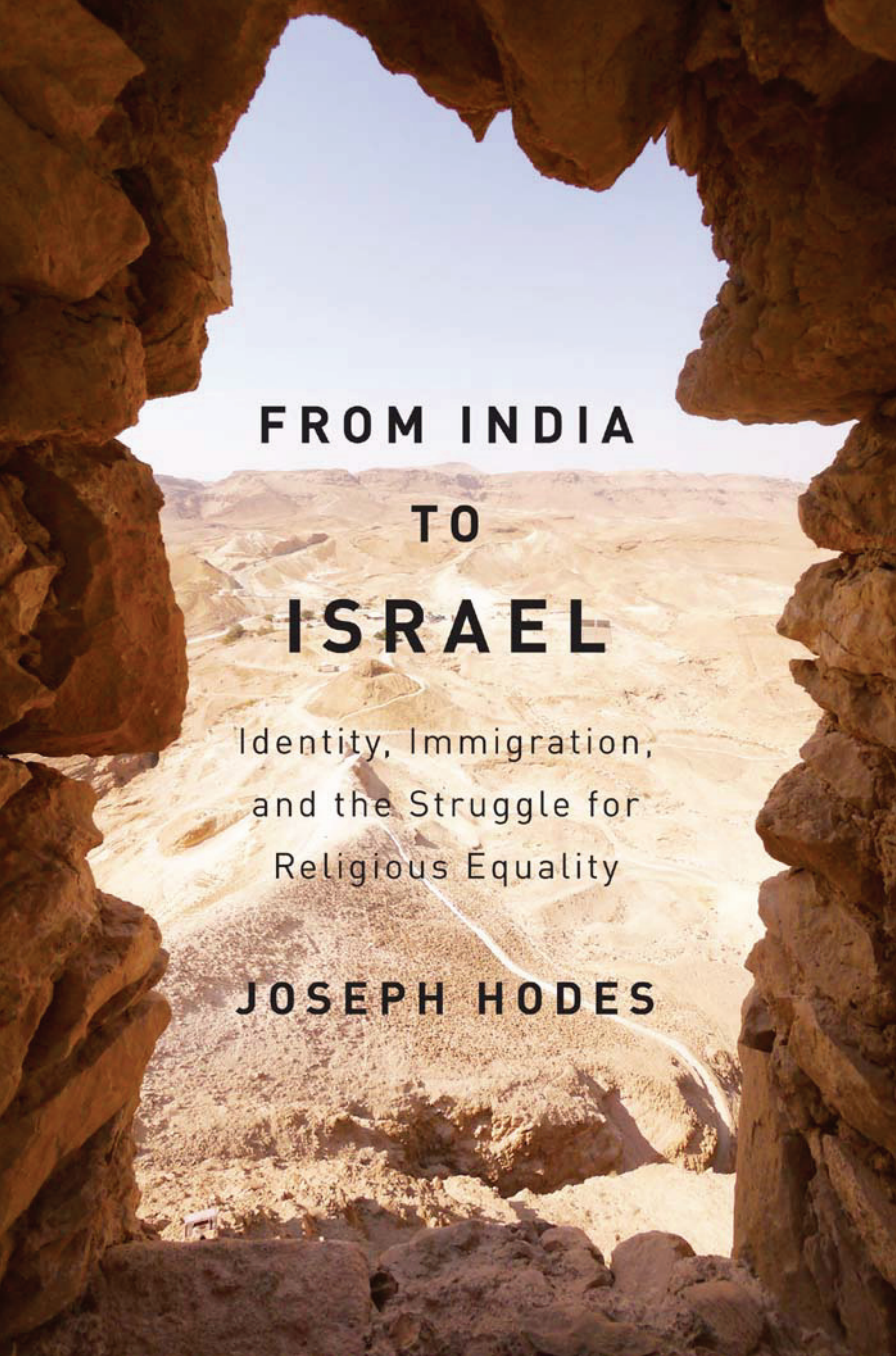
FROM INDIA
TO
ISRAEL
Identity, Immigration,
and the Struggle for
Religious Equality
JOSEPH HODES

FROM INDIA TO ISRAEL

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JOSEPH HODES

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For Masha, Josh, Maya, and Layla

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Glossary

aliya: Immigration to the Land of Israel – literally to "ascend."

Ashkenazi: A Jew of German, Central or Eastern European origin, wherever resident in the world.

chuppah: Jewish wedding canopy.

dharma: Hindu belief of duty.

Diaspora: Dispersion, the totality of communities outside the homeland.

galut: Hebrew word for diaspora. The Jewish dispersion outside Israel. Generally a term with negative connotations in Jewish culture. Strictly speaking, *galut* refers to the condition of exile.

get: Jewish divorce document. Since a Jewish marriage is entered into by the issuance of a legal contract between husband and wife, it can be terminated only by the issuance of a legal writ nullifying the original contract.

haham: A wise and learned person, a sage. For Sephardic Jews, the equivalent of a rabbi.

halachah: Jewish religious law.

haskalah: The Jewish Enlightenment. An intellectual movement in Europe that lasted from approximately the 1770s to the 1880s and beyond, depending on the place.

hazan: A cantor in a synagogue.

Histadrut: The Zionist labour union founded in 1920. Histadrut was for a long time the single most powerful nongovernmental force in Israel.

jati: Caste – literally "birth."

Kedushah: A liturgical prayer of varying form that is incorporated into the third blessing of the Amidah during the repetition of this prayer by the cantor.

kibbutz, pl. kibbutzim: Collective settlement.

kosher: That which is acceptable according to Jewish dietary laws of Kashrut.

ma'abarah, pl. *ma'abarot:* Transit settlement or neighbourhood for new immigrants to Israel, constructed because of lack of housing in the early days of the state.

miluim: Reserve duty in the Israeli military.

minyan: The number of persons required by Jewish law to be present to conduct a communal religious service, traditionally a minimum of ten Jewish males more than thirteen years of age.

Mizrahi, Edot ha-Mizrahi: "Eastern" Jewish community from Africa and Asia.

mohel: The person who performs the Jewish rite of circumcision of a male child on the eighth day after his birth.

moksha: Hindu goal of release from the cycle of death and rebirth.

mitzvah, pl. mitzvot: Religious rule or obligation.

oleh, pl. *olim:* Immigrant to Israel.

