

## PROBLEMS OF INTEGRATION OF SOVIET JEWISH EMIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA

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The title of this paper derives from the study on which it is based,<sup>1</sup> but the Australian situation should be seen as its focus, not as its scope. The problems of integration of Soviet Jewish emigrants exist in all the countries of their resettlement and, therefore, are not peculiar to Australia as it may perhaps be implied from the title. I shall include references to studies made elsewhere in support of this cross-cultural perspective. As its purpose is to promote better understanding of Soviet Jewish emigrants as a group among the established Jewish communities in the host-countries of the West (in this context I treat Israel as a Western country), it applies, again, not exclusively to Australia.

### A SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

My interest in these emigrants arose from my initial contact with them as a Russian-speaking barrister. As a group, they were distinguished from other non-Anglo-Saxon emigrants by a number of characteristics and, therefore, faced problems of integration unlike any other immigrants to Australia. By 1980, when mass emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union was suddenly brought to a halt, it was estimated that close to a quarter of a million had left the USSR. Of them, some 6,000 were admitted as permanent settlers to Australia, divided almost equally between Sydney and Melbourne. The data from both centres<sup>2</sup> established the following group attributes:

- (i) homogeneity: a great majority were men and women (including married women) possessing university or technical qualifications and professional skills; were in the "working age-group" (18-54); few couples had more than one child;
- (ii) poverty: uncommon of "skilled professionals", all arrived without any capital and with a few possessions, which made them dependent on welfare help;
- (iii) emigrants or refugees? The fact that the Jews can leave the Soviet Union only on receiving a *visov* (a summons) from Israel, disqualifies them from the status of a refugee as defined by the United Nations, as they have a "home" to go to. Their admission as permanent settlers to Australia was due to successful lobbying of the Australian Immigration authorities by the heads of the Australian Jewish Welfare Societies. In their submissions they relied on "persecution in the country of origin" and "material deprivation as a condition of exit" for admitting Soviet Jews as a special category of emigrants on humanitarian grounds.<sup>3</sup> In the final count, however, the successful outcome was determined by the additional factor, "possession of special skills";
- (iv) ethnic "marginality": although Jewish identification was a condition both for emigrating and settling in Australia, Soviet Jews felt too alienated from Judaism or

any expression of Jewish culture to join any local Jewish activities. Their lifelong socialisation under the Soviet regime had meant, on the one hand, total deprivation under the threat of persecution, of any access to Jewish knowledge and, on the other, an attachment to the Russian language and culture. As a result, they have been seen by the Australians, including Australian Jews, as "Russians" (in the sense of "Jews by default only"). To many emigrants, however, this specious designation had a derogatory meaning, as in Russia they had not been recognised as "Russians" but as "Jews by nationality" and treated as second-class citizens. Their ethnic position in the polyethnic Australian society was, therefore, marginal from the outset, and in socio-anthropological terminology they could be defined only as "an ethno-cultural group."

#### STUDY: THESIS AND METHOD

The problems of integration faced by Soviet Jews has been a subject of special interest to the sociology of migration that lent itself to a study in a socio-anthropological context. I approached it as a proposition (a "thesis") that it was their inability to find their Jewish identity that was the core issue of their finding a niche in a Western society. I further proposed that this inability has its roots in the ambiguity of Russian Jewry's position both under the Tsarist and the Soviet regimes, and undertook to investigate the former by a scrutiny of Russian-Jewish history, and the latter by anthropological method of "participant observation". Participant observation means a study of a subject-group by the closest possible involvement in its ongoing life, and compilation of case-histories based on interviews, preferably in the informant's own language, over a set period of time. My study, begun in 1981, took over six years and involved 40 families or about 100 individuals both in Sydney and Melbourne. All my informants knew of its purpose and co-operated fully.

"Integration", in the context of the sociology of migration, means "a process of becoming part of a host-society". Its equivalent in Israel is "absorption", reflecting the concept of "ingathering of Jews from exile". My study of the integration of Soviet Jewish emigrants in Australia has investigated the following separate (but often overlapping) aspects of their integration: I. Economic; II. Social; and III. Ethno-cultural.

Each aspect of integration has been affected by the following influences on the character-formation of these emigrants: (i) Soviet system of education and socialisation; (ii) attachment to the Russian language and culture; and (iii) life as a Jew under the Soviet regime.

#### ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Like other emigrants of non-Anglo-Saxon background, Soviet Jews upon arrival in Australia faced the major problem of overcoming the language barrier. In their case, however, it was intensified by the following factors: their penury and, at the same time, possession of marketable skills. The Jewish Welfare Societies both in Sydney and Melbourne have, therefore, mobilised all the available government resources provid-

ing English tuition for migrants and, simultaneously, looked for employment opportunities for them. By 1979, most of them had already crossed the Rubicon in having acquired sufficient English for holding an unskilled job or attending a retraining course, and this gave them courage to begin planning a transition to financial independence. In practical terms this meant leasing a flat, buying a car, setting up a partnership for a small business, etc.

It was at this time that I began receiving requests from Jewish Welfare workers to explain to their clients in the Russian language the "legality" of such simple transactions. They usually came by telephone to my Barristers Chambers asking either for telephone advice or a permission to send me a client for a voluntary consultation. Such contacts revealed to me a behavioural problem comparable to the fear of a child taking its first steps without support. To emigrants from the Soviet Union, the working of the open-market economy at first sight appeared as full of hidden traps as depicted by the Soviet propaganda. They were especially apprehensive of the credit system as the mainstay of capitalist economy. Bank-loans, mortgages, buying on terms etc. had no equivalent Russian terms in their vocabulary, being based on an alien concept. For instance, the advantage of buying a car "on terms" as a means of transport to work, when one is unable to afford paying its full price, was totally lost to an emigrant, to whom this transaction meant only "incurring a debt". According to an Israeli study,<sup>5</sup> the purchase of housing, etc. on credit represents a revolution in the behaviour of Soviet immigrants as consumers. To many it remained a cause of deep anxiety even after they had discovered that it is specially beneficial in conditions of inflation. This stems from the Soviet ethos of austerity, but also from the reality of everyday life: the shortage of consumer goods is such that one is happy to pay their full price whenever they appear (including the black-market price). It is interesting how this state of the economy is reflected in the language. Although Russian is my mother-tongue, the word *avoska* is a product of the Soviet regime. It is derived from the word *avos* meaning "if", and is the name for a string shopping-bag carried in one's pocket to be ready if . . .

