

American Jewish History 1967-2005 Part 2

By Jerry Klinger

"If Tikkun Olam can be used in place of God, to repair God's world, then who needs God. If Jews do not need God then they do not need to be Jews. If Jews do not need to be Jews then intermarriage is O.K. and Jews will cease to be".

- Conversations with Safed

"The people of Israel is the State of Israel plus the Diaspora of Israel".

- Simon Rawidowicz

"The Diaspora will continue to exist, but only for two or three more generations, not longer. After that, Jewish ignorance will greatly increase in the gentile world, assimilation will increase, and no trace will remain of our spiritual heritage. Slowly, the material connection between the Jews in the golah (Diaspora) and those in Israel will cease, and when the State of Israel will no longer require its help and reconstruction aid, an end will come to the golah."

- Isaiah Klinov

SHORT SUMMARY OF EVERY JEWISH HOLIDAY

They tried to kill us.

We won.

Let's eat.

- Jewish American Humor

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

If I am not for others, what am I?

And if not now, when?

- Rabbi Hillel

Who is an American Jew? What is an American Jew? The question is not a conscious one for the vast majority of American Jewry. Who or what is a person or group in America is rarely a conscious question. The encompassing American culture of blending, leveling, assimilating and homogenizing into the majority consensus tends to answer the question for most Americans. For Jews, the implications are much more serious – the implication is long term survival and survival, as who or what?

America is extraordinary. In two thousand years of Jewish Diaspora history, America is unique. Freedom, as it has evolved in 350 years of American Jewish experience, permitted the Jew to be whatever he or she chose to be or chooses not to be; that is the crux of the question of American Jewish survival.

Rabbi Hillel put the problem in a simpler context two thousand years ago, *"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, When"?*

"May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable unto You...." is said three times daily by observant Jews during the Amidah prayer. The struggle for American Jews has been to remember the link between Hillel and the Amidah.

The years immediately following World War II, returning American Jewish soldiers and their home front communities, focused on building the American dream. Families were formed, cars and televisions were purchased. Synagogues were built. The dark realities of the Holocaust were put behind screens, out of sight. The European survivors of the Holocaust, for the most part, were not welcome in America. The survivors flowed back to the only land that wanted them: A land that has always had the Jewish people living on it, continually, for over three thousand years, the Land of Israel.

For American Jews, the Land of Israel and the concerns for a homeland has been an issue for hundreds of years. In 1825, Mordechai Emanuel Noah failed in his project to create a homeland for downtrodden Jews high up on the Niagara River, at Grande Isle, near present day Buffalo. Over time, American Jews savoring a very rare thing in America – tolerance, freedom and acceptance, came to see America, itself, as the new Zion.

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The rise of modern Zionism and its clarion call worldwide, return to Zion, rebuild the Land of Israel, created a dilemma for America's Jews. The dilemma was solved, for most, by identifying America as their home but recognizing, for the rest of Jewry, that there still was a desperate need for a return to their National Homeland. The impact on American politics was correspondingly real. As early as 1917, no less a figure than the former President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt called for the establishment of a National Homeland for the Jews in Palestine.

Today, the term America as the New Zion has vanished from the American Jewish lexicon. Israel is the reality of the New Zion.

In 1950, the American Jewish Committee, fearful of the age-old anti-Semitic threatening accusation of dual loyalty, established an understanding with the young State of Israel. Known as the Blaustein-Ben Gurion agreement it called for certain ideas to maintain peaceful American Jewish and Israeli-Jewish relations. The struggling young country was in no position to challenge American Jewry.

It was agreed:

that Jews of the U.S. as a community and as individuals have only one political allegiance and that was to the United States of America

that the Government and people of Israel respect the integrity of Jewish life in the democratic countries and the rights of the Jewish communities to develop their indigenous social, economic, and cultural aspirations, in accordance with their own needs and institutions

that Israel fully accepts the fact that the Jews in the U.S. do not live in exile and that America is home for them.

Conceptually it created a comfortable definition of who an American Jew was. It rejected historic Jewish national identity in favor of Jews and Judaism as a religion and not a people. It also reinforced a new problem, Israel is real.

Jewish intellectual thought struggled with the reality. Ahad Ha'Am, Asher Ginsberg (1856-1927), maintained that Israel would be the central hub of the new Jewish life with spokes radiating from it. Simon Rawidowicz (1896–1957), on the other hand, saw the unity of Jewish people. "*The people of Israel is the State of Israel plus the Diaspora of Israel, the two are one.*"

Attachment to Israel, for all its ambiguity, was and remains a key way American Jewry defines itself. Yet Israel is not the only theme by which American Jewry defined itself in the post war years. American Jews have chosen to define and identify who they are by activism in Civil and Human Rights, the Anti-Vietnam movement, Religion, Feminism, Russian Jewry, the Holocaust and most significantly *Tikkun Olam*.

