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ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO SOVIET JEWISH EMIGRATION MORAL AND PRACTICAL DILEMMAS

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Virtually all Jews who left the Soviet Union between 1968 and 1973 elected to become olim, settlers in Israel. After 1973 more and more exiting Jews opted for resettlement in Diaspora countries, usually the United States. By 1976 only one half of the Soviet Jewish emigrants were making aliyah. In 1978 the breakaway percentage rose to 58.0%, and in 1979, a year in which 50,000 Soviet Jews are expected to emigrate, 35,000 will be breakaways, while only 15,000 will make aliyah. This seemingly unabated rise in breakaways (a term less value-laden and emotionally charged than the Hebrew noshrim or "drop-outs") represents a growing danger to Israel's survival, to American Jewry, and to the world-wide Soviet Jewry movement.

By 1976 alarm grew over the increasing proportion of Soviet emigrants who chose Diaspora destinations over Israel, the country officially recorded on virtually all Soviet Jewish exit visas. Nehemiah Levanon, head of Israel's office for Eastern European and Soviet Jewish affairs, spoke for Israel's prime minister when he proposed the total cut-off of all Jewish-sponsored transit aid to the breakaways. Unexpectedly, the nearly unanimous acceptance of the 1976 proposal by American Jewish leaders met with stiff opposition from

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Soviet Jewish Emigration¹

<u>Year</u>	<u>Israel Visas Issued by Dutch Embassy: Moscow</u>	<u>Total Emigration</u>	<u>To Israel</u>	<u>Per cent</u>	<u>Elsewhere</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
1970	1,047	999	999	100.0	-	-
1971	14,310	12,877	12,819	99.5	58	.5
1972	31,478	31,903	31,652	99.2	251	.8
1973	34,922	34,933	33,477	95.8	1,456	4.2
1974	20,181	20,695	16,816	81.3	3,879	18.7
1975	13,139	13,459	8,531	63.4	4,928	36.6
1976	14,138	14,283	7,279	51.0	7,004	49.0
1977	17,159	16,831	8,348	49.6	8,483	50.4
1978	30,594	29,098	12,231	42.0	16,867	58.0
1979 (4 months)	16,327	16,301	5,689	34.9	10,612	65.1

their own boards and agencies, from Jewish intellectuals, and from a broad spectrum of the American Jewish community. As a result, the cut-off plan was dropped.

In 1979, with more Jews than ever leaving Russia and the breakaway rate still rising, a new proposal to cut off aid to most breakaways is gaining strength among federation presidents and the leaders of some national agencies.

This time the plan's advocates have introduced a compromise originally proposed by Prime Minister Begin: aid should be made available only to emigrants who want to join immediate relatives already in the United States.

The huge cost and the social problems associated with resettling the immigrants, the de-romanticization of the Soviet Jewry issue, and Israel's need for a new policy now more vocally expressed by her leaders, may well combine to bring about the adoption of an aid cut-off to Soviet Jews not making aliyah. Israel and Diaspora Jewry have solidly grounded reasons why the Soviet Jewish emigration should be brought to Israel. The question at issue here is whether the cut-off plan is the most appropriate moral and effective means to the broadly desired end.

This paper attempts to inform a decision-making process on which debate will reach new levels of intensity in 1980. It discusses why the number of breakaways continues to increase and why they pose such a

difficult problem for Israel and world Jewry. The writers attempt to examine the alternative approaches to this problem for their practical and moral implications. Determining both effectiveness and possible negative side-effects of the plans are central concerns. What plan can achieve its objective without doing serious harm to the Soviet Jewry movement, to the political influence of American Jews, and to Israel's image around the world and particularly in the Soviet Union and the USA? Are the cut-off plans practical? Are they in harmony with the fundamental moral teachings of the Jewish tradition and of universal humanitarian ethics? Resisting the cut-off plans must be weighed against the grave dangers posed by the high breakaway rate and against the fact that alternatives will have only a limited impact on the breakaway problem that alternative policies seem to promise.

The Breakaways: A Balance Sheet

Large-scale Soviet Jewish emigration to the United States presents four primary liabilities: first, insufficient help for Israel's demographic crisis; second, potential assimilation of the breakaways; third, financial strain on the American Jewish community; and fourth, the danger of a halt in Soviet emigration.

First, Israeli Jewry is sitting atop a demographic time bomb. Within the 1967 borders, Jews constitute 85% of the population. But with the Arab fertility rate over twice that of the Jewish population, even the most optimistic demographic projections suggest inexorable decline in the Jewish proportion of the total population. Assuming a net Jewish immigration of 40,000 annually, in thirty years the Jewish portion of the population will drop slightly to 82%, but without Jewish immigration it will fall to 75%.

If the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank are included, these figures change considerably. Jews now constitute 64% of the combined population of Israel and the Occupied Territories. Without Jewish immigration, in thirty years Arabs will slightly outnumber Jews. Even if there is a net annual immigration of 40,000 Jews, the Jewish proportion of the population will drop to 58%. Even if Israel returns a substantial portion of the Territories to Arab administration, the growth of an increasingly nationalistic Arab population within the 1967 borders threatens Israel's Jewish character, its democratic fabric, indeed its survival.