It has not been easy for the Soviet Jews to learn to live in the private-enterprise economy where economic mobility is largely dependent on individual initiative. There is little scope for it in the Soviet Union's centralised system allocating jobs to everyone according to one's abilities. There is no unemployment in the USSR and, therefore, no "dole", but this does not mean that one does not have to change one's residence even to another city because of a job assignment.

I was learning of the differences between ours and the Soviet society through the mental make-up of the individuals confronting the daunting task of making their headway here. Although I was supposed to advise on a particular matter, it never ended at that. To many emigrants I was the first Russian-speaking person outside their own and the Jewish Welfare circles, and it was obvious that the process of learning was mutual. As my involvement with their concerns grew, so did my inability to cope with them in my professional capacity, and I decided to offer to the Jewish Welfare Society in

Sydney to give an informative lecture in the Russian language to Soviet Jewish emigrants about their civil rights and the legal system of Australia. This lecture, held on a Sunday afternoon in the Maccabean Hall, Darlinghurst, attracted a capacity audience and provoked an avalanche of questions. Shortly afterwards, early in 1981, I was asked to repeat it by the Jewish Welfare Society in Melbourne, and with the same result. These contacts with Soviet Jewish emigrants as a group had determined my decision to study their problems of integration into Western Society in depth. When I began my study in 1981, I had the advantage of comparing my findings with those of the late Dr. Elka Steinkalk,<sup>6</sup> conducted in Melbourne. They were largely congruent, which was encouraging, especially, as her study was done by a survey method largely based on replies to questionnaires.

Now, I referred before to that heritage of the life in the Soviet Union that stood in the way of the successful integration of Soviet Jews into Australian economy. But mention should also be made of those factors which counter-balanced the detrimental effect of that heritage, and have earned for the Soviet Jewish emigrants the reputation of dedicated professionals and self-motivated and keen workers. These factors stem from the Soviet system of education and socialisation. The standards of Soviet education are generally high, but especially in the sciences, and this is being recognised by the admission of Soviet graduates into the membership of the Institute of Engineers (Aust.) without any requalification.

As to Soviet socialisation, in implementing the aim of Marxism - Leninism or creating a *Homo Sovieticus*, a new type of Soviet man, it indoctrinates a Soviet child from an early age with the notion of work as a contribution to society's welfare and, therefore, the main source of satisfaction in life. This concept of work stands high in the Soviet scale of values. It pales in comparison, with the western notion of "job satisfaction", and is closer to the Protestant work-ethic by emphasising the non-material aspect of work. That this attitude to work is an important factor in the successful economic integration of Soviet Jews has been noted in an Israeli study<sup>7</sup> and reflected in their very high rate of employment in other countries.<sup>8</sup> But economic integration should be considered from two aspects. One is objective, namely, the group's contribution to the economy. The other is subjective, the group's own estimation of it.

At the end of my study in 1987 my finding was that from the viewpoint of their contribution to the economy (and the return rewards) Soviet Jewish emigrants' economic integration in Australia was an unqualified success. All my informant-families both in Sydney and Melbourne were independent of welfare financial help. There were no unemployed of working age in my sample. In a large number of families both husband and wife were income earners, but many wives worked outside their speciality. In terms of material returns, all the families owned a car. In those of more than one income earner two second-hand cars were a norm. All lived in home-units or flats "partly-owned" (their euphemism for mortgage) with loans from the Jewish Welfare Co-operative Society or from their employer companies. The heritage of Soviet urban

living conditions showed itself clearly in their preference for apartments and not houses on land. Only two families with young children succumbed to "the Australian dream" in this sense. It was obvious that all have overcome the initial anxiety over "incurring a debt". As one of my informants said: "over there, owning money was a stigma; here it is a sign of affluence". Good earning capacity coupled with parsimonious living habits enabled Soviet Jews to attain a standard of living much higher than those of other emigrant groups over a comparable period of time. Their rate of employment was also much higher, and the data from other countries confirmed these Australian findings.<sup>9</sup>

But how do the emigrants themselves evaluate their economic integration? The lowering of occupational status was a frequent response to my query among my informants. Steinkalk's study likewise showed it as the main cause of dissatisfaction with life in Australia by 43% of her respondents. In Israel, 57% of men and 53% of women had lower occupational position than in the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> American studies are even more specific. To quote an American psychologist:

. . . The loss of status is a threat to those whose profession . . . and position in the hierarchy of society became a large part of their identity. This kind of identity by status is very strong in the USSR. People who had it, cling to this status compulsively, for it reinforces their sense of being worthwhile and gives them the sense of security.<sup>11</sup>

In Australia, this loss of status is specially felt by Soviet doctors whose degrees are not recognised, and the standards of re-qualification are very stringent. Fortunately, there were very few of them in the wave of emigration under my study - due to the wise policy of the Jewish Welfare Society of discouraging them from coming. Those who came did so, obviously, at their own risk and for reasons other than the hope of resuming their careers in this country. Most were wives of other professionals. All were offered assistance by the Fellowship of Jewish Doctors, but, during the period of my study only two Soviet doctors re-qualified as general practitioners in Sydney and two in Melbourne.

Now, to sum up the factors responsible for the successful contribution of Soviet Jewish emigrants to the Australian economy: (i) the high standard of Soviet education, especially technical; (ii) the Soviet concept of work as a productive effort; (iii) a contrasting, more "relaxed" attitude to work in Australia.

