American Jewish Loss After the Holocaust* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), xxiii.

96 Letter #64 to family, 14 March 1971, RT papers, AJA. Describing Bethlehem, I said, the “town is very commercial.”



marked a changed relationship. I was a young adult with skills and experiences visitors did not have.

In December 1970 my hometown newspaper sent Robert Woodward Jr., its vice president (and son of the publisher), to the Middle East. He followed a Christian seminary professor visiting Qumran and other historical sites, spent parts of several days with me and some friends, and visited a high school classmate studying at the American University in Beirut. He wrote a story about me that covered more than half a page, plus photos. I thought the article overall was fair and captured both connection to and ambivalence toward Israel. He quotes me as saying, “Here in Israel we cannot escape our strong nationalistic feeling, our constant awareness of cultural ties to the past, our heritage which is here.... Spiritually and culturally we belong” and “Most Israelis don’t hate the Arabs—but a small minority do and act like conquerors.” He also quotes me—the “personable, tousle-haired scholar”—as saying, “It’s nice to be in a place that is mostly Jewish”; it is an accurate quote but perhaps an odd one to choose for the headline in a paper that serves a town where only a fraction of one percent is Jewish. I recommended two books, *The Seventh Day* and *A Beggar in Jerusalem*. The accompanying photos included an exoticizing one of me wearing tallit and tefillin, which I rarely wore, at the Western Wall. Woodward also noted this comment from another American Jewish student: “Let’s face it, Israel is basically a racist state.”<sup>97</sup> I was surprised to see this classmate’s comment in print. I felt uncomfortable about this partly true statement, and also with my friend’s readiness to say it to a reporter.

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97 Robert Woodward, Jr. “It’s nice to be in a place that’s mostly Jewish,” *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald* (31 January 1971): 44. Avraham Shapira, ed. *The Seventh Day: Soldiers’ Talk about the Six-Day War* (New York: Scribner’s, 1970) (translated excerpts of *Siah Lohamim*). Elie Wiesel, *A Beggar in Jerusalem* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970). Recent reports show that *Siah Lohamim* was censored, documented in a 2015 film “Censored Voices.” See Gili Izikovich, “The ‘Seventh Day’: Censored Voices From the 1967 War,” *Haaretz* (7 June 2015), <https://www.haaretz.com/the-seventh-day-censored-voices-from-1967-war-1.5369889> (accessed 24 February 2021). The student sharing the “racist society” comment was Steven Schiffer (1951–2000), who attended UW before his year in Israel.

## Political and Social Complexities

I had been an active participant in the American antiwar movement; in Israel I was one of the most knowledgeable about U.S. draft policies.<sup>98</sup> I was in touch with the Jewish Peace Fellowship in the United States, and I served as a local draft counselor to several Americans. During the year I worked on a pamphlet for Americans considering making *aliyah* as a way to avoid the Vietnam War draft. (As citizens, they would be subject to the Israeli draft.) Although never published, it was to provide an overview of Israeli society and the newcomer experience, as well as information about legal immigration to Israel; similar pamphlets existed for immigrating to Canada.<sup>99</sup> The section on life in Israel, which was completed, was based “primarily on the observations, feelings, loves, and criticisms of American students, in order to give a realistic, though I think not pessimistic view.”<sup>100</sup>

Since high school I was drawn toward pacifism. Israel challenged that in some important ways. I saw Israel as dependent on its military. After Yom Hashoah 1971 I wrote, “Here is a country that lives by the blood of its youth, and if they did not have an army I cannot say the Arabs would love us. They’d probably slaughter us. But that doesn’t mean I can kill, or train myself to.” In the United States, I saw military force as often “a) politically ineffective or stupid and b) immoral.” In Israel, however, I felt that “the only basis for opposition is the latter—that to kill another person is immoral. It’s very difficult ground to stand on and I doubt most Israelis would understand. But they need to hear and

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98 I had submitted a conscientious objector application to my U.S. draft board in 1968 when I turned eighteen, to initial dismay but ultimate support from my parents. I communicated while in Israel with others in Israeli programs about my U.S. draft concerns. Letters, Peace and Draft, Correspondence, Israel 1970–1971, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

99 “Some Thoughts on Israel and the U.S. Draft,” January 1971, “Correspondence, 1970–1971,” MS-846, box 3, RT papers, AJA. A copy is also in Collection M86-086, RT papers, WHS. Israel had no procedure for recognizing conscientious objectors to military service. Parallel publications included Byron Wall and Mark Ivor Satin, *Manual for Draft-age Immigrants to Canada* (Toronto: Anti-Draft Programme, 1968, 1970) and *Immigration to Canada and its Relation to the Draft* (Montreal: Council to Aid War Resisters, 1970).

100 RT to Jewish Peace Fellowship, 24 January 1971, 1, “Correspondence, 1970–1971,” MS-846, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

remember ‘not by might and not by spirit but by my word says the Lord God of hosts.’”<sup>101</sup> I wrote to Rabbi Richard Winograd at University of Wisconsin Hillel that I was torn about *aliyah*, particularly by my opposition to military service.<sup>102</sup>

While Israeli and Middle Eastern issues were prominent, I did not forget the ongoing war in Vietnam. The four students killed at Kent State University in Ohio profoundly affected me and other students, as the National Guard had also been called to the UW campus. There were nationwide strikes and student protests, and shortly thereafter two other students were killed at Jackson State University in Mississippi. As the first anniversary of this painful event approached, some of us thought we needed to mark it. With little advance planning, we hand-made posters calling for an antiwar protest at the American embassy in Tel Aviv and posted them around the Jerusalem campus. Someone thought of contacting American students at Tel Aviv University to join in. Since no one had telephones, a messenger traveled from Jerusalem to the Tel Aviv dorms to involve those students a day or two before the event. We did not bother to seek a police permit, usually required for demonstrations in Israel.

Although American students had demonstrated at the embassy on Jewish issues, it was not common to demonstrate against American policy.<sup>103</sup> Several dozen students showed up, and we lit six *yahrzeit* candles, said kaddish for those killed, and read their names, a ritual influenced by a Holocaust remembrance organized by Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf. We also delivered an antiwar letter addressed to Ambassador Walworth Barbour. The organizers were relatively successful in alerting the Israeli

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101 Letter, 30 April 1971, RT to Marlene Chertok, Correspondence, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

102 Letter, 29 April 1971, RT to R. Richard Winograd, Correspondence, Israel 1970–1971, U–Z, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

103 A photo shows American students demonstrating at the U.S. Embassy [n.d., ca. 1969] calling for American support for Syrian Jews. Yosi Rot, photographer. Image in Dan Hadrani’s archive, 05028, at the National Library of Israel (NLI). In the fictional film *Milk and Honey Experience* (1971) an American student sits outside the U.S. Embassy calling for U.S. support of Soviet Jews.

press, as four daily newspapers carried stories.<sup>104</sup> A major impact for me was creating a Jewish mode for protesting the war in Vietnam.