Israel's future depends upon continuous, substantial Jewish immigration. Soviet Jewry is the last reservoir that is likely to supply the numbers of immigrants essential to maintaining and improving Israel's precarious demographic distribution. Since the survival of a strong Israel is vital to Diaspora Jewry, American Jews have a significant stake in reversing the growth in the number of Soviet Jews who reject Israel for the United States and other Diaspora destinations.

There has been a heavy psychological effect on Israel as a result of its receiving few American or Russian Jews as permanent residents. This is a powerful side effect of Israel's demographic crisis.

Second, the breakaways represent a loss to the Jewish community since they are not likely to remain identifiably Jewish in future generations. In general, Jews living in Israel have a better chance of remaining within the Jewish fold than do those living in the Diaspora.

Because most Soviet Jews have been deprived of sustained contact with Jewish life for two or three generations, their chances of remaining identifiably Jewish outside Israel are worse than those of most other Jews. When Soviet Jews arrive in the United States, they establish substantial contacts with the organized Jewish community, to which they turn for material aid and help in dealing with the ways of the new society. But as soon as this aid is no longer needed, the patterns of alienation from Jewish life firmly established in the Soviet Union tend to emerge.

Assistance by American Jewry in the form of reduced tuition at yeshivas and day schools and of special membership campaigns by synagogues, Y's and the B'nai B'rith have been generally unable to overcome decades of Soviet determination to eradicate positive attitudes towards Jewish life. If anything, many Soviet Jews see their Jewishness as a stigma, an obstacle to social acceptance and professional advancement, an identity better escaped or transcended than nurtured and enhanced. Consequently they generally break their connections with the Jewish community when they cease receiving aid from it.

Third, the breakaways put crushing financial burdens on the receiving community. In the United States, government aid pays for only a small portion of the cost of transit and resettlement. One estimate of expenditures² by Jewish philanthropic agencies puts the per capita cost at \$1,500. Other estimates go as high as \$2,500. This cost comes at the expense of funds for Israel or for local institutions. In fact, there are now serious problems with Israel's cash flow because funds for agencies handling immigration have come out of pledges made to Israel.

Soviet Jews settling here have engendered some disappointment and resentment even among their earlier most fervent supporters. Far from being the surviving remnant of authentic, traditional Jews that American Jewry had expected, the immigrants exhibit the results of the years of Soviet suppression of Jewish life. They suffer from the social awkwardness and the distinctive problems of any immigrant group joining a very foreign society.

Fourth, the large proportion of breakaways poses a grave threat to the exodus of Soviet Jewry. Under Soviet law, Jews apply for exit visas listing their destination as Israel, ostensibly to be reunited with their families there. If a large percentage of emigrants "change their minds" upon arrival in Vienna and head for the United States, the

juridical basis for the emigration movement is exposed to attack. In an overwhelming number of cases, the emigrants' decision not to go to Israel is made before they leave the U.S.S.R. Thus there is an element of subterfuge in the visa application process, even if the Soviets are aware of it.

According to leaders of the Soviet Jewry protest movement, the large proportion of emigrants going to the United States could provide a convenient pretext for the Soviet government to discredit the Soviet Jewry movement or to find a defensible reason for curtailing or even ending Jewish emigration. Since nearly all Jews (and non-Jews) leave the Soviet Union on Israeli visas and many fail to reunite with their families in Israel, the Soviets can correctly claim that Soviet Jews are largely failing to fulfill the conditions of their emigration. However the likelihood that the Soviets would employ this argument or that it would prove a meaningful part of their decision-making is subject to dispute. They certainly have not required pretexts for many of their most unpopular actions in the past.

The Soviets actually seem to be abetting the high breakaway rate by expediting applications in Odessa and other major cities where breakaways predominate. In private consultation, some experts have suggested that the Russians are purposely manipulating the numbers of Jews wishing to emigrate to the Diaspora. Unfortunately since Russian society is closed and its policies secretive, it is difficult to establish the facts in this case. The sources and motivations of applicants may genuinely have shifted, or the Soviets may be responding to visa requests on an unplanned and arbitrary basis. But if they are indeed manipulating destination through selection, their internal or external reasons for such manipulation remain unclear.

Internal Soviet propoganda has labeled emigrating Jews as undesirable, materialistic parasites interested not in returning to their homeland, but only in acquiring wealth. The USSR has tried for several years to spread a more favorable image of the Western world among its citizens and has now seized upon Israel as the imperialist villain, pointing to the large number of Jews refusing to settle there. This propoganda is a multi-edged weapon: it provides the explanation for permitting immigration (Jews are undesirables, parasites); it increases the anti-Semitism that forces more and more Jews to leave; and it deepens the negative image of Israel projected by the Soviets that discourages Jews from settling there.

In understanding the reasons Jews continue to be allowed to leave the USSR, the strength of the world Soviet Jewry movement should not be totally discounted: it has helped make the emigration of 200,000 Jews the concern of the United States, a world superpower. It has cause the USSR to retreat from policies inhibiting that emigration, most notably the "education tax" imposed briefly in the mid-seventies.