Pesach: Jewish holiday commemorating the exodus from Egypt.

puja: Hindu prayer ritual.

samsara: Hindu process of death and rebirth.

satyagraha: Grasping truth. The term used by Mahatma Gandhi for nonviolent civil disobedience.

shaliach, pl. *schilihim:* Emissaries sent all over the world by the Jewish Agency.

Sephardic: A Jew of Spanish or Portuguese origin, wherever resident in the world.

Shanwar telis: Saturday oilmen, the name of the rural Bene Israel oil pressers.

shohet: A person certified by a rabbi or Jewish court of law to slaughter animals for food in the manner prescribed by Jewish law.

Rosh Hashana: Jewish New Year.

varna: Literal translation, "colour"; but also meaning one's "professional class." It is also a mythical concept described in the Rig Veda by which Indian society is divided into priests, warriors, merchants, and labourers.

- Brahmin: priestly class
- Kshatriya: warrior class
- Vaisya: merchant class
- Sudra: labourer class

Wissenschaft des Judentums: Translation, "the Science of Judaism." A nineteenth century movement that sought critical investigation of Jewish literature and culture. Jewish scholars used scholarly methods of investigation to trace the origins and development of Jewish traditions.

Yeshiva: A Talmudic academy.

Yom Kippur: Jewish Day of Atonement.

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FROM INDIA TO ISRAEL

Asher Raymond moved from Bombay to Israel and fell in love with a girl who had moved there from New Jersey. When the girl told her father that she was going to marry a man from India, her father wanted to make sure the groom was in fact Jewish. Having never heard of Indian Jews the father was suspicious and asked him, "Do you speak Yiddish?" When Asher responded that he did not, the father was taken aback and stated, "How do you not know Yiddish?! *All* the Jews I know speak Yiddish!" To which Asher replied, "Do you speak Marathi?" When the father said that he didn't, Asher retorted with, "Well all the Jews *I* know speak Marathi!"

And now a few words from the podium of this house to the Bene Israel themselves. You are our brethren; to us you are the people of Israel. It is the strong desire of all of us to see you among the builders of our homeland, among all Jewry. Everything possible shall be done in order that every public body and every individual in the nation shall acknowledge such recognition. The Israeli public shall stand with you in this matter.

Prime Minister Levi Eshkol addressing the Knesset, 17 August 1964.

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Introduction: The Bene Israel in Premodern India

On 14 May 1948, Israel became a sovereign nation and opened its borders to Jews from across the globe. Between May 1948 and December 1951, approximately 684,000 immigrants poured into the new country. Never before had so many diverse cultures, languages, and ethnicities come together in such a tiny geographical area over such a short period to form a new collective. This text is an examination of one of those communities, the Bene Israel from India, and their immigration to Israel. It is as much a discussion or study of Israel and its immigration processes as it is of this Indian Jewish community that underwent those. The Bene Israel, one of the smallest communities to become part of the nation, is unique. Unlike virtually any other community that became part of the state, they had lived under neither Christian nor Islamic hegemony and had never been persecuted as Jews during the Diaspora yet were subject, upon entering Israel, to a unique form of bias and prejudice.

The Bene Israel, a tiny Jewish population that according to its own tradition has lived in India for more than 2,000 years, is the largest of the three major Indian Jewish communities, the other two being the Cochin and Baghdadi Jews.[1] The Bene Israel, numbering 20,000 at the height of their population in India, began to make *aliyah* in 1948, and by 1960 there were approximately 8,000 community members in Israel. Today, there are 75,000 Bene Israel in Israel and approximately 10,000 in India, living mostly in Mumbai.[2] For centuries they lived in villages on the Konkan coast in the state of Maharashtra, and self identified as both Indian and Jewish.

In 1960, twelve years after Israel was born, Chief Sephardic Rabbi Nissim decided that the Bene Israel could not marry other Jews in Israel. He stipulated several reasons for this prohibition, which served to set the Bene Israel as a people apart. This set in motion, from 1960 to 1964, a civil rights struggle between the Indian community and the State of Israel, which had far-reaching implications. The highest political bodies in Israel and influential members of the international Jewish community became involved. The international media picked up the story, and at one point Egypt even offered the Bene Israel asylum from Israel. After a drawn-out struggle, and under pressure from both the government and the Israeli people, the rabbinate changed its stance and declared the Bene Israel acceptable for marriage. Their experience of being set apart in Israel, after never experiencing persecution in the Diaspora, represents a unique narrative of a Jewish community and raises important questions about Jewish identity, the State of Israel, and its struggle to absorb the diversity in its midst.

This introduction discusses the Bene Israel in their traditional premodern existence in India. The discussion will include a brief description of Hinduism, India's hegemonic culture. A more advanced or impatient reader may choose to forgo this section, while those with limited knowledge of Hinduism and India will benefit from this insight into a religious community that never persecuted the Jewish minority in their midst. The first chapter, entitled "The Modern Period," will examine India and the Bene Israel as they moved into modernity. It explores how the Bene Israel became, under colonial rule, a favoured minority of the British. It will also introduce modern Zionism and Indian nationalism. Chapter one is based primarily on secondary sources but includes primary research gained from interviews with community members who lived through various aspects of this experience. The second chapter, "Zionism Comes to the Bene Israel," will examine how the ideology of modern Zionism was able to penetrate the subcontinent and how, despite heated debate within the community, it sparked a desire to leave India and immigrate to Israel. Chapter two is based on both primary and secondary sources, bringing forth new material from the Central Zionist Archives and interviews with community members to a discussion that has already been established by previous scholars. The third chapter, entitled "The Ingathering of Exiles," will be devoted to a discussion of Israel at the time of its birth and some of the challenges it faced. This chapter, while not necessarily dealing specifically with the Bene Israel, is meant

to provide a framework within which a proper understanding of the experience of the Bene Israel is possible and is based on secondary sources. The fourth chapter, "Arrival," is a depiction of the Bene Israel community as it left India and moved to Israel and is based on primary sources, including material from various archives throughout Israel, as well as interviews with community members who underwent this experience. It discusses the experiences of diverse sections of the community from 1948 to 1959. The fifth chapter, "Samson J. Samson and the Struggle for Religious Equality," discusses the struggle the Bene Israel faced in Israel from 1960 to 1964. Based on primary sources, this section provides a detailed analysis of what occurred during the Bene Israel's struggle for religious equality. While this book is a study of the Bene Israel community, where archival findings or interviews with Cochin or Baghdadi Jews were deemed to provide insight, they were included to add depth to the work.