In addition to antiwar concerns, our proximity to Palestinians (a term just coming into wider use) was ever present. Like most American Jews in Israel, I had very little interaction with Palestinians. In October 1970 I visited Haifa with another American student. We made a side trip by bus to an Israeli Arab village, original home of a Palestinian-American high school teacher of my brother Larry. But I realized once we arrived that I had no plan and felt out of place. I did not know the teacher's maiden name and had no contacts. We looked around for a few minutes, chatted with a shopkeeper, bought a snack, and left. I wrote briefly to my family, "Among other places we visited was Sharfaram, the village where Mrs. Allen used to live—it's not that small a place, about 10,000 people."<sup>105</sup>

I went shopping for bedding, towels, and the few basic dishes I needed in a dorm in the Arab shuk of the Old City. But my interactions with Palestinians were mostly commercial until I met a Palestinian student in my Hebrew class. I wrote to my parents:

Thurs nite I went and visited Nabil, the guy from East Jerusalem who was in my ulpan class. He was glad to see me. He's very hospitable. I'll [*sic*] to invite him over sometime soon. He's going to the other (Mt. Scopus) campus of the university studying math—it is very hard for him

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104 The demonstration was held on 5 May 1971. "Anti-Vietnam rally at U.S. Embassy," *Jerusalem Post* (6 May 1971); "Studentim amerikanim amru 'kaddish' mul hashagrirut" [American students said kaddish at the [U.S.] embassy], *Al Hamishmar* (6 May 1971), the longest and most detailed story; "Studentim amerikanim hifginu b'T.A. neged milhemet Vietnam" [American students demonstrated in Tel Aviv against the Vietnam war], *Lamerhav* (6 May 1971); *Yedioth Ahronot* (6 May 1971), photo of male and female students with candles and caption "Students from the United States, studying at Tel Aviv University demonstrated yesterday next to the American embassy" [translations by RT]. *Yedioth Ahronot* reported 30 "long-haired" student demonstrators, the *Jerusalem Post* 30 to 40 students, and *Al Hamishmar* and *Lamerhav* reported 60 students. In my correspondence, I reported 50 as part of a ten-page letter to Marlene Chertok, 7 May 1971, Correspondence, Israel A-L, 1970–1971, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

105 Letter #36, 28 Oct 1970, RT papers, AJA.

since his Hebrew isn't all that much better than mine and all his [classes] are in Hebrew.... [He] is from Jerusalem, but he is not an Israeli, he's a Palestinian. That's why he was in my ulpan class.... He's now going to Hebrew U to get a degree—he's taking all his classes in Hebrew and it is hard for him.<sup>106</sup>

I visited Nabil's home in East Jerusalem twice, and was warmly welcomed. After a change in our schedules we did not stay in touch throughout the year.

I came with a questioning attitude about the occupied territories and Palestinians, probably more so than many American Jews. I arrived with the American Friends Service Committee's booklet *Search for Peace in the Middle East*, including both Israeli and Arab narratives.<sup>107</sup> I was interested in the history of Israel and the conflicts in the Middle East. I spent time looking at old maps at university libraries trying to track parts of the former Israeli-Jordanian border dividing Jerusalem until 1967. "Today went exploring in Jerusalem—saw some of the former border points, visited the windmill (yes, there is one) and the new Jordanian downtown (not in the walls of the Old City.)"<sup>108</sup> On another walk, not far from the Jaffa Gate, I saw a monument made of melted weapons with the words from Isaiah, "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation."<sup>109</sup> In January I wrote that I was working on a paper on "Israel and the Palestinian Question" that would include "some discussion of the range of opinions here and the possible positive options open."<sup>110</sup>

In the spring I participated in the three-day march to Jerusalem, the *tza'adah*, coordinated by the Israeli army.

106 Letter #44, 21 Nov 1970 and Letter #46, 7 Dec 1970, RT papers, AJA.

107 [www.afsc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Search\\_for\\_Peace\\_in\\_the\\_Middle\\_East.pdf](http://www.afsc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Search_for_Peace_in_the_Middle_East.pdf) (accessed 28 April 2023). As I recall, the profiling of parallel Israeli and Palestinian "dual narratives" in this book was more significant to me than the specific details.

108 Letter #49, 23 December 1970, RT papers, AJA.

109 Letter #50, 26 December 1970, RT papers, AJA. The statue by Yigal Tumarkin was erected in 1966.

110 RT to Jewish Peace Fellowship, 24 January 1971, 1, "Correspondence, 1970–1971," MS-846, box 3, RT papers, AJA. I have no record of completing this paper.

At the time I was looking at it more as an endurance contest (which on the last day I almost quit) but I also see ... the militaristic elements—many well-organized units and military units. All of it until we got to Jerusalem on the last day was in the occupied territories. How would you like to have 23,000 foreigners walking past your door? Also political—lots of marchers wore little signs saying ‘*anu tzoadim b'artzeinu*’ [‘We are marching in our land’]. I don’t think it is ‘our land.’<sup>111</sup>

Another issue that became apparent only in retrospect was sexism. A significant majority of American students in the HU One Year program were women,<sup>112</sup> and they faced many of the same biases that they faced back home. In the opening scene of the film *Milk and Honey Experience*, an American woman at HU recounts her harassment on the street by Israeli men, particularly soldiers.<sup>113</sup> Tellingly, her female classmates agree, but her male American classmates make light of her experiences. Unfortunately, that fictional scene looked very much like reality. I had women friends in Israel from classes and the ulpan, and their experiences differed from mine and those of other men because of their gender.

Two American male students of HUC wrote an informal guide for their fellow rabbinical students (overwhelmingly male) who would arrive for the 1970–1971 year in Jerusalem. Along with practical tips about the city, the authors included a section on “how to meet girls,” which advised that meeting Israeli women was difficult. They told readers not to cancel their subscription to *Playboy* magazine and advised that hitchhiking was easier if you were with a “girl wearing a short skirt.”<sup>114</sup> A 1971

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111 Letter to Marlene Chertok, 30 April 1971, RT papers, AJA.