#### SOCIAL INTEGRATION

That emigrants, especially those whose native language is different from that of the host-country, tend to congregate in separate enclaves is a well known fact. Closeness to countrymen is a source of emotional as well as practical support in a new environment. It is from these "informal networks" that the newcomers learn the ropes of both the economic and the social integration into the mainstream society. Before the advent

of the Welfare State with its community and (lately) ethnic organisations, these informal networks were the only footholds available to emigrants for settling in a new society. Paradoxically, they still exist today to cater for the needs of those emigrants who, for one reason or another, cannot have them satisfied by the more formal organisations. The Association of Jewish Engineers in Sydney, and the *Shalom* Association in Melbourne, are voluntary informal organisations providing a social and cultural milieu to Soviet Jewish emigrants which, for a variety of reasons, to be described later, they cannot find in any of the existing more formal organisations. Both organisations were formed in the late 1970s as a kind of self-help groups, but developed in a different way. In Melbourne, a group of Soviet Jewish writers launched *Shalom*, a Jewish-Russian fortnightly in the Russian language as a nucleus of socio-cultural activities under the same name. This publication played an important role as a forum for debates on problems of ethnic identification of Soviet Jews and as a link with Israel through its own correspondent there. Its demise after more than seven years of publication by a voluntary effort was a great cultural loss. In Sydney, the original organisation was formed simultaneously with the Association of Jewish Engineers set up by Soviet Jews but open to engineers irrespective of nationality or religion. The existence of the early emigrant organisation as an independent body did not gain favour from the "established" Jewish organisations in Sydney, such as the Jewish Welfare Society, the Zionist Organisation and B'nei Brith. In fact, each of them made efforts to place it under its wing, but all met with a stiff resistance by the emigrants, suspecting that any patronage, however benevolent, would imply the power of control. They preferred to dissolve the early organisation altogether and to transfer its assets to the Association of Jewish Engineers. In 1987 the Association of Jewish Engineers amended its Constitution, restricting membership to Jews and members of their families but also extending it to graduates of tertiary institutions of any kind. Besides the new membership provision, the Association manifests its Jewish character by being affiliated with the Jewish Board of Deputies and devoting a large part of its activities to Jewish interests and Jewish benevolent causes. Apart from these, the life of the Association centres around social and cultural events which recreate the atmosphere of the "circles" of the Russian intelligentsia depicted in the Russian classical literature. The *lingua franca* is Russian, and Russian speakers invited as lecturers are still more popular than their English counterparts.

The Association purports to perform, therefore, a dual function: to assert the Jewish identity of its members and to sustain their Russian culture. It stands, therefore, in between an ethnic and a cultural organisation, according to their sociological definitions,<sup>12</sup> and I had to invent for it a new term: "ethno-cultural organisation". This term reflects the "marginality" of the group's ethnic position, and it has remained unchanged to the present time. Although there has been some movement towards a stronger Jewish identification (to be discussed later), socially the group maintains its isolation from the Jewish communal life as well as from social contacts within the mainstream society.

As nowadays, in line with the Government's promotion of the policy of "multiculturalism" it has become common to refer to Australians with an indication of their national origin, such as Anglo-Australian, Aboriginal etc., it would seem appropriate to refer to Soviet Jewish emigrants as Russian. However, and despite the fact that they openly assert their "Ruskost" in the sense of attachment to Russian culture, in some contexts reference to them as "Russians" has been found deeply offensive. This is yet another facet of their "marginality" for which I had sought an explanation. In my case-book there is a record of the following incident: X declared in a highly emotional tone: *Tolko etovo nie bvatalo. Tam mi bili yevrei i is sa tovo biejali, a sdes mi russkie . . .* Fancy this: over there we were "Jews" and left because of this, only to be called "Russians" here. This man was a recent arrival. My first hunch was that because of his poor English he had taken an innocent remark as a slur. I tried to explain reference to origin as a current colloquialism. - No - he protested with the conviction of righteous indignation, - it had an offensive overtone. - To my question who the speaker was, he explained that he had overheard a conversation between two Jewish Welfare workers while waiting for an interview. I had to agree that, to him, in that situational context, the epithet "Russian" could not but carry a derogatory meaning. But I could think of other contexts where reference to Soviet Jews in Australia as "Russians" would be acceptable to them; even of their self-identification as Russian Australians.

For instance, one of my informants, a young musician, had felt so alienated from everything Jewish that upon arrival here he decided to become an "Unhyphenated Australian", in other words, to discard any ethnic identification and to devote himself totally to the development of a musical career. He was remarkably successful in both these goals. After only a few years he became a fluent English speaker with an unaffected Australian accent and articulation, and a concert pianist of acknowledged reputation. However, as he told me, he owed this reputation to his special interpretation of Russian composers. In the Australian musical circles he was proud to refer to himself as Russian Australian.

But Soviet Jews are not the only emigrant group of Russian birth - the criterion used in the Australian Census of 1981 - which shows some 28,000 such persons resident in Australia. The bulk of this number, or some 20,000, represents Russian emigrés or political refugees from Communism.<sup>13</sup> (also known as "White Russians"). The majority of them live in Sydney and maintain a network of communal organisations "promoting Russian nationalism in its monarchist formula and affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church".<sup>14</sup> Their centre is the Russian Club in Strathfield where the portrait of Nicholas II, the last Tsar, and the Romanov coat-of-arms adorn the entrance, and their mouthpiece - a weekly *Yedinyeniye* (Unification). The Club promotes Russian culture by arranging literary evenings, poetry readings and concerts by Russian artists. Another Russian Club, of a different political persuasion, best described as "not-anti-Soviet", in distinction to the one in Strathfield, is the Russian Social Club in Lidcombe. It has the support of the Soviet Consulate and provides entertainment in the form of Soviet film-evenings and shows by visiting Soviet artists. The existence of these two clubs is of

itself evidence of the disunity among Russian Australians. Neither Club because of its political orientation can provide a social milieu for Soviet Jewish emigrants. Despite the polarity of their political positions against each other, the heritage of anti-Jewish discrimination is common to both, and that it is still alive is shown by the following facts:

Some years ago a member of the Ethnic Communities Council in Sydney conceived an idea of uniting the migrant Russian-speaking groups into an "ethnic" organisation. He convened the foundation meeting at the Russian Club in Strathfield and invited to it representatives of several Russian emigré organisations as well as those of the Soviet Jews. No sooner, however, than the purpose of the meeting had been explained, the representatives of the Russian Cossacks declared that they would not participate in any organisation with the Jews, and walked out. This was the end of this project which might have led to some socio-cultural interchange of Soviet Jews with other Russian-speaking groups.

Now, this overview of "other" Russian organisations in Sydney explains both the longevity and the purposefulness of the Association of Jewish Engineers. The ties of the Soviet Jews to their political and cultural past may make them "Russians" in the eyes of mainstream Australians, but *not* in the eyes of emigré Russians Australians. On the other hand, their muted expression of Jewishness finds little encouragement on the part of "established" Australian Jews. In other words, they are "Jews" to the right-wing nationalist Russians; they are non-Jews to the Jewish Australians. In their own eyes they are, therefore, still "Soviet Jews", passive bearers of Jewish identification with but a slowly growing Jewish consciousness.