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Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572), who lived in the northern Galilean town of Safed, first defined the concept of "*Tikkun Olam*". Rabbi Luria, one of the great Kabbalistic thinkers of Judaism, advanced the idea that God needed mankind to help God repair and return the broken world to its perfect order. Luria spoke in terms of personal perfection as the guide to world repair, "*Tikkun Olam*".

American Jewry, in the 1950's, energetically joined the American movement to suburbanize. Jews moved out of "ghettoized" Jewish communities and into communities that were residentially mixed with Christians. Jews were physically injected into the Christian world and Protestant ethos of Christian social activism. American Jewry needed to demonstrate to themselves and their neighbors that they were Good Americans who shared common human values with their Christian neighbors.

American Jewry's response was to evolve Rabbi Luria's concepts of *Tikkun Olam* into universal world improvement and perfection. A good Jew was working toward *Tikkun Olam*. It was a response that has broader meaning than simply, social justice and social action.

It was a response to understand, that which was not understandable in recent Jewish history. God did not cause the Holocaust, man did. It was the Jew's obligation to help God repair the world. As the prophet of old urged "*Justice, Justice shall ye seek*".

"*Proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all the inhabitants thereof*", the words of Isaiah are cast in bronze letters on the base of the Liberty Bell. Nothing could be higher in defining the purpose of who and why God had bonded with Jewry than to have every Jew a partner of God in repairing the world. It was also an outward, visible response to the Christian world for why to remain Jewish.

A crucial link in Jewish thought was changing. The American Jew's defining purpose was to improve America and the world. The key Lurianic link of personal repair to God had changed. If the Holocaust had been caused by man, without God, then man could repair the world without God.

A theological discussion from modern Safed characterized the problem succinctly. "If *Tikkun Olam* can be used in place of God, to repair God's world, then who needs God? If Jews do not need God, then they do not need to be Jews. If Jews do not need to be Jews then intermarriage is O.K. and Jews will cease to be".

The failure to tightly link *Tikkun Olam* and religion changed the perception and role of the American Jew. The change would underlie most of the who and what was American Jewry for the last half of the 20th century and on.

Jews declined as a percentage of the American population, from about 5-6% in 1945 to under 2% by 2005. American Jewish life between 1967 and 2005 is characterized by low birthrates, less than 1.6 per family and very high intermarriage rates, approaching 50%. The American Jewish Identity Survey estimated that 2,345,000 individuals whose grandparents had been Jewish, today, practice another religion. Clearly, the children of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish marriages overwhelmingly no longer identified themselves as Jews.

During the 1980's, patrilineal descent was accepted by Reform Judaism. In 2005, the American Conservative movement is struggling with the very same issue of patrilineal descent, acceptance and survival. Patrilinealism permits the children of a non-Jewish mother to be counted as Jews. As a consequence, conversion rates, in mixed marriages, have dropped off significantly.

Reform Judaism in the 1990's, with its more lenient interpretation of tradition, religious obligations and open acceptance of mixed marriages, reclaimed its position as the largest Jewish religious affiliation. Reconstructionism, the most liberal movement, with the least stringent requirements defining who is a Jew, became the fastest growing Jewish movement.

Intermarried Jews tended to marry for love and felt that ethnicity or religion was not important. In mixed relationships the Jewish sense of communal responsibility for fellow Jews, including identification with Israel, declined dramatically. In 2005, one third of all American Jews live in mixed Jewish –non-Jewish households.

The absolute number of Jews in America did increase, slightly, between 1945 and 2005. The absolute numbers increased because of Russian Jewish and Israeli immigration, along with counting households where one family member was Jewish, kept Jewish numbers up. Demographically, the implication is clear. If the offspring of intermarried unions remained Jewish, American demographics and the implications for Jewish survival in America would be radically different.

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"Always come to the aide of those who are being oppressed," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, (1772-1810). American Jewry listened for two reasons. First and most importantly Jews knew that how the weakest links in society would be treated, the Jew was not far behind. It was in American Jewish interest to protect itself by protecting others. The second was *Tikkun Olam*. The American Jew had an obligation to improve America.

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The story of Jewish American support, sacrifice and extraordinary sharing of painfully achieved status with their fellow Black American citizens, is virtually unique in American history. Julius Rosenwald, chairman of Sears and Roebuck, contributed more generously in behalf of Southern Blacks than did any philanthropist in American history.