112 Sheier, “Academic Problems,” Table 1, 26, has 57.2 percent women, 42.8 percent men in his original sample of 250 students, about one-third of the total in the One Year program. The author found virtually identical figures in a random sample of 100 names from the One Year program for 1970–1971.

113 The screenplay (1971) is by an Israeli, Rachel Ne’eman, sister of the director. She had close American student friends. (Personal communication, Judd Ne’eman, 15 March 2021). An exception to the lack of women’s stories is the novel by Cheryl Magun, *Circling Eden: A Novel of Israel* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995). The novel focuses on an American woman at Hebrew University, concluding with the 1973 Yom Kippur war.

114 Guide by Leslie Freund and Alan Levine, HUC-JIR papers, ACA 172, file 2, AJA.

article in a student magazine written by a man claimed that “a survey conducted by *Lillit* reveals that most American women on the Hebrew University campus prefer Israeli men to American men.” The author continued: “Whatever the faults of Israelis, Israeli women concur that there is no room for Women’s Lib in Israel. In a society where sexual equality has always been an established fact, there is no need for a reaction formation to a phenomenon which never existed.”<sup>115</sup> Of course, sexism was deeply imbedded in Israeli society, as in many other societies.

Some American women in Israel began examining tensions between feminist ideals and traditional Judaism. In a paper titled “The Lonely Woman in Confrontation with the ‘Lonely Man of Faith,’” Ellen Konar, who identified as modern Orthodox, wrote a paper in which she said, “I find it difficult to accept a separate (different) but equal status in religion, what has been rejected in the modern world.... I regret not being able to find a means to reconcile my own perceptions with those I find appreciated in the tradition I love.”<sup>116</sup>

### **Other Students’ Perspectives: Survey Responses**

To compare the many experiences I and others who spent extended time in Israel had, I initiated in 2018 a survey of Americans who had been there between 1967 and 1973. There were 150 responses (142 received within a few weeks of posting).<sup>117</sup> This is a nonscientific sample;

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There was also a more conventional guide prepared by the administration, “Your Year in Israel,” folder 172/5, AJA.

115 J.J. Gross, “The Eve of Revolution” in *Lillit* (March/April 1971): 20–22. There is no information on this reported survey. *Lillit*, July 1971, 39, had a partial reply from Sylvia Berger of Tel Aviv, seemingly accepting much of the premise of Gross’s article but noting that half of Israel’s population was “oriental” and “not veterans of Degania or a random sample of women at Hebrew University.”

116 *Hapisa*, 5734/1974, op. cit. This issue includes articles written during the 1972–1973 academic year, including Konar’s.

117 Full results will be deposited at the American Jewish Archives. A small number reported on experiences either slightly outside the target date or demographic. For technical reasons, it was not possible to exclude these responses, but the small number does not affect the larger picture. Many participants had multiple Israel experiences, or stays that extended beyond the 1973 date, particularly during and after the Yom Kippur War. From the comments, it appears that all respondents were Jewish.

responses were solicited on H-Judaic (the academic Jewish studies listserv), the listserv of the National Havurah Committee, a number of rabbinic and minyan lists, and a list of American alumni of HU. In addition, readers forwarded the survey to friends and colleagues. There are three limitations of this study to keep in mind: (1) responses over-represent people in Jewish professions; (2) of the one-third of respondents who gave their address, approximately one-third (17 out of 57) lived in Israel, which is almost certainly a far higher percentage than among a random sample of Americans who had studied in Israel;<sup>118</sup> and (3) there are inherent limits in asking people to reflect on experiences that are forty-five or fifty years old.

In this sample group, the largest number arrived in Israel in 1971. Of the remainder, about half arrived earlier and half later.<sup>119</sup> Just over half were college students. About a quarter were recent high school graduates; smaller percentages were college graduates not in graduate school; or were in graduate or rabbinical school. Half attended an Israeli university program, primarily Hebrew University; smaller numbers were on a kibbutz or kibbutz ulpan. Only a small number were part of a yeshiva or religious program. Many of the 23 respondents who answered “other” were in gap-year programs, such as Bnei Akiva, or in other university-level programs, some organized by American colleges. Only a handful were in a work/study program, such as World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS) or Sherut La’am.

The vast majority of these respondents were in Israel for more than nine months: half for 9–12 months and a quarter of the respondents, more than twelve months. Almost all learned or improved Hebrew.

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118 That is, only 17 out of 150 reported addresses in Israel. While some reported making *aliyah* following their Israel study or program, others moved to Israel five, ten, or twenty years later. Others had lived in Israel for an extended period but returned to North America. Five years after a 1970–1971 survey only 25 percent of North American university students (combined with South Africans and Australians) were still in Israel, a percentage that declined each year. “Survey on Absorption,” 1975.

119 Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers. Responses such as “other” have generally been omitted in this brief summary, so that reported numbers do not add up to 100 percent.



Ulpan was part of the experience of well over half with smaller numbers learning Hebrew in other settings in Israel. A small minority were “fluent or advanced in Hebrew before they arrived.” Only two people reported that they did not learn much or any Hebrew. It is worth noting that in this period, English was much less pervasive in Israel than it is today.

Time abroad can have a significant effect on personal development. A program advisor for American students in Paris recently said, “Every student [abroad] goes through an identity change.”<sup>120</sup> The survey offered a number of opportunities for open-ended responses about major impacts of being in Israel. Those in Israel during the Six Day War or Yom Kippur War found those to be key experiences. Many respondents mentioned (1) academic experiences, including learning Hebrew; (2) traveling the country (and the West Bank and Sinai, then under Israeli control); and (3) living in Israeli society. One person remembered all three categories: “Studying Bible in an academic setting with world-class faculty such as Nechama Leibowitz, Moshe Greenberg, Lee Levine. Traveling and experiencing the nature and history of the land. Living daily life as an apartment dweller in Jerusalem.” Another commented on the Jewish diversity encountered: “For the first time in my academic life my Jewish and secular studies were integrated. I met American Reconstructionist, feminist, and other progressive Jews and found new ways to connect to Judaism that were aligned with my values and experiences.” Many respondents had the experience of “meeting family members I didn’t know.” A number met their future spouses. Several reported still being close to Israeli roommates, even after many decades. A few spoke of encounters with both Jews and Arabs: “Positive engagement with Israeli Jews.