Interestingly, social isolation of Soviet Jews both from the Jewish communities and the mainstream population of the host-country has been a phenomenon observed cross-culturally. To quote from an American study:

There is a unique relationship between Soviet and American Jews . . . American Jews fought for the freedom of emigration for Soviet Jews and, upon arrival, assisted them generously in the process of absorption. However, there is a limited contact between them . . . Only 5.4% of Soviet Jews have some kind of social contact with American Jews . . .<sup>15</sup>

The same study quotes from an interview with a Soviet Jew who explains why he cannot become an "unhyphenated" American:

I don't have their memories, associations, past . . . I didn't collect baseball cards, didn't start driving at the age of 15 . . . I wasn't absorbed in comic books . . . My personality and that of the Americans was formed differently . . . Language itself is not an important thing. Even if all of America began speaking Russian I would still feel myself in a foreign country.

And an Israeli study shows that after five years stay in Israel 80% of Soviet immigrants had friends only among those of their background, and that even in the absorption centres for professionals from different countries, Soviet immigrants tended to

have the fewest social contacts beyond the family circle. After five years stay in Israel, 60% of immigrants stated that they had lived a more satisfying social life in the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup>

#### ETHNIC INTEGRATION

*Be a Jew in your tent, and a man when you go outside.* Judah Gordon (1830-1892)

The above epigraph says it all. The core problem facing a Soviet Jew in the West is his or her inability to *reassert* the belongingness to the Jewish nation, the identification with which was the precondition of emigration.

Larissa Bogoraz so expresses it on arrival in America:

Who am I now? . . . Unfortunately, I do not feel like a Jew. I understand that I have an unquestionable genetic tie with Jewry, I also assume that it is reflected in my mentality and behaviour . . . But I am accustomed to the colour, smell, rustle of the Russian landscape, as I am to the Russian language, the rhythm of Russian poetry. I react to everything else as an alien.<sup>17</sup>

Not knowing who one is in a new environment precludes one from creating "a tent" where one feels at home, and without it one cannot find a niche in a wider society.

In Australia, the debate on "Who Am I?" went on for years in the pages of Russian-language *Shalom*, an organ of Soviet Jewish emigrants. It has also been a recurrent theme in my interviews. But a number of my informants stated that the crucial question, "Who am I?" had arisen for them before the decision to apply for an exit visa for Israel. In the words of one of them:

It suddenly struck me that it meant a transition from being a "passive" Jew to becoming an "active" one. But how? It was a tantalising moment. If only I had the courage to prepare myself for it, risking persecution, as some had done.

To a Western Jew it is impossible to understand this experience without knowing the extent of ignorance of the Soviet Jews about anything Jewish. Mark Azbel, a famous physicist now living in Israel, so describes it in his book *Refusenik*:

My name is mentioned in the Bible, but I never learned about this until I was forty-two years old . . . I did not know a single Hebrew letter until I reached the age of forty . . . If I had tried to learn that would have been the end of my job . . . The standard history textbook . . . does not mention Judaea, nor Israel . . . There is no mention of Jews in any of school textbooks in the Soviet Union until Jews appear in the 19th century, completely without antecedents, as ruthless exploiters . . .<sup>18</sup>

But Azbel was at least able to learn from his parents about his Jewish origin at an early age. Most of my informants, aged about 40, were growing up at the time when their parents concealed their Jewishness, some because of fear of repercussions, and others because of a genuine conviction that the victory of Communism will eliminate all national distinctions. In most instances this question would arise when a child was called *zhid* by playmates and, later on, in having to declare his or her nationality during the roll-call at school. That being a Jew was an attribute with nothing positive to it, and that this notion, acquired early in life, had been later reinforced by discrimination

on entry to an university and during one's career, was the experience undergone by the majority of my informants under the Stalinist regime. Most of them, on reaching maturity, knew about Israel only what had been disseminated by the official propagan-da. Zionism was denounced as a tool of Western imperialism, and the expression of any interest in it as a Jewish cause invoked a risk of arrest and imprisonment.

One could not imagine more bizzare circumstances for the terse announcement in *Izvestia* on 5 December 1966 that Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality having close relatives in Israel may apply for exit visa to proceed there. The Soviet Union was then supplying weapons to the Arabs in the tug-of-war in the Middle East, and the outbreak of an armed conflict with Israel appeared imminent. It was also waging a virulent anti-Zionist campaign at home. How to interpret, then, except as an act of provocation, an invitation to the Jews to declare an intention to emigrate to their "homeland", Israel?

A widespread feeling among the Jews was, at first, that it was a device to weed out dissidents among them. However, those of them who had nurtured Jewish and Zionist interests and were, therefore, already under the watchful eye of the KGB, applied for emigration late in 1966. But, then came the breakdown in Soviet-Israeli diplomatic relations followed by the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967, the so-called "Six-Day War". The Israeli victory in this war was as unpredictable as it was stunning to Soviet Jews. Suddenly, Israel emerged in a new light as a modern and viable State. Consequently, there followed a flood of applications for exit visas. It intensified after 1969, when about 3,000 were actually allowed to leave for Israel and continued, with peaks and falls until 1980, when it was suddenly brought to a halt by the Soviet authorities. This unpredictability in Soviet emigration policies has caused traumatic experiences to many Soviet Jews. Those who thought of emigration for its own sake but were not emotionally or otherwise prepared for life in Israel, hastened their applications for fear that they might be forever left behind, even though this meant an immediate loss of livelihood and an indeterminate living "in limbo" thereafter. On the other hand, those few to whom life in Israel meant the fulfilment of their Zionist or Messianic dream, had their applications refused year after year, up to a period of 15 years.