The study of the Jews of India has made considerable progress in the last fifty years. The subject has been given attention by top scholars across a multitude of disciplines, and this work would not have been possible without the foundations left by those specialists. The aim of this present book is modest: to present a study of what happened to the Bene Israel community when they arrived in Israel, but, in order to accomplish this, an in-depth study of the scholarship which came before was necessary. Some of the more important works for this study included Haeem Samuel Kehimkar's work *The History of the Bene Israel of India*. Written in 1892 by a member of the Bene Israel community in India, it stands to this day as one of the most authoritative texts on the community in India prior to the twentieth century.

If Kehimkar's excellent text was important, Shirley Isenberg's *India's Bene Israel: A Comprehensive Inquiry and Sourcebook* (1988) was equally important for this project. Her book, of more than 400 pages, addresses theories of origin, the development of religious and community life, and employment. It should be noted that Isenberg draws heavily from Kehimkar, with almost half the information in her work coming from his text. Her contribution, however, lies in the analysis of the raw data that she presents from census in Israel and India and from personal interviews in both countries.

No less important for this work was historian Joan Roland's *The Jews of British India, Identity in a Colonial Era* (1989). While focusing primarily on the Bene Israel, her text discusses the Baghdadi commu-

nity as well. The depth of her research and her archival findings were extremely helpful. In particular, her in-depth discussion of how Zionism came to India and the relationship between the Bene Israel and Baghdadi community paved the way for the chapter "Zionism Comes to the Bene Israel," which presents new information building on the foundation that she laid. In many ways, Roland starts where Kehimkar left off, giving an authoritative presentation of the Jews as they lived in British India.

Schifra Strizower's book, *The Children of Israel: The Bene Israel of Bombay* (1971), provides, probably for the first time, a discussion of the Bene Israel community in India that is different or examines different areas from Kehimkar's work. This small, excellent text gives a detailed discussion of the accusations the Bene Israel faced from the Baghdadi Jews, which were central to this book. Strizower's discussion of those accusations was particularly useful.

In regards to texts which examine the Bene Israel in Israel, anthropologist Shalva Weil's seminal dissertation, *Bene Israel Indian Jews in Lod Israel: A Study of the Persistence of Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity*, written in 1977, offers a detailed analysis of the Bene Israel as they lived in the town of Lod in the mid to late 1970s. This fascinating text discusses the extent to which the Bene Israel in Lod retained their ethnicity and the extent to which they became Israeli, abandoning some of their Indian traditions and customs.

Jews of India (1986), a volume edited by Thomas Timberg and published in India, provides insightful essays by Isenberg, Roland, and Weil. Most important for the beginning stage of this book was Shalva Weil's chapter entitled "An Overview of Research on the Bene Israel," which discusses the areas where Weil thinks more research is needed. This served as a springboard for initial research, making it possible to go through archival holdings with an appreciation of what one expert felt had not been studied. Isenberg's chapter entitled "Collating the Data and Suggestions for Further Research" served the same purpose with added incentive. She stated, "The above suggestions call for immediate implementation. If the many lacunae in our knowledge of Indian Jewish communities are to be filled, it's none too soon to delve into these matters before knowledgeable informants and valuable documentation will be lost forever."[3] This is particularly poignant as Samson J. Samson who was such a crucial informant for this work passed away shortly after the text was written.

Another key text for this study was *Jewish Exile in India*, edited by

Anil Bhatti and Johannes H. Voight (1999). This text examines India's relationship with Jews of different European nationalities in India during the Second World War. While all the articles in this small text were of value, Shalva Weil's chapter, "From Persecution to Freedom: Central European Jewish Refugees and their Jewish Host Communities in India," in particular provided insight into how the Bene Israel were exposed to Zionist ideas, brought to them by Jews fleeing Hitler's Europe for British Mandate Palestine via India.

Nissim Moses, genealogist and honorary president of the Bene Israel Heritage Museum in Israel, has created a Bene Israel genealogy comprising almost 100,000 names and has been instrumental in bridging the Bene Israel communities in Israel and India. He has also done substantial work in rebuilding heritage sites on the Konkan coast in India and in 2003 took part in a venture to rebuild the Magen Aboth synagogue in Alibag. He travels frequently to the Konkan coast for further research. His unpublished articles on the similarities between Hinduism and Judaism, the surnames of the community, and the genealogy of the Bene Israel were very useful. He has also contributed hours to this project, going over ideas and the history of the community, adding an authoritative insider's voice to this study.

Anthropologist Barbara Johnson and religious studies scholar Nathan Katz, although focusing primarily on the Cochin Jewish community, also lent important works to this study. Barbara Johnson, who worked closely on this project going over various drafts and offering guidance throughout, has also written about the Pardesi Cochin community and their immigration to Israel, as well as coauthoring the book *The Ruby of Cochin: An Indian Jewish Woman Remembers.* Her writings, insights, and expertise were invaluable for this study. Nathan Katz's work on the Bene Israel community, as found in his excellent text *Who are the Jews of India?*, was also particularly informative and useful.

As much as possible, this book relies on primary documents. As the text is primarily concerned with what happened to the Bene Israel upon their arrival in Israel, the chapters that focus on this aspect draw almost exclusively from Israeli archives and from interviews with Bene Israel who moved from India to Israel. Those archives include the Central Zionist Archives, the Israel State Archives, the Ben Zvi Archives, the Labour Party Archives, the archives of Israel's national library, the Knesset Archives, and the personal archives of Samson J. Samson and Nissim Moses. While other chapters use primary docu-

ments from interviews and archives, they also draw from secondary sources and from the body of work that has been produced by scholars who have written about the Bene Israel community.

This book examines the community as it moved from the traditional village environment to the cities in the colonial period, its exposure to Zionism, its immigration to Israel, and the challenges of absorption it faced upon arrival in Israel. This text, therefore, is devoted to a discussion of the Bene Israel both in India and Israel and seeks to explore many questions: Who are the Bene Israel? How did they arrive in India? How did they survive in India? How were they exposed to modernity? How were they exposed to Zionism? Why did they move to Israel? and What was going on in Israel at that time? The central question with which this work is concerned, however, is What was the experience of the Bene Israel community upon their arrival in Israel? Most of the inquiry and discussion is intended to foster deeper comprehension of this issue. To facilitate a proper understanding of the Bene Israel and what their experience entailed it is necessary to begin our discussion with India itself and the conditions under which the Jews there existed.