On the international scene, the Soviets have been subjected to severe Arab and Chinese criticism for helping to increase Israel's

population and for providing manpower for its armed forces. The Soviets are generally sensitive to such censure. In response, the U.S.S.R. has pointed to the large number of Jews who choose Diaspora destinations. For example, a 1976 Radio Moscow Arab language broadcast beamed to North Africa responded to a "listener's question" regarding emigration to Israel:

...The number of Jews emigrating from the Soviet Union to Israel is not large at all. For example, the number of Jews who have left the Soviet Union for Israel is fifteen times lower than the number of Jews who have left the Arab countries. ...The hullabaloo raised by various kinds of reactionaries that the Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union is increasing the power of Israel is nothing but a lie, and its aim is merely the imperialist desire to destroy cooperation between the Arabs and the Soviet Union and deny the Arabs a strong and sincere friend in their struggle against imperialism.

If the Soviets are willing to jeopardize their friendship with the Arab nations over emigration, they must have good reason to increase the emigration rate to the highest in history.

The emigration rate rose tremendously in 1972 when Henry Kissinger orchestrated a drive toward detente but fell after US-Soviet relations cooled. In 1978 the rate rose again, reaching an all-time high in 1979. The Soviet government apparently wants to improve its image in the West, particularly in the United States, in the months before the 1980 Olympic games and during Congressional deliberations on the SALT II Treaty. More important, it is seeking most-favored-nation status and approval of export-import credits from the United States, both of which are contingent upon Presidential certification of free emigration from the Soviet Union as required by the Jackson-Vanik and the Stevenson amendments. Whether Soviet emigration will be jeopardized by the rising rate of breakaways remains to be seen. There is little question that the Soviets' decisions regarding Jewish emigration will be determined by larger political issues.

Some American Jewish organizations have urged that U.S.-bound Soviet Jews apply for American visas. However such expansion of official emigration to America would give Ukrainians and other national minorities a claim to exit visas for themselves, a condition the Soviets would never permit. As a result Soviet Jews applying in that way might be barred from emigrating forever, and worse, policy changes might result in all immigration being blocked.

Discussion of the four negative implications of the shift in destination noted above should not preclude mentioning two positive aspects of the emigration to America which have created a vested American Jewish interest in continuing the flow. First, communal cohesion

in towns with small Jewish populations has been strengthened by the arrival of Soviet Jews as the communities mobilized to assist in the absorption effort. In New York City, where half of the immigrants make their homes, deteriorating Jewish neighborhoods such as Washington Heights have stabilized, while prosperous areas such as Rego Park have been enhanced by the influx of Soviet Jewish arrivals.

Second, the immediate drain on the Jewish philanthropic dollar is considerably less in the United States than in Israel (\$1500 per capita versus \$19,500).³ There all housing, health, welfare, education and other absorption expenses are higher since housing for emigrants is given or sold cheaply on a permanent basis instead of rented for a year or less like it is in America. All the costs in Israel are undertaken by agencies ultimately funded by overseas contributions and by the Israeli taxpayer. The latter is often resentful of special privileges granted the Russian emigrant. but most Jewish policy makers agree that these benefits are minor compared with the possibility of a high rate of Soviet Jewish aliyah.

Shifts in Motivation

Some of the Soviet Jewish activists who agitated for the right to emigrate ten years ago came from regions (e.g. Georgia) where industrialization and russification were slow so that traditional values and cultures were not thoroughly eradicated. Most of the other early activists came from western regions (e.g. Lithuania) annexed to Russia only in the 1940's and therefore not long cut off from active Jewish culture. Around 1973, several new conditions contributed to an increase in the proportion of emigrants choosing Diaspora destinations. First and foremost, the emigration of nearly 200,000 Jews during the last decade has severely depleted the reservoir of Zionist-motivated Jews and spurred less committed Jews to emigrate out of financial, political, and professional motives.

Second, educational and occupational opportunities for Soviet Jews have been drastically cut during the last decade. Soviet affairs expert William Korey noted in a recent article⁴ that university admissions of Jews have declined by 40% over the last decade owing to the Soviets' political reasons for an ethnically oriented admissions policy. In a related development, Professor Kassow reports that Soviet Jewish youths complained to him that employers would not hire them, fearing their imminent decision to emigrate.⁵

The emigration movement, itself a response to Soviet anti-Semitism, has contributed to further popular discrimination against Jews in education and employment and has limited their participation in Soviet society. This alienation, in turn, causes increased pressure to emigrate because it goes further in making Jewishness a stigma in the USSR. Caught in this vicious circle, many Soviet Jews who would not

have thought of emigrating four or five years ago (many would-be assimilationists among them) are now deciding to leave. They have little idealistic motivation to choose Israel with its more limited economic opportunities; instead, they head for the United States.

Third, the overwhelming reason for coming to the U.S. cited by Soviet Jews who do so is the desire for economic advancement. As one study concludes,

...the bulk of noshrim ...leave the USSR for essentially economic reasons....Their material aspirations may best be compared with the American middle-class ideal, viz., a comfortable home, car and television and educational opportunities for their children."⁶

According to officials of the organizations that oversee the absorption process, most Soviet Jews have become well integrated into the American economy. Most Soviet Jews prefer America for the same reasons most American Jews do.