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120 Mehammed Mack, Smith College program director, is quoted as saying, “As a college student, Jacqueline Bouvier spent a year in the city, and it became one of the great influences on her life.” Ann Mah, “After She Had Seen Paris,” *New York Times* (30 June 2019): 5T. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/23/travel/paris-jacqueline-bouvier-kennedy-onassis-college.html> (accessed 6 Sept 2019). On the impact of foreign study and independent student travel, see George Gmelch, “Crossing Cultures: Student Travel and Personal Development,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 21, no. 4 (1997): 475–490. This article focuses on American university students in a summer program in Austria in the 1990s.

Positive engagement with Israeli and non-Israeli Arabs in Jerusalem.”

Many respondents reported their Israel experience greatly affected their Jewish identities. A number made *aliyah*, some became more committed to religious observance, and one or two commented that the experience led them to encourage their children to study in Israel. For example: “Strengthened my connections to Israel and Jewish People; cemented the seed that I would make Israel my home and future”; “On return, I became much more observant (thanks in part to being exposed to more religious people . . . ) and my Jewish knowledge increased”; “It helped to cement my Jewish identity, sense of community, Jewish history, and deepened my Jewish knowledge. I have been to Israel dozens of times since then”; and, “I have always felt, since that year, connected to Israel, and have traveled back several times. I encouraged my daughter to do a similar program.”

Most responded to the question about memorable experiences. One woman, who had been in the same program at the same time as I, wrote a lengthy response:

Politically: When we arrived at [in] Ohalo we were taken up to a roof and shown where Jordan, Syria and Lebanon lay and told not to go down the road alone at night.... When the ceasefire was announced<sup>121</sup> we danced in the dining room and continued outside.... All year I had a sense that not only was I living on a daily basis with the tangible evidences of history, but that I was in a place and at a time when history was being made....

Socially: lived with Israelis and Turkish women on HaGivah HaTsarfait [sic], have been friends ever since then with two of them.... I remember goats & shepherds at the bus stop, which overlooked the Old City. There were no phones, Israel was still a poor country.... People dropped in on each other all the time,... there was no other way to get together. Participated in Tzahal’s Three Day March around Jerusalem,<sup>122</sup> very weird marching through occupied territory and being a “part” of the

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121 This refers to the Israel-Egypt War of Attrition at the Suez Canal, August 1970.

122 Spring 1971.

army for that time.... Was able to move around the country so easily.... I saw whole families hitching. It was a golden time, between the wars, the Arabs were still in shock so we could and did go everywhere... We had no fear about being in the Old City or anywhere else in Jerusalem or the country at large....

I remember feeling like the Israeli students were adults and we Americans were still kids. This really was the case, they'd been through the army, were several years older and most were married. We were "freaks," smoked dope and often played more than we studied. The Israelis were fond of Nixon and didn't understand why we were against him. I left ... for Israel about a month after ... [the murders at] Kent State University—this really affected us deeply—and I was a bit torn about abandoning the anti-war effort for a year. I felt at once strongly attached to my American life ... and my Zionism and strong feelings for Israel.<sup>123</sup>

When asked, "Was anything missing or overlooked in your Israel program/experience?" most respondents said no. A typical response was, "No. Was the best year of my life." However, a few mentioned personal issues—"I was very lonely most of the time and there were few resources to turn to"—and some mentioned gaps in their Hebrew studies, or in the wider connections to Israeli society: "I wish I had continued with formal Hebrew language study" and, "Looking back, I would have liked to have integrated more with Israelis." A few commented that there was a lack of follow-up after returning to the United States, and several found that experiences of Sephardi/Mizrachi Jews and of Palestinian Arabs were lacking: "I met with members of the Israeli Sephardic community on my own ... & otherwise my courses did not address issues such as poverty in Israel"; "Our tour, like Israelis in general, turned a blind eye to the situation of the Palestinians"; "Obliteration of Palestinian experience. Social religious and class issues."<sup>124</sup>

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123 This 2018 response was submitted anonymously and has been only lightly edited. Personal names have been removed.

124 Survey responses, op.cit.

## Major Effects of Israel Experiences

Those [young adult] subjects who experienced Israel directly and developed significant personal connections to Israeli Jews during their middle to late adolescence and very early adulthood usually deepened their engagement with Israel to the point that the engagement became independent of their parents' religious and social lives. That is the point at which the subjects crossed the line into what I have been calling 'Diaspora Zionism.'<sup>125</sup>

There is no doubt that living in Israel temporarily strengthens young Jews' ties to Israel. But these experiences could also challenge preconceptions as Americans encountered an imperfect society. In looking at both my own and others' experiences in Israel, several trends and reactions revealed themselves. Among them:

(1) *People emerged with more complex views of Jewish life and people*—Israel broadened perspectives on Jewish life. I had encounters with Jews from the Middle East, the Soviet Union, Latin America, and Europe, as well as those raised in Israel. Late in my year I wrote, "I'm not very convinced of Judaism being a religion any more, having become much more aware of its cultural-ethnic-national-side.... And I'm wary of over-universalism (the Jews for everyone's rights but their own, etc.)"<sup>126</sup>

(2) *Some felt ambivalence toward Israel*—Israel was enchanting, inspiring, and disappointing. I wrote, "No Jew ever comes to Jerusalem for the first time. He rather returns."<sup>127</sup> Near the end of my year in Israel I wrote, "I'm really discouraged by Jewish chauvinists" and "Judaism in Israel is not a moral force."<sup>128</sup> Coming from a Jewish tradition emphasizing social justice, I found this connection lacking in most of the Israeli public sphere.

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125 David L. Graizbord, *The New Zionists: Young American Jews, Jewish National Identity, and Israel* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 68. The author's research cohort are the children or grandchildren of the baby boomer generation that is the focus of this article.