INDIA

The origins and premodern existence of the Bene Israel are shrouded in mystery, and there are no reliable written records of the community before 1738, when they were mentioned by name in a letter written by a Danish missionary.[4] Thus, a lack of reliable evidence makes it difficult to know exactly from where and when the community came from, how they got to India, and what their origins are. The community itself, however, maintains a tradition, recounted by Haeem Samuel Kehimkar, that, "their ancestors came to India [via boat] about sixteen or eighteen hundred years ago, from a country to the north, or from 'the Northern Provinces,' in order to avoid persecution which followed in the train of its constant invasion by a host of conquerors."[5] The ship carrying them lost its course and crashed on India's Konkan coast. The Konkan coast is situated approximately thirty kilometers south of what is today Mumbai in the Raigad district of the state of Maharashtra. According to Kehimkar, all but fourteen people are believed to have perished in the crash, but those fourteen made their way to shore and were given refuge by Hindu villagers. This positive relationship with the Hindus endured for more

than 1,000 years, and to this day the Bene Israel who remain in India live closely and peacefully with their Hindu neighbours.[6] According to this tradition, while these fourteen Jews survived, their belongings and Holy Scriptures did not, leaving them with only the memory of their religion to rely on. Today there is a monument, erected by the community, at the spot on the Konkan coast near where the shipwreck is believed to have taken place.

This tradition has largely become accepted as fact by most members of the Bene Israel community. It is a remarkable legend and similar to the origin myth of the Chitpavan (Konkanasth) Brahmin of Maharashtra.[7] It provides the community with an origin theory that has served as a unifying force as they became spread out first in India and later in Israel. As this text is focused primarily on the experience of the community when they arrived in Israel and as other scholars have given the theories of origin considerable attention, there will be little exploration or speculation about the community's origin mythology here. It is, however, appropriate to document some of the various theories as purported by the Bene Israel members and others regarding the origins of the community.

Kehimkar argues that the Bene Israel ancestors left the Galilee (the Northern Kingdom) in 175 BCE, long before the destruction of the second temple (70 CE). One of the major reasons for this explanation is that the Bene Israel have maintained a tradition to this day of making special offerings that are consistent with practices carried out during the time of the Second Temple. Due to the absence of the Temple, the altar, and the services of the Cohanim (priests) and Levites (assistant priests/temple servants), no other Jewish community has consistently continued to observe such rituals. Although it has been impossible to maintain the Temple ritual in its strictest form in the Indian environment, Shirley Isenberg notes that, "It remains a remarkable coincidence that so many of the offerings customary among the Bene Israel are analogous in purpose, meaning, format, and detail to the biblical prescriptions."[8] The ritual known as *Malida* is consistent with a particular form of observance maintained in the Northern Kingdom of Israel after its separation from the Kingdom of Judah.

In 1963, the scholar Shellim Samuel, a Bene Israel, added to this tradition of origin by suggesting that the ancestors of the Bene Israel were from the Northern Kingdom's Asher and Zebulon tribes, both of which lived in close contact with seafaring peoples on the coast, in an area famous for its oil pressing industry. He suggests that due to

their skills in shipbuilding, seafaring, and the maritime trade, they may very well have been en route to India when they were shipwrecked off the Konkan coast.[9]

While the Bene Israel community itself (or most of its members) reject origin theories proposed by outsiders and remain loyal to their own tradition of origin, as expounded by Kehimkar, a brief reflection on some of these other theories is appropriate. Rev. Joseph Wolff, a Jew from Prague who converted to Christianity, was in India in 1833. He espoused a theory that the Bene Israel may have come from Persia or Yemen as part of the lost tribes of Israel.[10] Dr John Wilson, who had worked among the Bene Israel in the first half of the nineteenth century, later encountered the Yemenite Jews and was struck by the similarities between the communities. Due to those similarities he came to the conclusion in 1866 that the Bene Israel must have come from Yemen.[11] Others have suggested that the Bene Israel were Hindus who had been converted to Judaism. None of those theories were based on hard evidence.

Modern science has recently helped to shed some light on the origins of the community. In 2003, Tudor Parfitt published an article entitled, "Genetics and Jewish History in India: The Bene Israel and the Black Jews of Cochin," which reported the results of DNA tests on these communities. Those tests suggest that the Bene Israel can be differentiated genetically from other Indian populations in the surrounding areas of Maharashtra, Goa, and Gujarat.[12] The study is based on evidence that the Cohen Y chromosomes found in many Jews throughout the world are remarkably homogenous.[13] His study found that the Cohen chromosome was present in "high frequency" in the Bene Israel community, suggesting that the Bene Israel are of Middle Eastern origin, as they have always claimed, and are not, as some have speculated, descended from Indians who may have been converted to Judaism.

If it were true that they arrived in India before the destruction of the Second Temple, then they would not have been exposed to the traditions of rabbinic Judaism that evolved after the year 200 CE. Despite this, however, and the loss of their holy scriptures, the Bene Israel, according to Kehimkar, continued to observe the Sabbath, and to this day the rural Bene Israel are known as the "Shanwar telis" (Saturday oilmen) because they abstain from work on Saturdays, not working or kindling fire or cooking food, which suggests a Jewish origin because Jews traditionally rest on the Sabbath day in accordance with the

commandment to "remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." They also circumcised their children on the eighth day in accordance with Jewish tradition and refused to eat fish except with fins and scales, as stipulated in Leviticus 11:9–10. The Bene Israel, according to Kehimkar, observed certain Jewish holidays including Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Simhat Torah, and Pesach. They also recited the Shema, the fundamental tenet of the Jewish faith, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one" at every rite of passage and at every occasion for prayer.[14]

According to Kehimkar, on arriving destitute in India they were offered refuge by the Indian Hindu villagers on the Konkan coast, where they took up the occupations of agriculture and oil pressing. Through a process of acculturation, presumably, they and their descendants eventually took on Hindu names – perhaps done, as Kehimkar suggests, to divest themselves of even the smallest vestiges of peculiarity in the eyes of the natives – such as Alloba, Elloba, Bawaji, and Pittu among others. At the same time, they probably kept the biblical names, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which changed over time to hybrid or Indianized biblical names: Abraham to Abaji, Samuel to Samaji, Elijah to Elloji, Moses to Mussaji, etc.