Fourth, some Soviet Jews want to be reunited with their relatives already in America, and some Soviet Jews have American friends with whom they have corresponded for years. American synagogues and community groups have "adopted" hundreds of Soviet families, and these adoptees naturally want to live where they already have a connection. The presence of family or friends in the United States or in Israel is quite critical to the settlement decision.

A fifth key factor is Israel's poor image in the Soviet Union. Its economy, military situation, social problems, and absorption difficulties all are of concern to the potential emigrant.

Approaches to the Breakaway Problem

Aside from their different motivations, breakaways differ from olim in their image of Israel. Soviet propaganda disparages Israel as a small garrison state under permanent siege by enemies committed to its destruction. As one emigre remarked, "People are told in the USSR that people die every day here (in Israel) in wars."⁷

Since potential Soviet Jewish emigrants have few friends, relatives, or professional contacts outside the Soviet Union, personal contacts and friendships with those outside can be highly influential. According to a recent Hebrew University study, mail contacts with Israelis (usually recent Soviet olim) has been a key predictor of the destination decision.

The way the absorption of the original groups of Soviet emigrants was handled in Israel left something to be desired, and many of

their letters to Russia were negative in tone. Reports that the previous emigrants from their country have felt somewhat unwelcome or uncomfortable with the style of daily living in the new country discourage potential future emigrants. Letters to the USSR from Soviet Jews living in Israel have often discouraged aliyah because they have usually been written during the absorption process, when bureaucratic difficulties are at their peak and cultural differences are felt more intensely. Ironically, where integration is more successful, fewer letters are sent to the USSR.

Soviet olim complain about the lack of kindness and the terrible confusion in the bureaucracy and especially about the difficulties in finding a job. Complaints about Israeli society center on the hostility exhibited by Israelis toward olim who are given priority in housing and government loans, difficulties in making friends, and general Israeli behavior perceived as indifference, pushiness, slovenliness, irresponsibility, and the lack of respect for authority.

Soviet Jewish immigrants experience problems more keenly than do other groups. Just having emerged from a highly regulated and tightly supervised society, they are especially sensitive to coldness and lack of personal concern; they see themselves as special victims of the terrible confusion in the bureaucracy. As one emigre wrote,

We have had fifty-seven years of isolation and brainwashing. We are ⁹not just from another country: we are from another planet.

Plainly, efforts to increase letter-writing to Jews in the USSR by Israelis and acclimated olim will have a positive though small impact upon aliyah.

More critically, combining the two independent immigration offices of the Jewish Agency and the government's Absorption Ministry would eliminate jurisdictional disputes, reduce bureaucratic overlap and entanglements, save money, and facilitate absorption of all olim, not only those from the Soviet Union.

Experts have suggested that some special programs should be initiated for absorbing Soviet Jews. The government might consider paying an Israeli family to "adopt" a Soviet family during its first year of residence to help the family members become integrated more quickly. A similar adoption program in the United States appears to be highly successful. Cultural activities making use of the Russian language should also be increased.

In response to the social problems presented by Soviet aliyah, Israel's absorption machinery has responded with a number of reforms

that many experts credit with helping to alleviate the situation. Many more Russian-language speakers are now working directly with the new immigrants; processing at the airport has been speeded and made more sensitive to the immigrants' anxieties; greater options are offered in the location and size of housing; easier financial terms for renting or buying apartments in choice locations are now available; a public campaign has been urging citizens to treat Soviet Jews more warmly; and the list goes on. Nevertheless, serious problems remain. Since surveys show informal reports that reach the USSR are major factors in destination decisions, improving treatment of Soviet Jews in Israel still further continues to be of great importance.

Another approach to improving the image of Israel in the U S S R would be to encourage the Voice of America, the BBC, and Radio Free Europe to give more coverage of Israeli society in their broadcasts to the Soviet Union. Persistent reports that both the BBC and VOA broadcast almost entirely negative news about Israel suggest the importance of systematic monitoring and pressure for corrective action.

It is quite possible that the Russians will jam such broadcasts, but there is little to lose by finding out.

Increasing the Jewish and Zionist commitments of emigrating Jews may encourage an increase in the numbers of olim. During recent years protest organizations--particularly the Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry--have sent Jewish cultural materials to Russia for the small but increasing number of activists studying and teaching Hebrew, Jewish history, rituals and customs, and Israeli society and history. Plans are being made to increase the flow of Hebrew and Russian educational materials--magazines, books, tape cassettes, and films. In addition, travellers to the Soviet Union with Jewish skills often teach classes; almost all such visitors provide critical moral support.^{9a}

Even if these attempts to invigorate Jewish cultural life in Russia do not have a widespread impact on the Zionist feelings or the choice of final destination by Soviet Jewish emigrants, Soviet Jews have a moral claim upon free Jewish communities to help them create an indigenous cultural life for its own sake and for the sake of strengthening the part of the Jewish people that will remain in the U.S.S.R. for the foreseeable future. But if Soviet Jewish culture were successfully spread, it might make a long-run difference in aliyah.