126 Letter to Marlene Chertok, 8 May 1971, "Correspondence," Israel 1970–1971, A–D, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

127 Letter to Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, 11 February 1971, "Correspondence," Israel 1970–1971, U–Z, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

128 Letter to Rachel Adler and Rabbi Moshe Adler, 30 May 1971, 3, "Correspondence," Israel 1970–1971, A–D, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

In 1974, Rabbi Samuel Fishman wrote a report for national Hillel on “Changing Attitudes Toward Israel.” Citing the large numbers of American students going to Israel, he wrote, “Student encounters with Israel, whether in the summer or over a year, have not always been effective and rewarding experiences.... Sometimes, however, the disappointments are rooted in the real and existential situation, and are not at all the consequences of misinformation or erroneous expectations.” He quoted an unnamed Wisconsin student (me) who had studied at HU:<sup>129</sup>

Though I was very excited about going to Israel, I do not think my expectations were too high. I did not expect Utopia or the messianic kingdom. I was intensely aware of the tragedy of a war by two peoples who called the land “home.” I knew that not all Israelis cared about the things I find important.... And in some ways I was surprised; the stark rockiness of the land; the golden nature of Jerusalem at sunset which grew on me; the green eked out by Jews and by Arabs from an inhospitable soil; the growing confidence of daily use of Hebrew reborn; the constant contrasts of old and new, East and West, peace and war; and the joys and exasperations of day-to-day living.... And yet I was also disappointed, in some sense profoundly, for I did not leave with the feeling ... that I was wanted in Israel.<sup>130</sup>

I also wrote of experiencing “history and holiness and of being in the center of the world,” which I believe captured the spirit of many in my generation. Near the end of my year, my view of the overall HU program was less positive than earlier. I thought that, while individual courses were good, the university as a whole was a disappointment, as was the

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129 Fishman, former UCLA Hillel director, came to Washington in 1969 to head Hillel’s new national Department of Israel Affairs. See Benjamin M. Kahn, “History of the B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundations,” particularly ch. 4, “Arabs on the Campus,” unpublished manuscript, SC-14900, AJA. Fishman, “Changing Student Attitudes,” 28–29.

130 Fishman, “Changing Student Attitudes,” 29. Fishman directly quotes, with a few minor editorial changes, from RT’s “Turning and Returning: Notes of a Displaced Person” (November 1971), “Correspondence” 1970–1971, box 3, RT papers, AJA. This article, written five months after my return from Israel, was unpublished but circulated to friends. The text as quoted is with Fishman’s edits. The original text is in Appendix A.

fact that almost all classes and social contacts were with Americans and other foreign students. I wrote of being torn about *aliyah* and my opposition to military service. I found myself “between two lands, with too much critical insight into both of them to be at ease. I’ve thought of the question: is the status of Wandering Jew as much an internal psychological state as an external reality?”<sup>131</sup>

I was not the only American student who felt ambivalent. In 1969, Dennis Ross (not the future U.S. diplomat) wrote, “I have a genuine relationship with this country. I love it/I hate it.” Moshe Waldocks (later a Hillel director and rabbi) wrote that “The development of a strong attachment to Israel has been difficult.... Rather than say that Israel has absorbed us I believe that many of us have absorbed Israel.” Student Jacqueline Hoffman wrote a short poem about threats of violence, titled “Planted in Holy Soil”:

They grow proud and straight and blossom  
Sprout their leaves—  
And are cut down.<sup>132</sup>

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131 RT to Richard Winograd, UW Hillel director, 29 April 1971, “Correspondence,” Israel 1970–1971, E–K, box 3, RT papers, AJA. These thoughts, and some of the words, appear in RT, “Turning and Returning.” I spent the seder with my Israeli roommate and family at his home in Zichron Yaakov. The intensity of attachment could also seem extreme. Marlene Chertok wrote me, “By the way, I’m happy to hear that you’re aware you’re fanatic at times. I’ve noticed religious fanaticism in some letters but as long as you’re aware of it I’m not worried.” Letter to RT, 7 May 1971, “Correspondence,” Israel 1970–1971, A–L, box 3, RT papers, AJA. My experience of Israeli society—with perhaps unrealistic expectations of making more Israeli friends—was not unique. Commenting on first-year HUC students that same year, Rabbi Ezra Spicehandler said: “The desire of students to have an ‘Israeli experience’ is limited by the Israeli experience itself.... Therefore the encounter has to be a limited one, with the students being somewhat disappointed.... Obviously the Israeli young people are not going to actively seek out an American student, it’s the American student that has to actively seek out the contact with the Israelis.” Ezra Spicehandler interview transcript (with Stanley Chyet, professor of American Jewish history at HUC and director of the American Jewish Archives), 8 June 1971, AJA, SC-11842, Box 1, Folder 12, 2.

132 Carole Hirsh, Helen Goldring, Gloria Srebro, eds., *Reflections on American One Year Study Program at Hebrew University-Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1969), 3, 14, 15, 19. Copy at National Library of Israel. I have quoted the entire text of Hoffman’s poem.



From left: Yisrael Fomberg, Tabak, and Moshe Faienstein on Hebrew University's Mt. Scopus campus, 1971. (Courtesy Morris Faienstein)

An unexpected finding from a study in 1986 stated that “Travel to Israel apparently induces some negative images of Israelis and Israeli society, even as it heightens Zionist commitment.”<sup>133</sup>

(3) *Students' perspectives on American Judaism changed*—For some Americans, the Israel experience led to changes in their own Jewish lives.<sup>134</sup> My affiliation with Reconstructionist Judaism grew out of my junior year in Israel. As I wrote in my application letter to attend the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, “While in Israel and Prague last year I became increasingly aware of the ties that bind all Jews together, whether Hasidic or Sephardic, whether progressive or traditional. I was exposed to Rabbi Jack Cohen and Kehilat Mevakshei Derekh ... in Jerusalem, which I attended regularly.”<sup>135</sup>

133 Cohen, “Jewish Travel,” 14.

134 I attended my first Orthodox synagogues in Prague and in Safed, on my way to and shortly after arriving in Israel. One of my American ulpan roommates, Morris Faienstein, raised in an Orthodox community in Brooklyn, attended his first Reform congregation, Har-El, in Jerusalem. (Personal communication, January 2016.)

135 Reconstructionist Rabbinical College application, January 1972. Application to HUC, with similar language, January 1972. I was admitted to both and chose the “road less

Some young Americans found that their involvement with Israeli society, including its problems, strengthened their commitments to issues they would face back home. Gerry Serotta wrote of a demonstration “opposite Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan.” The “committee, he wrote, “began as group of visiting foreign students, who, capitalizing on increasing consciousness of ecological issues abroad, hoped to attract large numbers of other foreign students.”<sup>136</sup>

Though a minority did decide to make *aliyah*, a far larger group returned to North America. Ezra Spicehandler wrote, “The Hebrew University is approaching, I think the last I heard, about 800 [American] students. When one sees these students, one immediately knows that many of them are going to be key figures in American Jewish life. Most of them do not settle in Israel. They return home, they keep deep Jewish commitments.”<sup>137</sup>

In June 1971, shortly after my twenty-first birthday, I left Jerusalem and returned to the United States. After a brief visit with my parents, I spent the summer on the staff of the Conservative movement’s Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. At the end of the summer, I participated in a national conference of Hillel students in Pennsylvania, then returned to Madison for my senior year including studying fourth year Hebrew (Hebrew literature.) My year in Israel was over, but its impact continued.<sup>138</sup>

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travelled.” Letter to Uri Herscher, director of admissions at HUC spring 1972, on weaknesses of Reform movement. “Correspondence” 1971–1972, box 3, RT papers, AJA. I declined an invitation from a JTS faculty member to apply to their rabbinical program because they did not admit women.