Kehimkar describes how, over many generations, the small community grew and spread throughout more than 140 villages on the Konkan coast. As each village needed only a small number of oil pressers, occupation, then as today, led to migration. In a naming process common in Maharashtra, Bene Israel families often took on the name of their village to indicate their origins. Therefore, families that lived in the village of Kem called themselves Kehimkar, while those who lived in Penn referred to themselves as Penkar.[15] This theory of Bene Israel surnames has received a lot of attention by scholars from both within the community and without. Recently, however, the scholar Nissim Moses has challenged this theory from within the community, suggesting that one of the problems related to the study, is that few scholars of the Bene Israel in the premodern period in India are fluent in both Marathi and Hebrew. He, however, coming from India but having lived for many decades in Israel, is fluent in both languages and asserts another theory. He suggests that the villages got their names from the Bene Israel family living at that location and around whose residence the village grew. When interviewed, he stated: "For many years the Bene Israel believed that their names originated from the names of the villages in which they lived. This

misconception arose from the fact that they prayed in Hebrew but didn't understand the language. The surnames in every instance have Hebrew roots and thus Hebrew meanings. On the other hand, in no instance do the names mean anything in Marathi."[16] According to Kehimkar, the Bene Israel tradition maintains that, as they spread throughout more than 140 villages over the Konkan coast where they settled comfortably surrounded by rice paddies, private orchards of plantain, mango, banyan, coconut, and palm trees, they acquired a reputation amongst their neighbours as a hardworking, loyal, and pious community. They went undistinguished from the other oil pressers in the region including native oil pressers and later Muslim oil pressers who were also absorbed into the rural society. They maintained their traditions and religious observance, which went relatively unchanged until an encounter with a Jewish traveler named David Rahabi sparked a Jewish revival.

Kehimkar attributes Rahabi's origins to Egypt but mentions that this name was also found among the Cochin community. He recounts how David Rahabi, who arrived "either 900 or 500 years ago,"[17] was convinced that the Bene Israel were Jews but wanted to test them to make sure. He gave their women clean and unclean fish to be cooked together, to which the women immediately objected, declaring that they never cooked fish that had neither fins nor scales. Satisfied, Rahabi proceeded to teach the community the tenets of the rabbinic tradition. He taught three men to read and write Hebrew without translation, and the community tradition maintains that from that time forward all their religious rituals were performed in accordance with standard rabbinic ritual. Rahabi's scriptures were copied by members of the community, and upon his death (he was thought to have been killed by a local chief two to three years after his arrival for reasons that are not clear), his three disciples performed the roles of teacher and judge, presiding over all disputes that arose in the community with the aid of four or five councillors, and performed all religious rites and ceremonies for the Bene Israel throughout the Konkan coast. These men were referred to by the Muslim term, *Kaji*. It is suspected that the title was taken when the territory was under Muslim rule.

The encounter with David Rahabi is significant not only because he is thought to have brought the Bene Israel into contact with rabbinic Judaism but also because the encounter marked the end of the community's isolation from world Jewry. As Kehimakr suggests,

Rahabi may have come from the Cochin community, and certainly after meeting him, "either 900 or 500 years ago," the Bene Israel were in contact with sections of the Cochin community which played an influential role in educating them in the tradition of rabbinic Judaism.

The origin of the Cochin community is also undocumented, with various legends and theories about it. What can be said with some certainty is that Kerala, where the Cochin Jewish community lived, was an area of India with which Jewish traders of western Asia and the Mediterranean region may have been familiar from ancient times. It can be said with certainty that the community was joined from time to time by coreligionists and that at least since the medieval period they were in communication with their fellow Jews and aware of developments in Jewish religious practice and ceremony, including the codification of the oral law in the early years of the present era and the standardization of the prayer book according to the Sephardic rite.[18] Like the Bene Israel, the Cochin Jews had a positive relationship with the Hindus. They played a valuable role in the international pepper trade, served in the armies of their rulers, and were held in very high regard. A copper plate inscription in the Malayalam language, reputably dated at 1000 CE, records a set of privileges awarded by a Kerala ruler to the leader of an established Jewish community there.[19]

According to Shirley Isenberg, the earliest recorded contact between the Cochin Jews and the Bene Israel can be found in a chronicle called the *Maggid Hadshoth,* which suggests that seventy-two families from near the Konkan coast (in what is today Puna) arrived in Malabar in 340 CE.[20] However, while this early contact may have occurred, it seems more likely that the communities actually went for centuries without contact before more recently establishing a connection.

One theory suggests that the port of Surat, situated 165 kilometers north of Mumbai, may have served as the first place of contact. The Mogul emperor Akbar conquered this port in 1572. From this time on through the seventeenth century, there is evidence that Jewish merchants settled there, established a Jewish community, and had some influence on the city's economic life. It is speculated that the Bene Israel in the district may have traveled to Surat, where they would have come into contact with the Jewish merchants and the community there.[21] Several documents refer to a Jewish merchant named

Moses Tobias who lived there from 1728 to 1745. He served as the official spokesman for Portugal in Surat and also rendered services to the East India Company branch office. His tombstone in Surat reads: "The Revered Ha-Nasi Moshe Tuibi from the holy community of Cochin, who died on Sunday the 20th of the month of Iyar, in the year 5529 at the age of 75 years." Moses Tobias may have established the first contact between the communities, having emerged from the Cochin community and been situated in Surat, the backyard of the Bene Israel.

The earliest solid evidence, however, of contact between the Bene Israel and the Jews of Cochin is found in a 1768 letter from Ezekiel Rahabi II, a leader of the Cochin community, addressed to the Dutch East India Trading Company. He wrote:

> There are Jews in India at Vijapur and they are called Bene Israel. They are scattered in all Maratha towns and also under the Moghul. There are also tent dwellers and some of them make oil, and some are soldiers and know nothing but the *Shema* and they keep Shabbat; and a couple of times went to see wise men (*Hachamim*) to learn about Judaism, to be guided and taught. One of them came to Cochin and stayed there for four years, and learned the Torah and a little of the laws and went away. And we heard that now he is their Rav and guides them according to the Jewish way.[22]

A Roby (Rahaby) family history in Cochin states that David Ezekiel Rahaby, son of Ezekiel Rahaby II, was instrumental in sending teachers and books from Cochin to the Bene Israel to teach them about Judaism, though the document does not say that he personally visited them.[23] Regardless of exactly when the Cochin community came into contact with the Bene Israel, they played an influential role in bringing the Bene Israel into contact with rabbinic traditions, and from the encounter with David Rahabi onwards, whether he was from the Cochin community or not, the Bene Israel are thought to have been in contact with the Jewish world after being isolated for centuries.