Efforts to persuade Soviet Jews to settle in Israel even after they have left Russia have been expanded but should be greatly intensified. Emigrants arriving in Austria are met by Jewish Agency officials and recent Soviet olim, who try to convince immigrants to select Israel as their destination. Those who choose the U.S. are sent to transit centers run by HIAS (the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) in Italy. Only America-bound emigrants become involved with HIAS. The

completion of additional processing often compels them to wait there for months before being permitted to continue their journey to the United States. Until recently, Israeli officials shunned the centers, and little about Zionism was included in the small-scale Jewish educational programs conducted there.

When Israel's Ambassador to Italy recently visited the Ostia transit center for the first time, he was warmly received. In an inspired action, the Jewish Agency has taken a small number of teenagers on brief visits to Israel. These have helped to improve the image of Israel held by their families and others in the transit centers. This experiment has now developed into specially designed summer tours to Israel for Soviet youngsters. Additional Zionist materials might well be distributed. Expanded contacts with Israel through Israeli officials and successfully acclimated Soviet olim might prove effective in helping the emigrants to reconsider their plans to settle in the United States.

The inherent mismatch between Soviet professional training and available openings in America contribute to difficulties in securing satisfactory employment. A special Israeli "tour V'aleh" program, designed to bring professionals of different fields in contact with their Israeli counterparts, could be geared specifically to Soviet emigres who have had extended difficulties in locating satisfactory employment. Since emigrants' preference for the United States is based on greater economic opportunity, Israel should capitalize on situations where individuals do not achieve quick success here.

Despite all efforts to improve the absorption process, to raise the level of Soviet Jewish consciousness, and to improve Israel's image among Soviet emigrants, the basic factors underlying the high breakaway rate will continue to operate. In the next few decades Israel can hardly be expected to compete with the United States in terms of standard of living. Unless there is a radical shift in emigrants' motives, a highly unlikely development, much more powerful measures are necessary to achieve a large-scale shift in destination. In light of these circumstances, Jewish communal leaders are weighing a variety of responses.

From Gifts to Loans

Perhaps the simplest way of expressing the American Jewish preference that Soviet Jews go to Israel is through altering the ease with which they obtain financial help once in the United States. This would reduce the communities' costs in absorbing emigrants and would communicate to potential emigrants that an attitudinal shift toward them has occurred in the American Jewish community. An easy way to do this would be to supply all local help in the form of loans rather than

gifts. Since economics are a prime reason for a preference for the United States, altering the financial balance might have a significant effect on emigration, and it certainly will free local funds for other purposes.

Soviet Jews who seek freedom rather than mere professional advancement will certainly find it in Israel, and as olim they deserve all the help we can give them. But a personal search for economic advancement may have a lesser moral claim on Jewish community resources than more general needs, for example, Project Renewal's attempt to develop the human and social resources of the Jewish state. If American Jewry prefers that Jews make aliyah, then it should put financial weight behind that value judgment.

From Vienna to Tel Aviv

Some have suggested that Soviet Jews should be given the opportunity to experiment with living in Israel before making their final decision about where to settle. At present, Soviet Jews who might be inclined to settle in Israel fear that once they do, they will be unable to leave. They know that according to current U.S. law, as emigrants from Israel rather than as refugees from the Soviet Union, they would be ineligible for the transit and resettlement aid from the United States government administered by HIAS and various other agencies. More important, they would be affected by the prevailing highly restrictive U.S. immigration ceilings from which they are now exempted by the "Parole Law" that grants the Attorney General the right to waive quotas for Soviet Jews and other refugees.

Another proposal would transfer the transit camps from Italy to Israel. During the months of processing before proceeding to the USA, the emigrants would experience Israeli life at first hand and could then be persuaded to change their plans.

Both plans present several similar difficulties. The Austrians might object because they have always insisted that arriving emigrants be guaranteed the right to choose their destination freely; American officials would have to agree to the change so that Soviet Jews processed in Israel could retain their status. Israelis argue strongly that a Jew in Israel cannot be defined as a "refugee." Beyond this, the Jewish philanthropic agencies would be forced to spend additional money for transportation and re-settlement of the emigrants who reject Israel after a stay there. The plan could also engender severe tensions between "visiting" Soviets and indigenous Israelis. The prospect is that thousands of Soviet Jews, after having been supported for months by the overburdened Israeli taxpayer and contributions from abroad, might then choose the United States over Israel. Such an event would damage Israeli morale and fuel deeper resentment of

incoming Soviet Jews, making absorption of Soviet Jewish olim even more difficult than it is now. Moreover, other immigrants would have a right to claim the same opportunities, further delaying and complicating the absorption of all immigrants into Israeli society.

One version of the proposal contemplates eliminating Vienna as the first western arrival point. Then all would be exposed to Israel before making a final choice, which when made in Vienna reflects extraneous factors like discomfort with the high anti-terrorist security there and a desire to see Italy. According to one recent report, the Israeli government may ask Romania to let Bucharest replace Vienna. Emigrants would then fly directly from Bucharest to Israel. Romania, however, will probably not wish to involve itself in the potentially troublesome Jewish emigration movement.