136 “Jerry Serotta” [*sic*, Gerry Serotta], “Birth of a student movement,” *Lillit* 5 (July 1971): 6. He reported that many Israelis found the issue-oriented protest, not tied to any political party, to be novel. (Personal communications, 15–16 March 2021.)

137 Ezra Spicehandler interview, 1971, SC-11842, box 1, folder 12. AJA. Transcript of taped interview regarding the first-year program of HUC-JIR in Israel, June 1971. The figure is approximately correct for students in the HU One Year program. There were about as many American students in other university programs, including graduate and undergraduate students.

138 On my twenty-first birthday in Jerusalem, see final letter from Israel to parents, unnumbered, 2 June 1971, RT papers, AJA. My summer at the more traditional Camp Ramah (which strove to have a Hebrew-speaking atmosphere) as a cabin counselor and tutor was not particularly successful.



Although their individual experiences differed, young American Jews who had lived in Israel played a key role in new developments in American Jewish life. For me, this became part of a generational perspective—personal Israel connections—that differed from that of my parents or grandparents. New manifestations of a more intensive Jewish life and an awareness of Israel as a real, complex society were generational markers.<sup>139</sup> For tens of thousands of American Jews after 1967, Israel was a lifetime influence.

### **Implications and Future Research**

As we have seen, after 1967 thousands of young American Jews lived in Israel and returned to the United States after lengthy stays. This experience had major influences on individual life stories and on American Jewish life. By 1973, tens of thousands of young American Jews had spent extended periods living in Israel.<sup>140</sup> These numbers expanded in subsequent years. Most experienced an attraction and deep connection with Israel and Israelis. Many developed an awareness of Israel's tensions and failings. For some, this went along with a sense of being torn between this land and their American Jewish experience. However, historians and sociologists of American Jewry whose work covered the years immediately after 1967 have not closely examined the implications of these shared experiences—living in a majority-Jewish society,

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139 In 1971–1972 I organized a Hillel course, “The Woman in Judaism,” only part of which took place. “Univ of Wis, 1968–1972,” box 5, RT papers, AJA. Also during that academic year I ate meals at the kosher co-op Kibbutz Langdon, and made plans to attend the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Temple University. I lived two years in a co-op kosher bayit (house) in Philadelphia, was an early member of Breira, and became active in the havurah movement. In 1980 I served on the organizing committee for the founding conference of New Jewish Agenda, a Jewish progressive organization. My career included serving as a congregational rabbi in Rochester, New York, Lansing, Michigan, and Spokane, Washington, while completing a doctorate in American Jewish history at Temple University in 1990. I was associate director of the Board of Rabbis of Greater Philadelphia and a staff chaplain at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania for thirteen years. I serve as editor of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association's newsletter, *RRA Connection*.

140 Of course, many thousands more had been to Israel on shorter programs, including summer school, tours, and personal visits.

learning Hebrew, meeting Jews with origins in many parts of the world, and for some, meeting Palestinians sharing the same land. This lacuna is significant and needs, in this author's opinion, a biographical focus of Israel experiences. This type of approach has been a fruitful tool for various other areas of study, including American Jewish feminism.<sup>141</sup>

Many American Jews who spent a year in Israel returned there for extended study or visits.<sup>142</sup> We do not know how many Americans, after a year of study or volunteering, considered making or tried to make *aliyah*—another piece of the puzzle that is missing. American Jewish families, including parents and future children, were likely affected in their Jewish journeys by those who had lived in Israel.<sup>143</sup>

Shared experiences can be a critical aspect of creating new directions. For example, Jewish summer camps, particularly Camp Ramah, were part of the background of many founders of the independent havurah movement of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>144</sup> At a time when even having

141 Dina Pinsky, *Jewish Feminists: Complex Identities and Activist Lives* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), references a number of women's Israel experiences. Joyce Antler, *Jewish Radical Feminism: Voices from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 6, mentions Israel experiences as one factor influencing the identities of the women she studies.

142 While in rabbinical school, I returned to Israel in 1975–1976 for a year at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, taking most of my courses in Hebrew.

143 Seventy-five percent of American students in Israel in the 1990s had visited Israel earlier and 86 percent had one or both parents who had been to Israel. It is likely that only a small minority of parents of earlier American students (1967–1973) had previously visited Israel. Cohen, "Tourism and Religion," 40. On parental influence, see for example Sarah Glidden's autobiographical graphic novel, *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less* (New York: DC Comics, 2010), 20, based on her Birthright Israel trip. Initially reluctant to go, she references her mother's 1972 stay at a kibbutz. Sheryl Liberman from Queens, who had been on the 1970–1971 One Year program, wrote after returning to the United States, "I would like to go to Israel this summer—just have to get the money (of course!). The more I stay here, the more attractive *aliyah* [in Hebrew letters] begins to look." Letter to RT, 19 October 1971, "Correspondence" 1971–1972, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

144 See, for example, Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1989); Jeffrey Salkin, "How American Jews Became Camp-passionate," *Religious News Service* 31, July 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/07/31/judaism-camps-reform/> (accessed 29 August 2019). Also, Daniel Elazar,

visited Israel was relatively uncommon, the presence of a significant minority of young American Jews who had lived there was influential.<sup>145</sup> Many leaders and participants in key American Jewish events in the 1970s and 1980s (and beyond) shared an extended period of study or work in Israel.<sup>146</sup> While few were in major leadership roles of established Jewish organizations, by this time there were new American organizations, publications, and movements that included many young Jews: the emerging Jewish feminist movement; Breira; the *Jewish Catalogs*; the National Havurah Committee; New Jewish Agenda; the Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education.<sup>147</sup> We need to examine how the experi-

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“The Changing Realities of the North American Jewish Community,” 1986 (unpaginated), <https://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles2/ramah40.htm> (accessed 30 November 2020).