Joel and Arthur Spingarn helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Jack Greenberg succeeded Thurgood Marshall as head of the NACCP legal Defense fund. Jewish organizations such as American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, and the Anti-Defamation League were in the front lines of the struggle for racial equality and justice in America. Jewish money was crucial in the struggle.

More than half of the whites who went to Mississippi in 1964 to challenge Jim Crow were Jews, and about half of the civil rights attorneys in the South during the 1960s were Jews. Between 1954 and 1959, 10% of all terrorist bombings in the South were directed against Jewish targets. Jews constituted about 1% of the population of the South.

In 1956, conservative Rabbi Israel Goldstein, who headed the American Jewish Congress said, " we must defend the rights of the Negro as zealously as we defend our rights as Jews whenever and wherever these might be threatened."

Jews offered their very lives so that American Blacks could achieve freedom. June 21, 1964, two young Jewish voting rights organizers, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, along with a young Black man, James Cheney, were murdered in Mississippi. Their murders became the catalyst of national outrage and world focus that lead to major advancements in the struggle for Black civil rights.

Influential Rabbi Abraham Heschel, a staunch anti-Vietnam war liberal, was a close friend of Martin Luther King. Heschel walked arm and arm with King through the dangerous streets of Selma, Alabama, visibly, morally and physically, linking American Jewry to the Black American struggle. Heschel would be shaken to his core when, in 1967 with Israel facing extermination, those friends for whom he had sacrificed so much in the civil rights movement were not there in Israel's time of need.

Although the bonds of *Tikkun Olam* between the Black and Jewish communities would not be broken between 1967 and 2005, they would be severely strained. The Nation of Islam, an American Black movement, was founded in 1913 by Noble Drew Ali. He was succeeded by W.D. Ford in 1934. Ford, like his predecessor, disappeared under strange circumstances and was followed by Robert Poole.

Robert Poole took the name Elijah Muhammad and began the rapid rise and influence of the Nation of Islam in the general American Black community. The Nation of Islam quickly adopted Muhammad's anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic views in the 1940's and 1950's. In the 1960's, Elijah Muhammad was challenged for leadership by Malcom Little, better known as Malcom X. Malcom X was in turn murdered by a member of the Black Muslims in 1965. Malcom X's autobiography is required reading in many American high schools today.

The Black Muslims, along with many rising, highly visible Black power groups such as the Black Panthers (Huey Newton), the Freedom and Peace Party (Eldridge Cleaver), the Black Caucus (H. Rap Brown) had fully integrated, advanced, taught and energetically promoted Black pride awareness and for some, anti-Semitism. As anti-Semitism decreased amongst educated Whites it grew amongst educated Blacks.

For American Jews it was a horrific quandary. Nothing more clearly characterized the changing relationship than the New York School Board issue of 1967-1968, in Ocean Hills, New York. Essentially a struggle of control, the heavily Jewish teachers union vs. the local Black power groups over local patronage and control of the educational system.

The struggle quickly degenerated into anti-Semitic venom as the established Black community failed to clearly interfere when the most vicious forms of anti-Semitism were condoned. The African American Teachers Association representative championed an award-winning poem by a 15-year-old Black student.

*"Hey, Jew boy, with that yarmulke on your head
You pale-faced Jew boy – I wish you were dead:
I can see you, Jew boy – you can't hide
I got a scoop on you – yeh you gonna die"*

The Black spiritual leader, Reverend Jesse Jackson, rose to national prominence as head of the "Rainbow Coalition" in the 1970's and 1980's. His anti-Semitic jokes about Hymietown in 1984 and his refusal to distance himself from the most vicious of Black anti-Semites, Louis Farrakhan, the new head of the Nation of Islam, left every major Jewish organization uneasy. American Jews were horrified, confused, angered and frightened by the sudden change of the perceived climate after they had tried repairing the world so hard.

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Questions of personal morality and personal decisions of right and wrong had come from the Holocaust and the subsequent Nuremberg War Crimes trials. A generation of young Jews was raised to question orders and evaluate them from the standpoint of morality and *Tikkun Olam*. The Vietnam War was a national question of right and wrong. "*Make love, not war*" became the national mantra.

Jews were in the front ranks of anti-war protest. In the 1960's it was estimated that ½ of the University of Chicago anti-war protestors were Jews. At Columbia the estimate was 1/3 and at

the University of Wisconsin ¼ of the protestors were Jews. In 1964 at University of California, Berkley, the "Free Speech Movement" originated.