According to the scholar Benjamin Israel, both before and after the exposure to rabbinic Judaism, the dispersion of the community throughout many villages determined the form religious observance took. Emphasis was placed on home ritual; congregational worship

was held at the home of a leading village family if there were a sizeable Bene Israel population nearby. Festival services were held in central villages with congregants from all over the Konkan area taking part. The leaders of the community travelled throughout the area to perform circumcisions, marriages and funerals, and to settle disputes, and all men were taught the techniques of ritual slaughter and leading a service.[24]

The Bene Israel were one of many religious communities in a religious environment rich in its diversity. Many stories about the community indicated how accepted their presence was including the following:

> Shlomo was a rich oil presser from the village of Tala who was blessed with much cattle and land. He was loved and respected by other Bene Israel, by his non-Jewish neighbours, and by the Hindu rulers of the area. After the Muslim conquests however, a false accusation was made to the Hindu rulers that Shlomo was conspiring against them. Shlomo was brought to the Hindu courts in chains, and while he swore he was innocent, his pleading fell on deaf ears. Shlomo was condemned to be trampled to death by an elephant. However, instead of killing him, the elephant gently picked him up and placed him on his back. The Hindu rulers took this as miraculous proof of his innocence and gave him a seat in their court and a large parcel of land.[25]

The Bene Israel in India, then as now, were integrated with their neighbours in many ways. Though they didn't intermarry, they dressed the same, spoke the same language, lived the same rural lifestyle, and shared many of the same local folk beliefs. This coexistence naturally invites a discussion of Hinduism, the hegemonic culture under which the Bene Israel lived, since Jews in the Christian and Muslim world, even at the best of times, rarely experienced the inclusiveness that the Jewish communities of India experienced among their Hindu hosts.

HINDUISM

Of the major religions in the world, only two, Christianity and Islam, maintain that the only way to salvation is through them. Judaism does not subscribe to the idea that the non-Jew cannot find their own sal-

vation, nor does Buddhism, Sikhism, Shintoism, or Hinduism. Hinduism, which has approximately one billion adherents, claims no single person as its founder, has no creedal statement agreed upon by all adherents, no unified system of belief codified in law, no claim of divine revelation, no centralized authority or structure, and has never found a need to define its essentials.[26] Not that the religion lacks structure, but it is not the same kind of structure as the monotheistic religions and which those religions deem normative.

In Hinduism, the belief that stones and trees have souls coexists with belief in the highest gods. Monotheistic worship of one god is just as acceptable as polytheistic worship of many gods, demons, and spirits. A god excluding monism exists alongside dualism, materialism, and agnosticism. A strict puritanical ritualism encounters wild, inebriated cults and blood sacrifices. Yet all these forms of religion are practiced quite peacefully alongside one another.[27] The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, spoke of Hinduism as "all things to all men."[28] Mahatma Gandhi wrote,

> On examination I have found it [Hinduism] to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all other religions but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths. In it there is room for the worship of all prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary, imperceptible character. Hinduism tells everyone to worship God according to his own faith or duty, and so it lives at peace with all religions.[29]

While the word "Hindu" was used in Sanskrit (the ancient language of this religious tradition) and Bengali texts as early as the sixteenth century,[30] the term Hindu is actually a British colonial invention dating from the end of the eighteenth century. It referred to the people of "Hindustan," the area of northwest India, but eventually came to be used to describe any Indian in India not of Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Parsi, Christian, or Jewish faith. It thereby incorporated a wide range of religious beliefs and practices. The "ism" was added around the 1830s, and Indians soon accepted the term in the context of establishing a national identity opposed to colonialism.[31] Even today, how-

ever, "Hindu" is often not a self-description used in India, and the caste or community one belongs to is often far more important. Due to regional diversity, the experience of the Cochin Jews in Kerala would have been, and still is, quite different from the experience of the Bene Israel on the Konkan coast. These two communities were exposed to different forms of Hindu worship, different artistic cultures, and somewhat different interpretations of the Hindu scriptures.

Although Hinduism accepts without prejudice many forms of worship, the concept of religious conversion is completely foreign to traditional Hinduism, a key point that perhaps set the stage for peaceful coexistence with Jews. To try to bring someone of another faith into the Hindu fold is a notion entirely alien to Hinduism. In fact, even if one wanted to become Hindu, most adherents would see it as impossible. One would be welcome to join the Hindu community and live according to Hindu norms, but one could never become a Hindu. Due to the idea of reincarnation and the infinite number of rebirths inherent in all Hindu philosophy, if one were meant to be Hindu one would be born a Hindu, and someone not Hindu who had a great desire to become Hindu would perhaps be born to this faith in the next life. These ideas meant that Jews in India were never asked to convert to Hinduism. And because Judaism does not proselytize and did not try to convert Hindus to the Jewish faith, no Hindu community felt threatened by the presence of Jews in their midst. There are, however, other reasons why Jews were able to coexist for so long among the Hindus.

If Hinduism allows for and accepts tremendous differences in ritual observance, it nevertheless adheres to a strict social order. According to Brahmanic scripture, the four major divisions of India's *varna* or class system are made up of the priests or *Brahmins*; the warriors, kings, and aristocrats, known as *Kshatriyas*; the merchants and traders or *Vaisyas*; and the peasants, known as *Sudras*.[32] The *varna* people are born into dictates their role in society and their individual duties, and it remains their *varna* until death. Traditionally this meant that there was no social mobility within society; social mobility was attained over many lifetimes through reincarnation or *samsara*, the constant process of death and rebirth. The religious belief is that the proper performance of one's *dharma* or duty, according to one's *varna*, enables the next birth to be closer to the ultimate Hindu goal of *moksha,* the final release from the cycle of rebirth. One moves towards or away from *moksha* over the course of infinite lifetimes depending on

the karmic traces accumulated or destroyed during each life. Therefore, if one adheres to the *dharma* of one's *varna* (which changes according to one's stage of life, the duty of the child is not the same as the duty of the parent) one will be reborn closer to the ultimate goal. Straying from these obligations, however, means that the next life will be farther from that goal. Theoretically, this maintains the social and moral order of society. It is traditionally believed that only the highest social order, the *Brahmins*, obtain *moksha*.[33] Someone born into the *Brahmin* class might then try to uphold the strictest of moral codes in the hope of achieving the final stage, while someone born into the lowest position of society could adhere to the moral codes for fear of being reborn in nonhuman form, in an unhealthy human form, or into tragic circumstances. While it may be difficult for monotheists who believe in only one life to understand the concept of rebirth, as a Hindu ascetic once explained: "Think long term. We change lives the way you [Westerners] conceive of changing clothes. Life is short."[34]