The more "live" option, the one that has again aroused controversy in the American Jewish community, is one that entails radically revising transit and settlement procedures. Aryeh Dulzin, head of the Jewish Agency/World Zionist Organization, is calling for the elimination of Jewish-sponsored transit and settlement aid to all exiting Soviet Jews not going to Israel except for those in two categories: a minority (whom he estimates at no larger than 25% of the emigrants) with parents, children, spouses or siblings already in the United States; and the very small number (now 500-700 annually) leaving the USSR with America-bound Soviet exit visas.¹⁰

The Cut-Off Option: Practical Considerations

The principal advantage of the modified cut-off plan is the greater percentage of Soviet Jewish emigrants that it is expected would settle in Israel. A recent study by Hebrew University social scientists predicted that if transit and settlement aid were terminated, 53% of the breakaways would migrate to Israel.¹¹

If this plan were to work, Israel's manpower needs would be addressed, fewer Soviet Jews would eventually assimilate, the strain on American domestic philanthropic budgets would be eased, and the Soviets would be deprived of a pretext to curtail emigration. Thus the primary goals in changing policies would be fulfilled.

But there are disadvantages to the cut-off plan as well. The cut-off plan would be likely to create a situation in which thousands of emigrants would be intent upon reaching the United States by whatever means available. The Hebrew University study estimates that as many as 36% of Soviet Jews would fall into this category.¹²

If HIAS' services were denied to the emigrants, they could turn for transit aid to the International Rescue Committee, to Rav Tov of the anti-Zionist Satmar organization, to the Tolstoy Foundation (a tiny

anti-Soviet group based in New York), or to Caritas (a Catholic charity best remembered for providing meals to Jews who had converted to Christianity in the Warsaw ghetto). These groups are all eligible to receive per capita Federal funds that will cover most transit costs. This subsidy now flows almost exclusively to HIAS.

Cutting off aid would alienate the Soviet Jewry movement's non-Jewish allies, including elected officials. Their fundamental support is based on the right to freedom of emigration. Non-Jewish support has changed this issue from a parochial Jewish one into a major American policy on world civil rights. Non-Jewish efforts were essential in making U.S. trade benefits contingent on free emigration, in successfully fighting the "education tax" a few years ago, in providing \$24.3 million to settle Soviet Jews in the United States, in intervening thousands of times for individual Soviet Jews, and in giving the entire Soviet Jewry movement political credibility in the eyes of the Soviets. A weakening of the now solid political support for Soviet Jewry would be a serious blow to a movement which has secured the freedom of 200,000 Jews and will help achieve emigration for 50,000 more in 1979. What of the hopes of the hundreds of thousands of potential emigrants who have endangered their futures in Soviet society by taking the first step towards emigration?

The cut-off plan will demoralize American Jews motivated primarily by liberal ideals. Even if top Jewish leaders could be convinced that the objections to eliminating aid are outweighed by its advantages, the middle levels of leadership--agency board members, Soviet Jewry activists and those outside the established organizations--may well splinter the Soviet Jewry movement and organized Jewry in general if aid is eliminated. A similar debate in 1977 engendered anger and bitterness from which some agencies have still not fully recovered.

Thousands of Soviet Jews would arrive in Israel resentful about having been deprived of the freedom of choice granted to their predecessors, further complicating absorption. Moreover, many emigrants who would encounter unusual difficulties adjusting to Israeli society can now choose to come to the United States. The cut-off plan would mean Israel's being compelled to absorb many more immigrants whose professions, motivations, ties of family and friendship, and Jewish orientation make them less than ideal candidates for successful absorption.

Building a community of unwilling Soviet olim would strain Israeli society and resources while damaging Israel's image in the world at large and among Soviet Jews still considering emigration.

The cut-off plan would create a small group, perhaps 9% of the potential U.S.-bound emigrants, who would remain in the Soviet Union, where their chances of Jewish survival are doubtful.¹³ Thus a cut-off

policy would violate the Jewish principle that redeeming captives (pidyon shvuyim) should be done at virtually any price.

Israel has hardly been able to house and absorb the 15,000 Soviet Jews arriving in 1979. A further increase would only add to Israel's economic problems and further strain relations between Soviet immigrants and the indigenous population. Information about these strains has already damaged aliyah.

Finally an American Jewish leader with authoritative but confidential access to Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky has reported Kreisky's insistence that Soviet Jews be accorded "free choice" in their ultimate settlement destination. Fulfillment of his implicit threat to deny Austria as a transit point if Jewish aid to breakaways were terminated would pose serious problems for the logistics of the emigration movement.

Despite all these difficulties, at present the need and the pressures to do something are more compelling than ever. The breakaway rate has risen to a dismaying 70%. The absolute number of exiting Jews happily is greater now than it was in previous years. But this strains Federation budgets. Yearning for olim and for gestures of support from Diaspora Jewry are now peaking in Israel because of low morale there. No easy way out of this quandry is visible.