It was a predecessor to the counter culture and anti-war movements. Six of the eleven initial founding organizations were Jewish. Anti-war activist, Abbie Hoffman, led the rioting against the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. He was tried before another Jew for the rioting, Judge Julius Hoffman, of no relation.

The generation of the anti-war protesters were part of a major disconnect from Jewish historical consciousness. Having grown up in the American world of freedom, toleration and acceptance, the memory of European and world Jewish history was absent from their awareness.

Some of the Jewish protest leaders, Mark Rudd of Columbia and Bettina Aptheker of Berkley were themselves children of protest leaders from the 1930's communist movements. Rudd and Aptheker were protesting more than simply the war. They were protesting who they were, the bourgeois Jewishness of their parents and the Jewish establishment's abandonment of their Jewish birthright; *Tikkun Olam* as they defined it.

Howard Sacchar in his excellent *History of the Jews in America*, wrote, "*Jewish anti-war participation was a source of heartache and intense soul-searching (fear)*" December, 1970 Commentary magazine Earl Raab "*The Deadly Innocence of American Jews,*" warned Jewish new Leftist that their politics of intimidation and disruption was threatening the very freedom that had provided them with their minority rights. In the same journal, Nathan Glazer minced even fewer words. *The identification of Jews with the critics of the Vietnam War, he pointed out, a war fought by the children of Middle America, those who did not go to college, could lead someday to the rise of an anti-Semitic 'stab in the back' myth.*"

Some Jewish protesters aligned themselves with the radical, anti-establishment, SDS, Students for a Democratic Society. In time the SDS was dominated by the destructive third world, pseudo anti-colonialist rhetoric. Again Howard Sacchar wrote very insightfully: "In Sept. 1967 during the SDS convention in Chicago, Stokely Carmichael and other Black Caucus delegates persuaded the SDS to brand Israel an outpost of Western imperialism, to denounce Zionism as "imperialist racism," and to castigate Israel's American – that is, Jewish supporters as members of the imperialist establishment." 3 months after 1967 war, this assault now by their putative ideological allies and especially by their black colleagues, left Jewish SDS members stunned.

Great majority of Jewish SDS members simply faded out the organization. 1969 M.J. Rosenberg, Feb. *Village Voice*, "*From this point on I shall join no movement that does not accept and support my people's struggle. If I must choose between the Jewish cause and a 'progressive' anti-Israel SDS, I shall choose the Jewish cause. If barricades are erected, I will fight as a Jew.*"

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The surging struggles of the Civil Rights and Anti-War movements reawakened a human rights struggle that had begun 120 years earlier. The first women's rights convention was held In Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. The focus was women's suffrage, the American right to vote.

Women did not achieve suffrage until the passage of the 19th amendment to the Constitution of the United States in 1920.

American Jewish women participated as supporters of the suffrage movement. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the heavily Jewish labor union, strongly and vocally supported the suffrage efforts. For the most part American Jewish women were not among the leadership of suffrage. Jews, the vast majority of whom were relatively recent immigrants, tended to focus on family and building a new life in America. Religiously, Jewish women displayed the same conservative outlook as men but with Americanizing their views began to change. Rachael Frank was the first Jewish woman to assume the position of Jewish educator and near Rabbi in the American West in the 1890's.

Twenty six liberal Protestant denominations had agreed to ordain women by the 1920's; the first Jewish woman to be ordained a Rabbi was Sally Preisand. Rabbi Preisand was ordained by the American Reform movement in 1972. The American Conservative Movement ordained its first woman Rabbi in 1985, Rabbi Amy Eilberg.

The 1950's and 1960's were amplifiers of human rights and *Tikkun Olam* in America. In 1963, American Jewish Women took the leadership of and reinvigoration of the American Women's movement. Betty Friedan (Naomi Goldstein) published the "Feminine Mystique". Within three years the book sold 2,000,000 copies – feminism was now human rights, social activism, *Tikkun Olam*. Friedan said about her commitment to feminism, "*it was really a passion against injustice....which originated from my feelings of the injustice of anti-Semitism*". Friedan along with a predominantly Jewish leadership, Susan Brownmiller, Shulamith Firestone, Naomi Weinstein, Karen Lipschutz Decrow, Muriel Fox, Gloria Steinem, founded the National Organization of Women in 1966.