145 Correlation does not prove causation. Students going to Israel were a self-selected group.

146 Among my cohort at HU were Steven Zipperstein, future Jewish historian; Tirzah Meacham, future Talmudist; Morris (Moshe) Faierstein, future U.S. Air Force chaplain and scholar of Hasidism; Anna Cohn, future curator of the “Precious Legacy” exhibit on Czech Jews; Lee Paskind, future Conservative rabbi and social justice activist; Lynn Gottlieb, feminist and future rabbi; Gerald Serotta, future Reform rabbi, Hillel director, and social activist; Shira Milgrom, future Reform rabbi and liturgist; Ilene Schneider, future Reconstructionist rabbi and novelist; Gail Twersky, future feminist scholar and founder of the Jewish Women’s Archive; and myself, future Reconstructionist rabbi, American Jewish historian, and chaplain. All returned to North America. The large majority of American students who were in Israel did not enter specifically Jewish professions. It is likely that by 1980 a cumulative number of 70,000–90,000 American Jews, almost all under 35, had been on a long-term Israel program.

147 Ezrat Nashim, a feminist advocacy group, began in 1971. There were large national American Jewish feminist conferences in 1973 and 1974. *The First Jewish Catalog* was published in 1973. Breira: A Project of Concern in Diaspora-Israel Relations (1973–1979) was a group favoring an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, a position then to the left of most established Jewish organizations. The Coalition on Alternatives in Jewish Education formed in 1976. The National Havurah Committee had its first annual summer conference in 1979. The New Jewish Agenda, a progressive organization, held its founding conference in December, 1980. Decades later, Steven M. Cohen reported that more than half of young Jewish leaders (56 percent) were alumni of long-term Israel programs, compared with just over 30 percent of older Jewish leaders who had spent four months or longer in Israel. Young leaders were also twice as likely as older leaders (48 percent to 21 percent) to say that their facility with Hebrew was “excellent” or “good.” “From Jewish People to Jewish Purpose:

ences of young adults who had lived in Israel influenced these groups, as well as synagogues, the rabbinate, Hillel, American Jewish language, Jewish summer camps, and the Soviet Jewry movement. Speaking anecdotally and from my own experience, I believe the influence in all of these arenas was very great indeed.

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## APPENDIX A

*Nov 1971*

### **Turning and Returning: Notes of a Displaced Person**<sup>148</sup>

*by Robert Tabak*

This summer I left Jerusalem after studying (more or less) in Israel for a year. Now I am back in Madison. And at present while both these statements are true I am uncertain of what I have left and to what I have returned: I feel the isolation of standing between two places, neither quite home, nor quite in exile.

The importance—in perhaps different ways—of Israel in Jewish identity in America, both in the general (adult) community, and among youth,

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Establishment Leaders and their Non-establishment Successors” in *The New Jewish Leaders: Reshaping the American Jewish Landscape*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), as cited in Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 107.

148 This text is as written except for minor corrections. It is the full text quoted by Rabbi Samuel Fishman in 1974. “Correspondence,” 1970–1971, MS-846, box 3, RT papers, AJA.

particularly as a factor among those leading to the rise of the Jewish student activist movement has been evident in recent years. More and more young Jews from North America have had extended exposures to Israel (six months or more), among them many who have studied at Israeli universities. While I speak here only for myself, I know that at least some of my feelings are shared by others who studied at Hebrew University and elsewhere in Israel, many of them the most morally sensitive and politically aware (both countries) young people I met while in Israel.

### **The Homeland**

Though I was very excited about going to Israel, I don't think my expectations were too high. I didn't expect Utopia or the messianic kingdom. I was intensely aware of the tragedy of a war by two peoples who called the land "home." I knew that not all Israelis cared about the things I find important (any more than do all Americans). And in some ways I was surprised; the stark rockiness of the land; the literally golden nature of Jerusalem at sunset which grew on me; the green eked out by Jews and by Arabs from an inhospitable soil; the growing confidence of daily use of Hebrew reborn; the constant contrasts of old and new, East and West, peace and war; and the joys and exasperations of day to day living. And yet I was also disappointed, in some sense profoundly, for I did not leave with the feeling that for all Israel's love of *aliyah*, that I was wanted in Israel, that those who would demand a true socialism or question violations of civil liberties that would not pass in the US or would refuse military service for conscience' sake would be ignored or shunted aside or despised or perhaps accused of "galut mentality." Not by all Israelis of course, but enough I felt—probably most—to be truly cut off. And when I wasn't looking, I was an American while I was in Israel.

### **Home?**

And on return to the States similar and different sorts of isolation cut in on me. I am outside the "mainstream" of America in many of my ideas too though in some ways the legal forms of dissent are more strongly protected here (due process, no house arrest) which are in fact usually more or less observed in Israel, but not always. There is a community of support for radical and dissenting ideas in the US—one that I can

find more easily than one in Israel. But there are elements of hopelessness and despair in the struggle to make America humane. The physical quality of life in America now seems more on the verge of collapse in the foreseeable future. And the fact remains that in another way I am outside even most leftist and counterculture groups: I am consciously and actively Jewish.

Is America then my home?

### **Galut: Eternal or Internal?**

The thought arose in my love-hate thoughts about Israel that perhaps the state of Galut (exilence) was in fact more than a separation from the homeland; that it was a kind of mental state, or perhaps existential condition. We are in Galut and the existence of the State of Israel does not remove the dual feelings of being both cut off and of being unavoidably tied together.

Are we then to accept the Israeli myth of “galut mentality;” move there, and hope our children will be “good Israelis”? Are we to become aware of ourselves as Stalin’s Jews, as “rootless cosmopolitans”? Are [we] to accept valuing Israel as “a country like all other countries” for Jews and drop our doubts about its presumably ethical nature? (I find this idea fairly accurate in a descriptive sense but heartily reject it as a value/goal.) Are we then to seek some viable form of Jewish life in the diaspora?

In the end, perhaps I will make whatever decisions I need to, as an American friend in Israel said, “I know I don’t feel completely at home here nor in America. I have to live my life knowing that I’ll be unhappy in some respects wherever I am.” At the same conversation a visiting American rabbi<sup>149</sup> who was speaking with a small group of American students at a friend’s apartment in Jerusalem listened to us and said that he didn’t know what to tell us; we were perceptive and sensitive participants/observers of both societies. “Now, you know too much,” he said.

Having eaten from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, it cannot be returned to its previous place, whether we find it sweet or bitter. We

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149 Arnold Jacob Wolf.

can only go out from the innocent garden with the hopes of a humane society into a terrifyingly real world.