The Cut-Off Plan: The Moral Issues

Proponents of the cut-off plan reason that insofar as Jews act as a community, we are required to concentrate our money and energies on efforts that are most likely to benefit the Jewish people. Soviet Jews who want to go to the United States therefore have a lesser moral claim upon Jewish communal resources than those who make aliyah.

As Hebrew University professor Mikhail Zand, a former activist in the Soviet Union, said:

From the Jewish point of view, I would prefer to see this money go to my neighbors in Katamon (an impoverished Jerusalem neighborhood)....They are the Jewish people in the Jewish state....In the Jewish sense these people (breakaways) are lost....It is preferable that this money go to Jewish causes.¹⁴

Israel, the state which provides the diplomatic and much of the political resources to free Soviet Jews, has a moral right to require Soviet Jews without family elsewhere to try life in the Jewish state. According to this view, a mistaken moral absolutism (freedom for all; help all Jews always) has led American Jews to aid immigrants to the United States, who are not so much motivated by a desire to perpetuate Jewish life as by a desire to succeed in socio-economic terms.

In an unintentional competition that results from this boosting of America's "easy life," Israel is bound to lose, despite world Jewry's preference that Israel be strengthened, a preference that immigrants may not now be receiving with sufficient force.

Opponents of the cut-off counter that efforts to bring out Soviet Jews should be contingent neither upon their Zionist aspirations nor upon their religious commitment. We have no idea how much longer the Soviet government will permit the exodus to continue, perhaps only until the end of the 1980 Olympics, Brezhnev's retirement, or resolution of the SALT II treaty debate. It is a Jewish imperative to take maximal advantage of current Soviet leniency before policies change.

During the 1976-1977 aid cut-off debate, an editorial in Ha-Aretz, Israel's leading newspaper, noted that the Jewish tradition of redeeming captives (pidyon shvuyim) does not place conditions upon the freed captive:

The people of Israel have an ancient tradition of freeing prisoners. The question of who are redeemed and what they will do afterwards has nothing to do with the matter: the redemption itself is the supreme value. For this reason Israel cannot oppose assistance to the dropouts....Israel is entitled to hope that all will emigrate and to use her influence toward that objective. But she must not cross the borderline and deny aid to those who leave, for that would be a denial of one of the fundamental values of the people of Israel.¹⁵

In the Middle Ages, Jews redeemed captives even if they had converted to other religions.

For American Jews the problem is especially personal and poignant. The grandparents or parents of most American Jews lived in the very regions and towns that are now the wellsprings of Soviet emigration. Despite tsarist oppression, they had the freedom of choosing the United States or Palestine. They chose America for many of the current economic and professional reasons, and they were accorded significant philanthropic assistance. This history, with its very personal overtones, weighs heavily on the conscience of the American Jewish community and its leaders as they grapple with the difficult issue of Soviet breakaways.

Should today's Soviet Jewish immigrants be treated differently from their predecessors of three generations ago, differently from Jewish refugees from other countries threatening Jewish survival, and differently from the domestic poor who also represent a burden upon the Jewish community's energies, manpower, and treasury?

Neither the values of Jewish tradition nor those of American society justify denying aid. American Jews are not making wholesale

aliyah themselves. Should they force others who are temporarily homeless and defenseless to fulfill this obligation for them? American Jews are not denying aid to Argentinian and Iranian Jews who have fled to America. This is because American Jews have always supported the general values of equal opportunity (i.e., equal help to all Jews) and freedom of choice.

Deciding what to do about Soviet Jewry involves taking a stance on fundamental ethical questions about the relationship between the individual and the community and about the rights that each party can claim. Approaching the question from this perspective broadens its dimensions. Throughout Jewish history the community (kehilla) had the right to compel its members to act in accordance with its commands, which were intended for the good and the preservation of the group as a whole; errant members were punished. Individuals always had the right to the kehilla's protection and support but understood this right to rest upon group-loyalty and obedience. Is the breakaway issue one where the group's need is overriding? In America, where there has been a great shift to individualism, Jews overwhelmingly rejected traditional communal coercion. Do they then have the right to use it on Jews elsewhere? If there is such a right, would it apply in this case? The writers of this paper reject that possibility. Perhaps the Israelis have a clearer right to make demands since they do accept Jewish coercion as a result of the condition of Jewish sovereignty in Israel. But Americans must make decisions based on their own moral standards.

Conclusion

The final policy choice boils down to interpreting and balancing the individual Soviet Jew's preference and the community perception of its own welfare. Is this truly a case where the group's need is overriding? We believe that the cut-off plan would be unlikely to be successful if it were implemented. This strengthens our moral conviction that this is not a proper course of action. If we really believe in pidyon shvuyim, in the right of all Jews to receive aid from fellow Jews, and in freedom of choice, we must support a policy that poses agonizing problems and makes heavy demands despite our financial and psychological weariness. But before such morally drastic action (eliminating aid) is taken, at the least every other option should be explored.