The women's movement surged like a great wave upon Jewish institutions. *Ezrat Nashim* (Helping Women), founded in 1972, burst in upon the all male conservative Rabbinical Assembly meeting and demanded that:

1. women be granted membership in synagogues
2. women be counted in minyan (religious quorum)
3. women be allowed full participation in religious observances... (including being called up to the Torah, reading the Torah, and chanting the prayers.)
4. women be allowed to initiate divorce
5. women be permitted and encouraged to attend Rabbinical and Cantorial schools and to perform Rabbinical and Cantorial functions in synagogues
6. women be encouraged to join decision-making bodies, and to assume professional leadership roles, in synagogues and in the general Jewish community
7. women be considered as bound to fulfill all mitzvot equally with men.

The women's movement revolutionized American Jewish life. The role and place of women in the community and in the home was changed. By the end of the decade, the reform movement had 335 ordained women Rabbis, the Reconstructionist had 98. By the end of the decade, among

all except the smallest of the major American Jewish religious movements, the Orthodox, women and the demands of *Ezrat Nashim* were being fully integrated.

There is a dark side to the changes that still have not been clarified. As women rose to roles of deserved and earned respect in synagogue life, serving as Rabbi's, Cantors, religious school principals, presidents of congregations, the numbers of men participating in American religious leadership and life has declined. Instead of doubling the available leadership by including women the effect has been the opposite. It has permitted American Jewish men, who no longer were singularly required to participate in religious life, to opt out. For the majority of American Jews if a minyan, or quorum (10) of Jews to hold prayers is required, rather than men and women mandatorily going together it is quite common for a family to be represented by the husband or the wife. Synagogue attendance has not doubled.

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The turmoil of the 1960's from the outside led young America Jews to try and refocus on the inside. The baby boom, Dr. Spock generation had tried counter-culturalism in the 60's as the media glorified the "Flower Children". Many had gone in search of identity and values seeking understanding and definition in everything but traditional Judaism.

Some searched for and found meaning in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Eastern mysticism, the Hare Krishna movement for example. Some tried and still do try to define themselves as Jews while proclaiming themselves as Christians – Jew's for Jesus. The majority experimented and drifted. The 1970's saw a renewed search for religious significance from within Judaism and away from counter-culturalism.

The Jewish Catalogue, edited by Richard Siegel and Sharon Strassfield was published in 1973. By the end of the decade it had sold 750,000 copies. The Jewish Catalogue, soft covered and brightly colored with pictures, was a "how to" book. Young Jewish America needed, wanted and found a book on how to be Jewish. The Catalogue was not a theistic tome but rather a practical guide to the ideas of Judaism, the symbols of Judaism and the application of Judaism. The Catalogue gave young Jews permission to create their own Judaism, or to accept, understand and adopt more traditional forms of Judaism.

The new awareness that the Catalogue opened merged with a grass roots, create your own Judaism and community. The Havurah Movement emerged in Sommerville, Massachusetts in 1968 with the establishment of the Havurat Shalom Community Seminary. The seminary and the supporting community of liberal, politically active and socially active individuals, sensitive to the ideals of *Tikkun Olam*, was a reflection and adaptation of the ideas of the founder of American Reconstructionist Judaism, Mordechai Kaplan in the 1920's.

The Havurah ideal and the search for meaning and identity among young American Jews merged with the how to Jewish Catalogue and emerged in the Havurah movement. Counter-cultural American Judaism became O.K. The Havurah concept, small in absolute numbers, quickly grew into a national movement. It had touched a responsive chord.

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Orthodoxy in America is and was a minority movement comprising about 10-15% of the American Jewish community. Their influence has been far disproportional to their numbers, as the majority of American Jewry, who tend to non-traditional observance, have deferred to a conceptual mystique that traditional Orthodoxy is somehow closer to pure Judaism.

The end of World War II shifted the center of Jewish life to America. Numerous ultra orthodox surviving "*Rebbs*" of the old European world moved to the new world. They in turn decided that the New World must be made into the old world religiously for Jews to survive.

None were more visible and strikingly successful than the American Chabad Lubavitch Movement under Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Schneerson's influence has spread worldwide, not just in America. Chabad actively proselytizes among Jews everywhere. Schneerson died in 1997 without an heir. Some in his movement have campaigned to proclaim Schneerson, posthumously, as the Messiah.

After 1967, American Judaism's search for religious values did lead to a mild revitalization of all branches of American Judaism with increased awareness of traditional observance. Orthodox Rabbinic outreach ranged from and through the music of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach and his "House of Love and Prayer" in the hippie Haight Ashbury section of San Francisco to Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, the mentor of the Jewish spiritual renewal movement.