While *varna* is strictly adhered to, an infinite number of *jati* or castes make up a complex network and social order. While there are four *varnas*, there are thousands of castes.[35] Strizower notes that caste also provides the pattern for relations with non-Hindus.[36] The Jews, while not Hindu, were most likely understood by the Hindus as belonging to a caste of oil pressers who did not work on Saturday, placing them in context within the social whole.[37] Belonging to a caste would have given the Jews a certain status in the complex web of Indian society. It would not be a high status, but it would allow for coexistence with other members of society not as a people apart, as were the Jews in Europe. Because each caste or *jati* has its own occupation, customs, rituals, traditions, and ideas, the caste system provided an institutional basis for tolerance and cultural pluralism. Eventually, the Jewish presence in India was taken so much for granted that in the modern era they were sometimes recorded in official government documents as the "Jew Caste."[38]

MAHARASHTRA

In the premodern period, the Bene Israel in India lived almost exclusively in what is now the state of Maharashtra. India is often referred to as a subcontinent due to the incredible diversity of its land and people. Over twenty-six languages are spoken by at least a million

native speakers, and there's a multitude of ethnic groups, including Aryan, Iranian, Dravidian, Asiatic, Tibetan, Altaic, Semitic, and others. For simplification, therefore, we will focus only on the history of the region the Bene Israel lived in, rather than the entire subcontinent, to understand the cultural, political, and religious factors that framed their existence in the premodern era. Far from being insular, Maharashtra has been the meeting point for diverse national and international influences for centuries.[39] It was part of the Maurya Empire from 321 BCE to 184 BCE. It was during this time that Buddhism, under the great Buddhist protector Ashoka, took root in the region. Like Hinduism before it, Buddhism does not feel that non-Buddhists cannot find salvation and would have no problem with Jews and other non-Buddhists in its midst. Somewhere during this time, perhaps around 200 BCE, the region took on the name Maharashtra and the Marathi language, one of the languages derived from Sanskrit.[40]

After the decline of the Maurya Empire, successive empires, including the Satavahanas and Gupta, held sway in different parts of the region, some ruling over parts of the region and beyond, and some ruling over the entire region. A feudal socioeconomic system was in place during the time of the Gupta Empire, from the fourth to the sixth century CE. While the Islamic conquests did penetrate the subcontinent, the Muslim empires struggled mostly with Hindu rulers and were unconcerned and often unaware of the tiny Jewish population.[41]

The process of feudalization reached its zenith in the sixteenth century under Mughal rule. With each passing empire, the local administration of villages was left to the local Hindus who were well acquainted with the customs and traditions of the region.[42] Therefore, although for centuries there had been some state control in that there was a ruling power that collected taxes and controlled a military, many villages felt independent of state control, often settling their own disputes, practicing their own religious traditions, and conducting their own caste and sub-caste affairs. There seems to have been a tradition in Maharashtra for the state to intervene only when local institutions failed to resolve issues. Except in rare cases the state was reluctant to meddle with decisions of caste councils.

This type of local rule, and the tradition of various national and international influences on the state allowed the Bene Israel community to flourish. The evolution of local institutions, which were influenced by diversity coming from other regions in India as well as international

trade, remained largely uninterrupted as empires came and went. Even with the Muslim conquests and successive Muslim empires in India, the local Bene Israel community remained unmolested. The caste designation attached to their main profession of oil pressing allowed them to live under the feudal system without distinction from other oil pressers in villages throughout Maharashtra. In 1674, the Maratha people gained independence when the Hindu Shivaji was crowned as their king. Non-Hindus were under no threat in his kingdom, except that heavy tributes were extorted from the rich. Throughout antiquity and the medieval period, therefore, the Bene Israel went unharmed, and this tiny Jewish population does not remember a single incident of persecution for being Jewish either from their Indian neighbours in the local villages or from successive empires, whether Hindu or Muslim. In fact, the only real problems associated with their Judaism came from another Jewish community, the Baghdadis.

THE BENE ISRAEL ENCOUNTER THE BAGHDADI JEWS

By the late eighteenth century, the Bene Israel had begun to migrate within Maharashtra to trade centers and cities that were being developed by the British. By this time Jews from the Middle East, primarily from what is today Iraq, had also begun to immigrate to India and had become collectively referred to as the Baghdadi Jewish community. While many of those Jews did arrive from Baghdad (a center of Jewish life and learning in the Middle East since rabbinic times), they also came from Mosul and Basra, with small numbers also from Syria, Iran, and Yemen. They left what is today Iraq to escape the persecution, disease, and severe flooding that ravaged their community. The governor of Baghdad in the first half of the century, Daud Pasha, the last Mamluk ruler of Baghdad, was notorious for his mismanagement and violence, but even before he came to power in 1817, the plagues of 1743 and 1773 had killed thousands in the Jewish community including most of the scholars and notables of the communities of Basra, Mosul, and Baghdad.[43] These plagues left the *yeshivas* of Iraq half empty and the rabbinate crippled. Ferocious flooding claimed more lives and further weakened the community. The port of Basra had been a trading center of the British East India Company from 1760, and many Jews there played an important role in English commerce connected to the port. Some of these Jews were encouraged by the British to go to India to expand commerce.[44]

Baghdadi Jews had lived and traded in small communities across the Middle East for many centuries, and when the British imperial policies opened up economic opportunities for them in India and the Far East, they took advantage of those opportunities.[45] By 1730 some members of this Iraqi community had settled in the Indian port city of Surat, a center of British Trade. As more violence and devastation ravished the Jewish communities of present day Iraq, more immigrants found their way to India where commerce between the ports of Surat and Basra was very profitable. The community eventually moved to Bombay and Calcutta and established itself as an important facilitator of trade for the East India Company, which relied on the port cities of both Bombay and Basra to coordinate the shipping of goods from India to Europe. As the Baghdadi community had connections in both Bombay and Basra, many families, including the Ezras, Gubbays, and Kadouries among others, made substantial fortunes. The most notable of these is the Sassoon family, who created an economic empire spanning India, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore and who became known as the "Rothschilds of the East."[46]

Baghdadi Jews eventually spread throughout the Far East and had community members in Basra, Rangoon, Bombay, Karachi, Singapore, and Shanghai.[47] In each place they settled, they clung tenaciously to their Jewish identity. Their commitment to Judaism as both a culture and a religion was central to their sense of who they were. Worried about assimilation, they emphasized their foreign origin and their religion to distinguish themselves from the hegemonic communities wherever they settled.