These writers believe that the incremental steps suggested early in this paper are of paramount importance as the only feasible options for tackling this problem. In truth, the drastic shakeup of the absorption civil service is urgently needed. It requires a sacrificial and heroic willingness on Israel's part to overrule its entangled, duplicating bureaucracy to create a unified handling mechanism (as recommended in the Horev Report¹⁶). Despite its importance, it has not been imple-

mented. And a massive program to spread Jewish culture in the USSR has not been undertaken yet. Nor has a shift from gifts to loans. These offer far more promise of shifting the direction of Soviet Jewish emigration than does cutting off aid. Until these changes are fully made, the morally drastic way of refusing aid remains a cheap way out that weakens the moral claims of the entire Soviet Jewry movement and of the world Jewish community. The Jewish community should not make moral choices because of the vested interests of resources or professionals handling immigration in the United States. And it should not make such choices because of bureaucracies handling aliyah in Israel.

There are two dangers in the proposed cut-off plan which have not been adequately weighed. One is that this issue can lead to a polarization in which Israel's interest or moral judgments are perceived as being in tension with American Jewish values and goals. Pitting Israeli against American Jewish perspectives threatens to erode the common perspective and stand which are so fundamental to the strength of American Jewish support for Israel. For both Americans and Israelis this is too precious a commodity to risk for so tenuous and speculative a program. In exercising power, morality is never an absolute. But squandering moral capital for unpromising policies is a poor exercise of power.

The second danger is the risk of undermining the almost universal general support for the Soviet Jewry movement. It has been proposed that the cut-off plan be tried for a few months in its compromise form. If it does not work, it is argued, the previous policy of unrestricted support can be reinstated. Such a plan fails to allow for the impact of such a declared policy even for a brief period. Soviet Jewry's rights are supported on humanitarian grounds and out of sympathy for free immigration. This takes place despite some American businessmen who claim that the U.S. can make a lot of money by overriding the problem's moral dimension with practical considerations. Momentary waivering on the moral issue can make a grave and permanent breach in American support. One can imagine the moral dismay of our friends on Capitol Hill and throughout America at reports that American Jewry has cut off aid to Soviet Jews simply because they decided to go to America rather than Israel. If the precious treasure of the appeal to deepest American moral instincts for help to the oppressed is dissipated, it may well be irretrievable. Authoritative, sympathetic observers on Capitol Hill report just such a danger.

In today's world of international mass-communication, most issues that once languished unseen or unknown are now played out in the spotlight of the world stage. This may be galling and restrictive of our policy options. But it is an unchangeable reality. It may be that if this were a matter to be settled entirely within committed Jewish ranks, sympathy for Israel and empathy with its great need for aliyah

might tilt the balance of decision toward a cut-off of aid. However, in a world of universal publicity and news gathering, the subtle emotional ties among Jews that cause us to forgive and justify will not operate. The millions exposed to the policy change will see withdrawing aid as a breach of support for a deeply respected universal moral principle by the very group which has most benefitted from its application. Since Jews lack a world superpower's ability to impose policy objectives by force regardless of world opinion, it would be wiser to follow the morally right road. The practical disadvantages and moral difficulties inherent in the cut-off proposal regrettably make it unacceptable for the foreseeable future despite the enormous pressure facing the State of Israel and world Jewry. Thus implementing the incremental proposals stated early in this paper becomes the next step.

End Notes

- 1 Israel Yearbook on Human Rights, April, 1979.
- 2 "Costs of Resettling Russian Refugees," United Israel Appeal, July 20, 1979.
- 3 ibid.
- 4 William Korey, Foreign Affairs Journal, October 1979, Vol. 58, no. 1.
- 5 Interviews with the writers during July and August.
- 6 David Harris, "A Note on the Problem of the Noshrim," Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol. VI, no. 2 (1976), p. 109.
- 7 Keith Rosten, "Trends in Soviet-Jewish Emigration: An Interview Study," unpublished manuscript, Champaign, Ill., p. 11.
- 8 Betsy Gidwitz, "Problems of Soviet Jewish Emigration: An Interview Study," Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol. VI, no. 1 (1976), pp. 31-2.
- 9 ibid., p. 33.
- 9a See Zvi Gitelman, "What Future for Jewish Culture in the Soviet Union?", Policy Studies 1979, NJCC, April 1979.
- 10 "Whither Soviet Jews: The Debate Goes On," Moment, Sept., 1979, p. 8.

- 11 Study done by Professors Elazar Leshen, Urit Kahanov, and Yehudit Rosenbaum of Hebrew University as cited in the Jerusalem Post, June 22, 1979.
- 12 ibid.
- 13 ibid.
- 14 Keith Rosten, op. cit., p. 17.
- 15 Ha-Aretz, Sept. 22, 1976.
- 16 "Report of the Commission for the Study of Immigration and Absorption," Israel Government, September, 1976. Originally published in Hebrew; also available in English.

LIST OF AVAILABLE POLICY STUDIES

Policy Studies (\$1.50, one to four copies; \$1.00, 6 to 9 copies; 10 or more copies, \$.50 each)

- January, 1979 - "Will the Well Run Dry? The Future of Jewish Giving in America," by Dr. Paul Ritterband and Dr. Steven Cohen
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