In the age of awareness, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, carried the message of that feminism is not inconsistent with orthodoxy and modern life. Yet even with all the religious revitalization even the orthodox community only retained 42% of those born into the American orthodox fold as Orthodox Jews. The assimilating pull of American culture is very strong.

Jews wanted to be Jews. They also wanted to look like and be Americans. A young child once said in December to his parents, "I don't want to be Jewish, I want to be Christmas." Symptomatic of the Jew's struggle for identity, though an extreme isolated example, was the bizarre denial and rejection of being different by Frank Collin, the leader of the American Nazi Party. Frank Collin was the son of an Irish father and a Jewish mother who survived the Holocaust concentration camp of Dachau.

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The miraculous victory of Israeli arms in 1967 raised Jewish pride, awareness and consciousness not just in America but also in the third largest Jewish community in the world, the former Soviet Union with 2,000,000 "Jews of Silence". The decaying Soviet system had reinforced its centuries old base of Russian anti-Semitism by attempting to culturally destroy and eradicate Jews by destroying Jewish identity. The 1967 victory undid decades of Soviet effort. At the grassroots level, Russian Jewish Zionism was rekindled and Russian Jewish desire to escape the failing Soviet system by emigrating grew into full-fledged action. The Soviet Jewish "Refusenik" movement was born.

Thirteen Soviet Jewish activists, late in 1969, conceived and nearly carried out a plot to hijack a passenger aircraft in Leningrad and force it to fly to Sweden. They would request political asylum in Sweden and then travel to their ultimate home – Israel. The plot was discovered and the activists were arrested before the plane could be taken over. The activists were put on trial six months later for treason not for air piracy.

The Refusenik community used the six months to maximum advantage. World attention was drawn to the incident not in terms of air piracy but in terms of human rights, freedom. The Soviet anti-Semitic system and effort to destroy the Jewish community was put on trial instead.

For American Jews, the plaintive cries of another Jewish community for help did not go unanswered this time. American Jews would not permit another Holocaust. They had failed in World War II and were impotent in the 1967 war. They would not be still yet again. For American Jews, saving Soviet Jewry became a religion; religion is one thing but power is something else. The power of the American government was brought to bear in an offensive that led to Soviet Jewry's liberation.

The first American conference on Soviet Jewry was organized by Moshe Decter in October of 1963. However, it was not until 1971 that the National Conference on Soviet Jewry became a permanent reality whose purpose was to make American Jews aware and responsive to the plight of Soviet Jewry. "*Save Soviet Jewry*", "*Let My People Go*", "*Remembrance Days*", "*Sabbath's of Concern*", silent candlelight vigils across the street from the Soviet Embassy on 16th Street in Washington, or Soviet consulates around the U.S., posters, newspaper stories, Rabbinic activism from the pulpit, became part of everyday life.

The energy poured into the Soviet Jewry movement far outstripped what had been done pre and during WWII for the dying Jews of Europe. American Jewry was not going to let it happen again. They would be activists but activism needed political power. The power came from a non-Jew, a death camp soldier liberator and in 1972, a U.S. Senator, Henry Jackson of Washington State.

The Soviet Communist economy, in 1972, was showing severe signs of strain and impending future collapse. The Soviets were in desperate need to significantly improve their economy by trade with the West, in particular the U.S. A key to improving the Soviet economy by trade with the U.S. was to obtain most favored nation trading status; that status had been difficult to obtain until a linkage was made. The linkage was extraordinary. The linkage was remarkable. The linkage represented the finest chapter in the American Jewish experience.

Simply said an amendment was proposed to the Trade Reform Act that been before congress since 1972. The Soviets would have to permit the human right of open and free emigration of its citizens, i.e. the Soviet Jews. On January 10, 1975, President Ford signed the act granting most favored nation trading status to the Soviets – the Jews were free to leave.

Soviet Jewry poured out. In the Austrian transition camps they were given the choice of where to emigrate to, Israel or somewhere else. American Jewry wanted the emigrants to come to America over Israel; it was part of the American religious credo to save Soviet Jewry. American

emissaries promoted Jewish immigration. American Jewry was so eager to have Soviet Jewish immigration to America that it had agreed to significantly underwrite, along with the American taxpayer, the cost of American immigration.

American Jewish groups, organizations, synagogues and communities undertook the cost of absorption into Jewish America. By 1989 the huge numbers of Soviet Jews who actually had come to America was over 100,000. The floodgates were bursting with more who wished to come.

In 1989 the American Jewish Federations decided that they could not afford the cost anymore and suddenly became ardent Zionists. Israel would be the future first home of choice for the new Soviet emigrants. The difference between American Jewry and Israel was that no matter the cost, Israel wanted the fleeing Jews.