It has been estimated that during the period of mass emigration ended in 1980, about 250,000 Jews left the Soviet Union. On its resumption, under Gorbachev's *perestroika*, from about 1983, some 10,000 were able to emigrate. But from about 1974 there emerged a trend, continued to this day, for Soviet Jews who had left with exit visas for Israel, to change their destination on reaching a transit point (Vienna or Rome), and to apply for admission to another Western country, predominantly the USA. This trend has been a cause of recent measures of the American immigration authorities to restrict immigration to those Soviet Jews who have close relatives in the United States, and of the Jewish Agency's decision to foot the bill of the travelling expenses only of those who proceed to Israel. The Australian Government followed the line adopted by the United States and is presently considering applications only from those sponsored by direct relatives permanently resident in Australia. This spon-

sorship is deemed to cover two-thirds of the living expenses of those waiting for visas in Italy, as well as of their travelling expenses to Australia, the one-third to be contributed by the Australian Jewish Welfare Societies. However, in the case of those Soviet Jews who are allowed to travel directly to Australia (i.e. omitting the European transit points) their air fares are still being paid by the Jewish Agency.

While representatives of the Jewish Welfare Societies have been lobbying the Australian immigration Authorities to expedite the processing of applications of those Soviet Jews who have been waiting in Rome, and have paid visits there to assess their living conditions, the policy of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) supported by the Jewish Welfare Societies is to discourage Soviet Jews from applying for permanent settlement in Australia. This policy, as announced in the Australian Jewish Press,<sup>19</sup> relies on the American experience of the Soviet Jews "dropping out of the Jewish communities" upon their arrival in the USA and, therefore, disclaims any obligation to assist "the transfer of one Diaspora to another" at the expense of diverting financial help from those who emigrate to Israel. This American experience was noted in a sociological study:

The beginning of Soviet Jewish immigration in 1973 caused a certain amount of enthusiasm on the part of American Jews who viewed very positively the prospect of newcomers adding strength and vitality to their community. Americans soon found out, however, that Soviet Jews were not really Jews in the same sense as Americans perceive themselves. While strong in national identity and possessing a sense of Jewishness arising out of Soviet anti-Semitism . . . Soviet-Jewish newcomers were rarely concerned with manifestations of Jewishness as a primary goal in their new American homeland. The honeymoon between American and Soviet Jews was over by 1980.<sup>20</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that Soviet Jews, whether they settled in America or Australia, do not manifest their Jewishness in a conventional way. They do not behave as Jews by observing Jewish festivals or rituals because they have no sense of tradition in doing so, and if their "ethnicity" were assessed by answers to a questionnaire about whether or not candles are lit in their homes on Friday night or whether they fast on Yom Kippur, their score, as a group, would be very low indeed. But, according to a noted American-Jewish sociologist, A.J. Epstein<sup>21</sup> who investigated by this method the "Jewishness" of a sample of American Jews, "ethnicity" has two dimensions. One, which is manifested in behaviour, he calls "public culture", and another, "intimate culture". The latter can only be studied by "participant observation" of the ongoing life of a home; of the behaviour of informants in the company of friends (Jews and non-Jews), at ethnic gatherings, etc. Epstein believes that the real test of ethnicity is the *transmission of intimate culture*:

The fact that American Jews continue to display certain special characteristics that distinguish them from other ethnic groups, such as the importance attached to education, the low rate of alcoholism, etc. despite the fact that many have abandoned a number of traditional Jewish customs, shows that something else has to be studied to explain these phenomena, and that it belongs to the field of intimate culture.<sup>22</sup>

As I had used "participant observation" in my study of Soviet Jewish emigrants

before I came across Epstein's book, the distinction he draws between two dimensions of ethnicity, each to be studied by a different method, has helped me to formulate the argument that it is wrong to assess their Jewishness solely by the standard of behaviour of the observant orthodox Jews. There should be a place, in every Jewish community, as there is, in fact, in Israel, for the recognition of the Jewishness of secular Jews. In their case, as with the Soviet Jews, one finds its manifestations, unexpectedly for the observer and at the unconscious level of the actors themselves, in the transmission of Jewish values going as far back as the *Halakhab*. I have found these values in the events not generally exposed to the view of the established Jewish communities in Australia. There is NO marrying out among the sons and daughters of emigrants - the generation grown up to maturity in this country. The concept of *mishpobah* among all Soviet Jews extends beyond the immediate family and often embraces the distant kin whom the emigrants had supported materially in the past and are now assisting in leaving the Soviet Union by all the ways and means they can. Considering the erosion of all ties with Judaism and Jewishness among the immediate ancestors of my informants, how to explain the transmission of Jewish values to their children over the gap of generations? In search of an answer I turned to the survey of the history of their forbears in Russia.

#### THE JEW UNDER THE RUSSIAN MONARCHY

I shall extract from my survey of this period one historical moment which represented the climax of aspirations of the five-million-strong Russian Jewry in the early years of this century. This world's largest Jewish diaspora had been confined by the Tsars for over 100 years to the Pale of Settlement, the *apartheid* policy of the time. While the aim of this policy was racial segregation and restriction of civil rights, its indirect result was the conservation of Jewish culture inherited from the period when the territory was part of Poland under the regime benevolent to the Jews.

The moment of my attention is 27 April 1906, the day of the opening of the First Russian Duma (Constituent Assembly) by Tsar Nicholas II. The Pale of Settlement was then a hot-house of revolutionary agitation aimed at the overthrow of the hated autocracy, but also a store-house of Jewish spiritual energy ready to burst out into the mainstream society in support of the Russian emancipatory movement. I propose to look at this event as it was seen by my father, a typical representative of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia. It was his hope that it would lead to the opening of the gates of the Pale so that Jews and the like-minded Russians could join hands as comrades-in-arms in a peaceful march towards the creation of the future democratic Russia. And it was this hope that had affected both his inner life and his external career, as it did of countless other Russian Jews of his generation. Because of this hope they did not avail themselves of the opportunity to leave the country of their birth for America or other lands as did the more far-sighted among them. No, the optimists did not take seriously the fateful admonition of Pobyedonostzev, the Procurator-General of the Holy Synod and the spiritual adviser of Nicholas II, that "the Jewish problem in Russia will be solved when one-third of Russian Jewry dies, one-third has assimilated, and one-third has

emigrated." Nor did they resign themselves to assimilation or death. On the contrary, they stayed because of their faith in the liberation of Russia and, through it, the removal of the shackles on their civil rights, including the right to live as Jews in the country of their birth.