## APPENDIX B

### Some Thoughts on Israel and the U.S. Draft

by Robert Tabak

Working Draft, January 1971 (selections):

*My viewpoint is a limited one: that of an American student in Israel for a year. I have been learning Hebrew since I came to this country in July 1970 but am still far short of real fluency. Therefore this cannot be any sense an authoritative view of all aspects of a society; it is much more impressionistic. The comments of a number of mostly American students on the general topic of living in Israel are included below, as otherwise unidentified statements in quotation marks.<sup>150</sup>*

#### LIFE IN ISRAEL

##### What does Israel feel like?

*"My existence here is much more active than anywhere else."*

*"You need good reasons---besides just being Jewish-- for coming here."*

*"Israel is an extremely vital country--a land that requires a great deal from its people, that drains them in many ways."*

*"There is a general feeling of peace here. People don't talk about the war except at news time."*

*"To live in Israel it's not necessary to be incredibly conscious of your Jewishness--but you do have to be able to be among Jews."*

*"In Israel, even with all its faults, I'm closer to transcending the sense I had in the US of being a Jew in Galut --in exile."*

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150 "Some Thoughts on Israel and the U.S. Draft," working draft, January 1971, "Correspondence," 1970-1971, MS-846, box 3, RT papers, AJA. The entire typescript is approximately twelve pages, double spaced. A copy is also in Collection M86-086, RT papers, WHS. Except for correcting typos and punctuation, the texts are as written. Material not in quotation marks is by RT.

*Israel is a very special place: a religious center, an historical homeland, a developing nation, a state with a number of socialist ideas and institutions, a nation that survives by military strength, an unexpected occupying power. It is a promise and a dream yet unfulfilled in so many aspects of its daily life.*<sup>151</sup>

*The people*

*Israel is a new country. Only 40% of its citizens were born here; most Israeli university students have either immigrant parents or immigrated as children. 10% of the country's citizens are Druze and Arab. If the occupied territories are included, 40% of the total population is Arab. Some reactions to the Israelis:*

*"There is a greater willingness to help than in the states. There is more frankness and willingness to meet halfway."*

*"Israel is very exciting and open. There are so many people from different places, classes—it's a gathering of people."*

*"As individuals, they aren't too bad—though they have [a] less critical frame of mind."*<sup>152</sup>

*Pace of life in Israel; standards of living*

*Good advice is given by one student:*

*"Try and determine what your status would be here; what your full-time employment will be. Compare life here with the much higher standards in the US. You have to determine what your material values are."*<sup>153</sup>

*The land and the environment*

*The land of Israel is magnificently beautiful. The starkness of the Negev desert, the valleys and rock-strewn hillsides, the lush green of area around the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret), the hesitant greenness of land always on the verge of reverting to wasteland—add to make a place that can let one feel close to the earth and its history.*

*"Here, every tree, every drop of water is precious."*

*But there [are] critical aspects as well. One of Israel's long-term problems*

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151 Ibid., 1–2.

152 Ibid., 2.

153 Ibid., 2.



may be a water shortage. The attitude toward soil conservation and land reclamation is very positive; that towards air pollution is not. This is not yet a serious problem, and Israel may learn from the US on this point.

Perhaps due to the speed of the country's growth, there has been a greater emphasis on function than aesthetics.<sup>154</sup>

### The Universities

Higher education is much less widespread and more career-oriented than in the US. Two Israeli universities offer opportunities to learn Hebrew and live and study in Israel for extended periods. The Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University offer both sophomore and junior year One year programs (which include intensive Hebrew study for several months) and also a preparatory year for high school graduates who want to do their undergraduate work (prep year plus three years) at an Israeli university. (Grad studies are also possible here.) Though I have many criticisms of the university, my experience as a whole has been quite positive. You can learn quite a bit of Hebrew in 5 or 6 months, and if you've had background in the States (versus just learning to read without understanding), all the better. (I had one year of university Hebrew, but many kids who had no formal background are now at or above my level.)

But "if you want to isolate yourself in an American community at the university you can." For example, of Hebrew University's 16,000 students, some 3500 are Americans.<sup>155</sup>

"Many of the American students were involved in the Movement. They're doing soul searching." And perhaps with some exaggeration, "This (Hebrew U.) is the largest gathering of American radicals outside the U.S."

Also, a surprising number of the American students here consider themselves religious.<sup>156</sup>

### The military and the reserves

Many Israelis are concerned about the psychological and moral effects over

154 Ibid., 3.

155 An incorrect figure. That was the total number of overseas students, of whom about 1,500 were Americans.

156 "Some Thoughts," 5. The draft pamphlet did not have a section on religious life.

*the long run of a continuing semi-war stance and being an occupying power. Almost all Israelis want peace, even if many are unsure how to get it. Israel is not a militarized garrison state, though this is a potential danger to the country, especially if there is no peace or relaxation of tension.*

*Immigrants (Olim) and Immigration (Aliyah)*

*“Israelis like aliyah but not olim.”<sup>157</sup>*

*Most of the olim coming to Israel since 1967 (excluding a small trickle from the USSR and Eastern Europe) have been well educated people from Western countries coming here from choice rather than necessity.*

From the pamphlet’s conclusion:

*Some Americans come because they want to live in Israel; —others to escape (blacks, riots, crime, decadence.) If you’re escaping, then I can’t recommend Israel. Being an immigrant—or potential immigrant—to a strange land is not easy. Some will find the sacrifices and the difficulties too much. Israel is neither a decadent American colony nor the Messianic Kingdom nor the images of Leon Uris’ Exodus. If you’re looking for the “Hassidic homeland,” a beautiful Shlomo Carlebach concert is more up your line than Israel. If you feel there’s a reason to come here, then maybe there is. Even if you’re not sure what it is, maybe you should think about coming. You don’t have to make a decision for the rest of your life if you come and see what Israel is like. It usually isn’t easy to leave home for a new home, unseen. But your grandparents probably did it, and so did more than half the Israelis.<sup>158</sup>*

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157 Translation: “Israelis like immigration, but not immigrants.”

158 “Some Thoughts,” 8. Other sections not excerpted here included “Bureaucracy and Government,” “Politics,” “Kibbutzim,” “The Military and the Reserves,” “COs [conscientious objectors] and Pacifists in Israel” (marked “To be revised”), all completed. There was an outlined but incomplete concluding section titled “Legal Aspects of Immigration to Israel.”