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Syria and Egypt jointly attacked Israel during one of the holiest periods of their religious calendar, when aggressive war was specifically prohibited by Islam, during Ramadan. The attack was timed to hit Israel when it would be its weakest, when its defensive lines would be depleted by soldiers on leave for the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. The almost overwhelming attack across the Suez Canal and in the Golan heights began on Oct. 6, 1973, Yom Kippur.

The war went badly for Israel in the beginning. Losses of life, material and land were horrendous. Egyptian tanks crossed the Suez Canal and poured into the Sinai desert heading toward Tel Aviv. Syrian Tanks flooded the Golan and threatened to swoop down on Northern Israel and destroy it. Only massive Israeli sacrifice and a huge American airlift of military supplies reversed the impending disaster.

President Richard Nixon, ironically personally anti-Semitic, followed the advice of his Jewish secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. Nixon would not permit Soviet military hegemony in the Middle East by permitting the Soviet client states of Egypt and Syria to destroy Israel. In the greatest tank battles in history, Syrian armor was crushed in the Golan. Israel counterattacked in the Sinai.

Israeli forces fiercely led by the barrel chested General Ariel Sharon, recrossed the Suez Canal, trapping the Egyptian Third Army and capturing large portions of the Egyptian territory on the west side of the Canal. American pressure prevented Israel from capturing Cairo itself and dictating a peace.

Syria was pushed back and the old, tense, status quo was reinstated. But in Egypt, under the new leadership of Anwar Al Sadaat, Egyptian honor, even with defeat, was vindicated. Israel withdrew from the West bank of the Suez under American pressure and the realization that it could not physically hold such a vast territory of hostile Arabs.

The government of Golda Meir, who had been born in Kiev, educated in Wisconsin and emigrated to Israel as an ardent Zionist in 1921, fell. The shock of near defeat, the

unpreparedness of the Labor government led to a sea change in Israel. Meir was replaced by Yitzhak Rabin who was defeated in elections by the conservative government of Menahem Begin.

Begin and Israel realized how buffering lands between the Arabs and Israel helped prevent disaster. Begin began aggressive defensive measures to put outposts of Jewish settlement beyond the green line (1948 Armistice lines), in territory that was in contention, territory that had been won in the 1967 war. Begin believed that Jews had a right and duty to settle in all of the lands of ancient Israel.

American Jewry, again, was stunned by the 1973 war. American Jewry, eventually reacted in knee jerk fashion, by raising money and awareness but the American Jewish soul was changing. American Jewish support, understanding and awareness that *Am Yisrael Ehad*, the Nation of Israel is One, was changing, diminishing.

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American support for Israel continued to grow. The only democracy in the Middle East, the only country that shared Western values and ideals, continued to expand. America soon injected itself deeply into the Arab – Israeli conflict not in war terms but in peace terms. American Presidents from Nixon to Carter, to Reagan to Bush to Clinton acted as intermediaries helping broker the peace treaties between Egypt, Jordan and Israel. America helped broker the deeply desired "peace" of the Oslo Accords between the Palestinians and Israel.

American Jewry's ties to Israel continued to change, tourism exploded while funding for Israel bonds and Israel focused help from American Jewish Federations, continued to fall. American Jewry was tiring of Israel's war for life. Israel was real and American Jewry increasingly had other issues to consider.

As American Jewish ties to Israel slowly weakened American ties to Israel began to radically strengthen. The 1970's saw the emergence of the American Moral Majority led by Christian spiritual evangelicals such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson.

The evangelicals, over 50,000,000 strong, believing that the return of the Jewish people to Israel was a precondition for the second coming of Jesus Christ, became the most powerful and ardent friends and supporters of the Jewish State. As American Jewish support wavered over whether Israel should be liberal or conservative, pro-or Anti Palestinian, trade land for "peace" or any of dozens of divisive issues – American Christian support for Israel jumped in miraculous bounds. The Reverend Jerry Falwell arranged for Menachem Begin to meet the leadership of the Moral Majority. It was the Reverend Pat Robertson who declared, "*Jerusalem was my home.*"

Yassir Arafat was the President of the Palestinian people, the Nobel Peace prizewinner and head of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Arafat revealed time and again his original true motivation, as a terrorist bent on destroying Israel, during the first and second Intifadas. In Arabic, to his sympathizers, he would say one thing and in English, to the willingly self-blinded, Western media he would say something else.