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Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1978*

By intersecting my father's biography with the history of the period preceding by a decade only the October Revolution, I should be able to recreate the spirit of "secular Messianism"<sup>123</sup> as the credo of a Jew of the Pale who was both the bearer of the Jewish "intimate culture" and a member of the Russian intelligentsia. As Wright Mill said: "Every individual lives in some society . . . and lives out a biography within some historical sequence. By the mere fact of his living he contributes, however, minutely, to the shaping of society and to the course of its history."<sup>124</sup> David Einhorn, a Russian Jewish poet, wrote at the time: "I do not know how others number the years, but I count them from 1905."

My father was not in St. Petersburg when Tsar Nicholas opened the First Duma in the Throne Room of the Winter Palace.<sup>25</sup> Nor was he able to see the scene reproduced in the photograph below and yet he had lived through every moment of it, judging from his description of its every detail to me. I shall ask the reader to look at the photograph when reading the following lines.:

On the left side we see the Imperial Council and the Tsar's retinue, with men in formal wear and the ladies of the Court bedecked with jewellery. On the right side are standing the elected deputies dressed in the contemporary garb of merchants,

workers and peasants. Among the deputies are several Jews. One of them is Maxim Vinaver, a lawyer (my father's colleague) and a noted Jewish leader. For the first time the Jews of Russia had a public platform where they could present their case to the representatives of the Russian people as well as to the entire country. Moreover, it was Vinaver who was given the honour to deliver the Duma's Reply to the Tsar's address from the Throne.

Referring to the omission in the Tsar's address of any reference to the removal of civil inequalities of the Jews, Vinaver said:

It is becoming clear to us, Jews, that the Government has made up its mind to tread the old path. Let it be known to you that we Jews are joining the chorus of those voices which say unto you: Go away! We say with the voice of five million people: So long as you connive at civil slavery there will be no peace in the land.<sup>25</sup>

These were courageous words, the kind, perhaps, never yet heard within the walls of the Throne Room, quite apart from their being uttered by a Jewish lawyer, denied the membership of the Russian Bar. But Vinaver was enthused by the striking anti-Government coalition among the elected deputies and underestimated the reaction of the opposition that the speeches like his would provoke.



*The opening of the First Duma by Nicholas II in the Winter Palace on 27 April 1906  
This photograph shows the nobility on the left side of the throne  
& the elected deputies on the right side.*

Chloe Obolensky - The Russian Empire 1855-1914  
A Portrait in Photographs

And this is what happened. The Tsar used his residual power in dissolving the First Duma. As a protest, the liberal coalition, representing some 200 deputies, travelled to Finland, so as to be beyond the reach of the Russian secret police, and there issued the so-called Vyborg Manifesto, calling on all Russians to strike in protest to the dissolution of the Duma. But the only result of this action was the Order depriving all the signatories of the Manifesto, including Vinaver, from all electoral rights to the Second Duma. This secured its reactionary composition, and the same applied to the last two Dumas. The Jewish problem was never placed on the agenda, and the Government continued to resort to its policy of drowning the rising tide of the Revolution in Jewish blood.

My father was in Minsk, his home-town, on the day of the opening of the First

Duma. He could have been in St. Petersburg, having the right of residence there as a graduate of St. Petersburg University, but as he was denied the right of practising on his own, except as an assistant to a Russian lawyer, he considered this beyond his dignity and preferred the work of a legal consultant to a bank in Minsk, in the Pale, then vibrating with activities already mentioned before. The day after the Opening, pogroms swept over the main cities of the Pale, including Minsk, ostensibly being provoked by the celebrations of the event. In Minsk, my father was among the enormous crowd that gathered in the Station Square when the Governor-General of the Province, Kurlov, ordered the troops to fire into the crowd so as to disperse it. Over 100 persons, nearly all Jews, were killed and 400 wounded. Miraculously, my father was left unhurt. Only some months previously, the day after the issue of the October Manifesto by the Tsar promising the Constitution so as to quell the general strike which paralysed the whole country, Minsk was the scene of a similar celebration. It similarly brought on the loss of life of at least 100 Jews.

One had to possess unlimited optimism, therefore, to treat these anti-Jewish excesses as the last spasms of the dying regime, but this was characteristic of a considerable part of my father's generation born in the Pale in the 1880s - too young to remember the pogroms of 1881-2 following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. They knew, however, that even the mock-trials of the pogrom perpetrators could not hide the fact that they were hirelings of the "Black Hundreds", the secret army of the Tsar. Russian anti-Semitism, therefore, no matter how brutal, was directed "from above". According to this way of thinking, the Russian people were to be absolved from any ill-will against the Jews. They had been ignorant tools in the hands of the reactionaries, but now they were awakening, co-operating with the progressive elements in Russia. In other words, they were to be seen as allies of the Jews.

My father was born in 1877 in Minsk, one of the largest cities in the Pale of settlement. His father was a *maskil* determined to bring up his three sons in the spirit of *Haskalah*. They all went to a *Heder* before sitting for entrance examinations to a gymnasium, to pass which they had to get top marks because of the *numerus clausus*, and underwent the same stringent selection-test for admission to the university. My father did not attempt to enter the university on getting his matriculation but spent some time in a *Yeshivah* learning Talmud. His decision to become a lawyer stemmed from his reverence for the principles of social justice found in the *Halakhah*, and it was his dream to be able to apply them at the reformed Russian Bar after the downfall of Tsarism. His belief in its inevitability was purely Messianic in the sense that he was not an activist by nature; a passive sympathiser but not a joiner of any political party or movement. This non-involvement has always surprised me, as Minsk was the birthplace of Hoveve-Zion, the proto-Zionist movement, as well as of Paole-Zion, its left wing. It was also the venue of Zionist Conferences and those of the Bund (the Jewish Labour Movement). One of the Bund's most prominent leaders, Vladimir Medem, was my father's classmate in the gymnasium and one of his closest friends. Born in Minsk, Medem was baptised at birth but later returned to Judaism. His biography says

that he did so under the influence of his Jewish friends, and my father must have been at least one of them. My father's name was Alexander Boas Ginsbourg. The surname denotes West-European origin. Boas is a biblical name but Alexander stems from the Greek. When I was a child I liked to think that he was named after Alexander the Great, as it was after his conquest of Judea that the Jews together with the Greeks set up colonies in Tauris (now Crimea) still existing there since antiquity. I also thought that the composite origin of his name reflected the versatility of his knowledge: he was a classicist, knew several European languages and was very well versed in Judaism. But he was not destined to be a practising lawyer. Although his faith in the favourable outcome of political events had survived the fiascos of the Dumas, the notorious Beilis case and the loss of many of his friends charged with participation in terrorist activities, it was lost at the overthrow of the Kerensky Provisional Government by the Communists (the October Revolution). This event made him a man broken in spirit for the rest of his life, as it occurred only six months after Kerensky, as the Head of a new Government, abolished the Pale of Settlement, lifted all restrictions on the Jews, including the incapacity of lawyers to practise on their own and, generally, recaptured the spirit of hope surrounding the October Manifesto and the opening of the First Duma.