American Jews increasingly believed, simply, that if enough wealth and material well-being were given to the Palestinians then peace would be at hand. Peace could be purchased. But to the tens of millions of American evangelical Christians, who were motivated by faith, their support was never blinded. Their support never wavered. American Jewish tourism wavered in the face of violence and suicide bombers, though their financial contributions did accelerate. The Christian's continued to come and give money.

American Jewry, in the late 1990's, is two or three generations removed from the immigrant experience and the natural bond of all Jews worldwide. The Boomer generation, raised in the anti-establishment era of Vietnam protest, was increasingly in leadership and power positions within the Jewish community.

The questions of who is a Jew, little less who is an American Jew, is far from settled. The new American Jewish leadership is much more willing to criticize Israel for not being more like America. They are much more willing to reflect American liberalism's anti-Israel growing bias.

Bertam Gold of the American Jewish Congress decried the excessive influence of Israel on American life. Larry Garber of the American New Israel fund translates the Arab-Israeli conflict over the issue of land ownership in Israel in American terms. "In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that contractual provisions restricting the sale of residential houses to just whites or blacks could not be enforced in court of law.....Using U.S. legal terminology, the broader question is whether, on a critical issue like the question of land, discrimination, even by a private organization that seeks to right a historical wrong, should be allowed in a democratic society.....Israel's survival as a Jewish state does not require that it discriminate against citizens who subscribe to other religions, or who do not accept the legal authority of a particular group of rabbis."

Garber failed to balance his negative views by understanding that Israel is not America. Caroline Glick of the Jerusalem Post did try and balance the Middle East reality when she commented on the same issue. "The Islamic Wakf owns large swathes of land in Israel that Jews are prohibited from purchasing or leasing. The Holyland Christian Ecumenical Foundation buys lands in Israel exclusively for Christian settlement."

For many American Jews there is a realization that without a viable Israel U.S. Jewry might become a empty people. Minister of Diaspora Affairs, Natan Sharansky, himself a former Soviet Refusenik, commented in 2005, "Anti-Israel bias on campus brings to the forefront the greater issue of whether or not North American Jews will decide to stand up for their beliefs....U.S. Jews are in danger of becoming the 'Jews of Silence'....90% of Jewish students are not willing to stand up for Israel."

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The story of American Jewry's search for meaning with modern Israel is fraught with contradictions – Contradictions ranged broad ranged from Federations twinning with cities in Israel, free Birthright trips for small groups of American Jewish college students to connect to

their heritage as Jews by going to Israel, to American Jewry arguing bitterly about how much to cut back financially on Israel support even from designated monies.

From the darkness and evil of 9/11, when educated, well to do, Muslim religious fundamentalists flew commercial airliners into the Twin Towers in New York, murdering thousands in the name of Allah, came a new meaning. Muslim fundamentalism was not aimed at killing Israelis but was grounded in destroying America. The evil legacy of 9/11 was that American Jews could not pretend that *Al Qu'aida* was focused on Israel alone. American Jews realized that they, as Jews, were the target as well.

Simon Rawidowicz wrote in his essay the "***End of the Endless***", "*we must not forget the main point: the State of Israel is not the people of Israel, it is only a part of the people of Israel.*" American Jewry needs Israel as the spiritual guide and bond for its sense of people, identity, the link to the land that the Bible says God gave to the Jewish people. Israel needs American Jewry because it cannot go it alone in a hostile anti-Semitic world. Imagine little Israel demanding that the Soviets let the Jewish people go or threaten Argentine anti-Semitism with economic boycott without American aide.

American Jews continue to struggle to remain Jews even while facing the absolute demographic numbers suggesting that they will vanish. American Jews still build synagogues, schools, Jewish museums, write Jewish books and even produce Jewish T.V. and movie themes.

American Jews argue with each other over Jewish values and who is a Jew. American Jews still light the Hannukah candles and tell their children the stories of the Maccabees of old and the Maccabees of modern times. Even a Jew from Connecticut, Senator Joseph Lieberman, was the Democratic Vice Presidential candidate with Presidential candidate Al Gore in their failed 2000 election bid.

Simon Rawidowicz wrote in his essay "***The Ever Dying People***":

"Such a Jewish realism will also show us the real meaning of that fear of the end that is so inherent in us. A people dying for thousands of years means a living people. Our incessant dying means uninterrupted living, rising, standing up, beginning anew. We, the last Jews! Yes, in many respects it seems to us as if we are the last links in a particular chain of tradition and development. But if we are the last – let us be the last as our fathers and forefathers were. Let us prepare the ground for the last Jews who will come after us, and for the last Jews who will rise after them, and so on until the end of days."