But the march of events produced a curious twist in my father's biography. During the Civil War the bank, in whose employment he remained for many years, entrusted him to save the bullion, first by taking it to Siberia, and then to its branches in the Far East. My mother and myself later joined him there. In a strict sense, therefore, my father was not a refugee nor a political emigré. He remained forever a Jew loyal to the Russia of his dreams. When I went to the Soviet Union for a short visit this year, I met some Jews whose parents had felt the same strong ties to Russia as my father did and who, therefore, sought accommodation with the Soviet regime in its early period, often to their peril. I have also met others whose parents had been determined to emigrate following the pogroms, as more than a million did, but missed their chance. Their children, without exception, envied my fate.

#### HOW REFUGEES FROM POGROMS BECAME JEWISH AUSTRALIANS.

It was, therefore, due to a totally unpredictable turn of the wheels of fortune that I grew up in a small but vigorous Jewish community in the Far East. I vicariously escaped, therefore, the inescapable fate of my contemporaries remaining in the Soviet Union to lose their Jewish identity and yet being exposed to vicious anti-Semitism.

But there were hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Pale who saw no future in Russia after the pogroms. Australia was then too little known to the world at large to become a target-country for Russian Jewish immigration, but there were a few enterprising individuals among them who braved the unknown and a long voyage by land and sea to come to Australia on their own with the intention of permanent settlement. The progenitors of two well known families, the Taft (predominantly of Sydney and Melbourne) and Silbert (originally of Western Australia) were such individuals. I intend

to summarise some facts of their biographies here so as to show how different was the process of integration of a Jew of the Pale from a Jew of the Soviet Union into Australian society. I derive the facts about the Silbert family from Eric Silbert's book *Dinkum Mishpohab*<sup>6</sup> and about the Taft family from the unpublished biography of his father kindly placed at my disposal by Professor Ronald Taft. The two families have this in common: both made great "quantitative" contributions to Australian Jewry. The progenitor of the Taft family had about 130 direct descendants, of whom over 100 are still alive. And Silbert's book includes a family-tree with some 500 names, counting spouses. Many members of both families have made important contributions to various fields of endeavour, thus integrating also "qualitatively" into Australian society.

Eric Silbert's father, Barel, was brought to Australia together with brothers and sisters, orphaned at an early age, by his older sister Fanny who married her uncle, Abraham Silbert. Abraham had been to Fremantle before, and set himself up there as a produce merchant. He and Fanny arrived there in 1900 from Breslau in the Pale of Settlement where they had been married. Barel followed with other children about two years later, at the age of 14. He worked for some time in Abraham's business but, having learned English quickly, soon became economically independent. He met Minnie Masel through the Fremantle synagogue. They were married there, and in 1922 Minnie gave birth to Eric, the author of *Dinkum Mishpohab*. Minnie's father, Joseph Masel, came from Grodno in the Pale of Settlement. He had been educated as a rabbi but was also a businessman. Seeing that there was no future for the Jews in Russia he decided to emigrate, and arrived in Adelaide with his eldest son Esor in 1887. He decided to settle in Fremantle, opened there a clothing business and immediately brought there the rest of the family from Russia. Eric's grandparents on both sides were Yiddish-speaking but his parents (Barel changed his name to Barney) already felt alienated from "the ghetto way of life." Barney liked Yiddish, feeling no need to perpetuate it, and Minnie received a secular education, had travelled widely before her marriage to Barney, and agreed with him that their children should be brought up as Australians. This meant that Eric and his brother were encouraged to play sport from an early age, and to socialise with non-Jews as well as Jews, as did their parents. Eric's education began in St. Joseph's kindergarten where he was taught by the nuns, and the primary school also run by a religious Order. Later he attended Christian Brothers' College as one of a few non-Catholic boys, and as he was not academically inclined, his parents decided that he would do better in a boarding school. Their choice was *Aquinas*, also the Brothers' establishment. The effect of this on Eric was that he only casually refers to his Jewish education, namely, the Sunday School and pre-Barnizvah studies, and calls them "ghetto-inspired institutions".

The result of this upbringing was that Eric chose a very 'un-Jewish career,' he joined the Royal Air Force at the outbreak of the Second World War. He later qualified as a wireless operator, which earned him a commission and a number of awards. After the war he considered remaining with the RAF, but this is not what his family wished for him, their argument being that "no Jewish wife and mother would like to share that

kind of life". Consequently, at the age of 24 Eric married a Jewish girl, Joan Tate, his childhood friend. As he says in his book: "Other than marriage, Judaism at this point was to become the most significant point in my life". This came about by their introduction to the Liberal Judaism, and Eric and Joan became pioneers of the Liberal Jewish movement in Perth. This involvement brought Eric to Israel as one of the Chairmen of the Menzies Forest. Simultaneously, he served as President of the West Australian Board of Deputies. He also played an active role in Apex, the Rotary and other mainstream Australian service and welfare organisations.

It is interesting to note that in the upbringing of their own four children, Eric and Joan followed the same path as their own parents, namely, "not tying them to Jewishness from an early age, but rather making this a matter of their own choice". Their son went to the Christ Church Grammar School, and the daughters to the Methodist Ladies College in Perth. Nevertheless, as Eric says, there were very few intermarriages among the numerous descendants of Silbert and Maisel clans.

As to the Taft family, Professor Ronald Taft's father, Grisha (Hirsh) Tafypolsky, came to Melbourne from Kiev in 1906. Why did he chose Australia? As I read in his biography written by his son, it was only his independent spirit and the love of adventure: first he went to America to visit his relatives who had fled there from the Russian pogroms, then returned to Russia to marry Olga Mushatovsky, and they both decided to board the ship to take them to Melbourne. At that time there were no more than 300 Russian Jews in Australia and about 100 of them had settled in Melbourne. Grisha had a flair for languages, and quickly learned enough English to set up a stationery shop in partnership with another Jew in the centre of Melbourne. The business did very well from the start and still exists today as H. Taft and Co. in Collins Street. Grisha had eight brothers and sisters and he brought all of them, together with their father Abram, then an old man, to Melbourne as soon as he felt settled. In 1922, after Grisha had moved to the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, where at the time very few Jews lived, he brought over from Russia 16 members of his family and some time later several members of his wife's family. They were all helped in setting up small businesses or in getting employment by Grisha and his brother.

As Ronald Taft says in his autobiography, it was the arrival of his numerous relatives from Russia, when he was a teenager, that had stimulated his life-long interest in the problems of migration. That Grisha found his home in Australia is best evidenced by the fact that he originated the first "chain migration" from Russia to Melbourne. But his attachment to his new country went further. Ronald, his son, was brought up exclusively in the English language and went to a denominational school. He does not even speak either Russian or Yiddish, nor was he given a traditional Jewish education despite the fact that he is a direct descendant of the "ghetto generation". Ronald explains this by his father's broadmindedness, despite the fact that he was himself deeply involved in promoting cultural aspects of Judaism in Melbourne. In 1911 Grisha became a foundation-member of the Kadima library and of the Yiddish Cultural

Group. In 1916 he joined *Chevra Kadisha*, the Jewish Orphanage, and other benevolent Jewish organisations, later becoming life-governor of some. Also, both in his lifetime and by his Will, he included in his *mizvot* beside the Jewish also Australian benevolent causes. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge, served on the Committee of the Victorian Children's Association etc., at times being the only Jew in their governing bodies. As to Professor Ronald Taft, his son, he inherited his father's interest in causes of wide Jewish concern and has written extensively on problems of migration generally, and, on Jewish migration in particular..

Now, my purpose in introducing these two family histories is a threefold one. First, it is to show the tolerance of Australian society in permitting the refugees of oppression to cultivate a double loyalty to their own group and to the mainstream society. Secondly, to compare the circumstances attending the arrival of these first refugees from Russia with those of the Soviet Jewish emigrants described above. And, thirdly, to compare both groups' "Jewish behaviour".

As we know from Hilary Rubinstein's article in the AJH Society *Journal*<sup>27</sup>, the Australian Jews viewed with disfavour the prospect of large Jewish refugee emigration from the Russian pogroms. They feared "the invasion of hordes of petty traders into the country with openings only for the tiller of the soil and for the skilled artisan." In practical terms, it meant that the forbears of Silbert and Taft families had no Jewish Welfare Societies to meet them and to offer help on arrival. No, they had to rely solely on their own motivation and limited skills to find the niche in an environment differing so sharply not only in language and culture, but in climate and calendar from the Russian Pale of Settlement.

We know that the forbears of both families showed little or no concern for the Jewish education of their children. They fostered their "un-Jewishness" at their formative years. There could be two reasons for this behaviour. One is the usual parental concern for the children's integration into the mainstream society. Another is the sense of emotional security in their own ethnic identity by the parents. This security is what Epstein calls "intimate culture", the concept I discussed before. It encompasses unconscious transmission of ethnicity to the next generation, which the Jews of the Pale passed on to the succeeding generations. The descendants of both families knew their origin and what it meant in terms of traditional Jewish values, and this sense of ethnic security enabled them to venture forth in contributing to the values of Australian mainstream society. Let me repeat what poet Judah Gordon said: "Be a Jew in your tent, and a man when you go outside". In other words, one must feel comfortable in one's own tent to be able to behave like a man on stepping outside.

#### NOTES

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Map - The Jewish Pale Of Settlement - Zvi Gittelman, *The Century of Ambivalence*;  
 The Opening of the First Duma - Chloe Obolensky - *The Russian Empire*,  
*A Portrait in Photographs*

ED: I have discussed with Dr Frenkel the intended significance of her remarks towards the end of her Paper regarding the effect of "intimate culture" on the mass of Russian Jewry prior to the Russian Revolution. I believe that it is desirable to avoid any misconceptions on the part of readers, while I appreciate of course that the author is entitled to present the matter according to her own knowledge and understanding of the subject. However, I am constrained to question

any suggestion - if intended - that the great majority of the Russian Jews would not have been concerned to provide their children with Jewish education, distinct from secular education, relying on their sense of "intimate culture" to maintain and preserve their Jewish identity. But, it depends on what the reader will understand by this concept. Dr. Frenkel agrees that most of these Jews would have manifested attachment to traditional values, including religious education. Nevertheless, she maintains that some of them continued to cherish their Jewish identity even when they abandoned religious customs to which others clung tenaciously.

It need not be disputed that some did in fact believe that their identity as Jews would persist notwithstanding their rejection of religious orthodoxy. However, while the majority of the Maskilim preserved their national-religious identity, some of the Jewish youth were thereby estranged from traditional Judaism (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol 14). Further, as is explained by Louis Greenberg in *The Jews in Russia*, Vol. 1 (pp 188-9), "the great mass of orthodox Jews repudiated everything Haskalah represented ... That these fears and suspicions were partly justified we have seen demonstrated in the eventual weakening of Judaism and in the derelictions from the Jewish ranks which followed in the wake of the Haskalah." As that writer concludes, only a change in the form of the Russian government could achieve emancipation. Even the Hebrew language was in danger of disappearing as a cultural medium. This prospect was lamented by the poet, Gordon, an exponent of emancipation:

*Alas! Am I to be the last of the singers of Zion  
and you the last of the readers! (Ha-Shabar, 11, 354)*

There developed, on the one hand, such as the Bund and others who sought to liberate the Jews from religious tradition by developing secular culture and national schools in Yiddish. On the other hand, the Zionists wanted Hebrew and stressed the unity of Jews everywhere. Accordingly, I would say that the influence of so-called "intimate culture" has to be carefully considered, avoiding generalisation, and giving due weight to all the historical facts of the situation. In my view, traditional, albeit orthodox, Judaism and its mores played a large role in the culture which preserved the identity of the Russian Jews.

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