Initially, the Bene Israel, who had begun to settle in Bombay, welcomed the Baghdadi newcomers, inviting them to worship in their synagogues and bury their dead in their cemeteries, but the friendly relationship gradually dissolved. The Baghdadis began to actively dissociate themselves from the Bene Israel for a number of reasons including wanting to maintain close ties with the British, which, for them, meant not being mistaken for Indian, as well as feeling that the Jewish practices of the Bene Israel were not in accordance with their own. An example of this would be the dietary practices of the communities. Being substantially less affluent than the Baghdadi community, the Bene Israel could often not afford two sets of pots and pans to keep their kitchens kosher. To keep kosher they would boil water in them, as prescribed. Soon, however, the Baghdadis began to refuse to eat in Bene Israel homes. This failure to recognize the legiti-

macy of Bene Israel kashrut was but one example of issues that contributed to a growing rift between the communities.

The two communities, however, were not always in conflict. Some Bene Israel would pray in Baghdadi synagogues, and a few cases of intermarriage occurred. In 1836, however, David Sassoon and nine other Baghdadi Jews sent a petition to the local authorities in Bombay requesting that a partition be erected in the Jewish cemetery to separate the deceased of the two communities. For the Bene Israel, being set apart had caste overtones, and their treatment by the Baghdadi community had a profound impact, which contributed to keeping the communities separate. Thus, the Bene Israel never experienced any problems connected to their religious identity until the modern period brought the Baghdadi Jews to India.

Throughout the premodern period the Bene Israel community was by all accounts a happy and secure member of a multicultural society. While India suffered invasions, droughts, famines, and natural disasters, the Bene Israel community lived alongside the other members of society not as a people apart but as an accepted part of the larger community. While there are no written records until 1738, India has a strong oral tradition, and if the Bene Israel had suffered persecution for being Jewish, it is unlikely that there would be no oral history of it. That the Cochin community also maintains that there was no anti-Semitic persecution in India highlights the nonproblematic position of Judaism in India.

While Hinduism allows for pluralism in its midst and Maharashtra has seen diversity through migration from other regions of India and through international trade, the Bene Israel were such a small minority that they would never have been deemed a threat. If they had been Hindu they may have been absorbed by the larger Hindu community, but as a tiny minority among Hindus they were in a situation unique in the Jewish Diaspora. They lived in a region that was practicing multiculturalism long before multiculturalism became a social theory in the western world and in a hegemonic culture that was largely ignorant of conversion. Thus, over many hundreds of years, these Jews became Indian Jews.

1

The Modern Period

From antiquity until the colonial period, India was invaded no fewer than twenty-six times. Until the end of the fifteenth century, all conquerors came overland and all but one through the Hindu Kush. They brought armies through the Himalayan mountain passes, some 12,000 to 16,000 feet above sea level, and filed through the narrow Khyber Pass to the Suleiman mountain range, through the Indus Valley, and beyond. The Queen of Assyria sent her army through those passes twenty-two centuries before the Common Era; Cyrus of Persia repeated this feat in 530 BCE; Alexander the Great brought his own army in 326 BCE; the first Islamic invasion of India came through those mountains in 710 CE, and the Moguls led by Babur came in 1524 CE.[1]

The first European seaborne incursion was headed by Vasco da Gama in 1497.[2] The Dutch followed, then the French a few years later, and finally the English, who dispatched their first Indian Ocean expedition in 1591 and founded the East India Company in 1600. The first half of the seventeenth century saw England importing cotton, indigo, drugs, sugar, and carpets, among other things, from India.[3] By 1687, the East India Company was so entrenched and imperialistic that it announced its proposal to establish civil and military institutions "as may be the foundation of a large, well-grounded, sure English dominion in India for all time to come."[4] Eventually, by mostly despicable means, perhaps considered normal for the period, the British established themselves throughout the length and breadth of the subcontinent. In some areas the East India Company ruled directly, and in others it stood behind maharajas (princes controlling princely states) or Muslim Nawabs (provincial governors of the Mo-

ghul Empire) who served the politics of empire building.[5] Therefore, by the time the modern period began in India, the British were the well-entrenched hegemonic power.

It is difficult to say exactly when one period begins and another ends, and scholars debate dates and causes of change. What is agreed on, however, is that the modern period began at different times in different parts of the world. For India, the argument can be made that it began on the morning of 11 May 1857. On that morning, before Delhi had woken up, a band of sepoys (Indian soldiers in the British Indian army), having defied and killed European officers the previous day, crossed the Yamuna River, set fire to the tollhouse, and marched on the Red Fort to capture the city of Delhi.[6] This event, known simply as the Revolt on the subcontinent and as the Sepoy Mutiny in Europe, was the precursor to a widespread revolt by the sepoys all over northern, central, and western India. Within a month of the takeover of Delhi, all major centres in the north were captured including Benares, Lucknow, Allahabad, and Kanpur.[7] The Revolt was marked by intense anti-British feeling. The British administration was toppled and replaced with the traditional leaders of Indian society, the territorial aristocrats and feudal chiefs who had suffered at the hands of the colonial ruler.[8]

The sepoys, upon conquering Delhi, in a proclamation issued to explain the anti-colonial uprising, stated: "It is well known that in these days, all the English have entertained these evil designs – first to destroy the religion of the whole Hindustani army, and then to make the people by compulsion Christian. Therefore, we, solely on the account of our religion, have combined with the people, and have not spared alive one infidel, and have reestablished the Delhi dynasty on these terms."[9] The sepoys' fear that their religion was under threat was not unfounded. Since the British lifted the ban on missionary activity in 1813, Christian missionaries had been openly preaching in military barracks and denigrating other religions.[10] Throughout the Empire, the British were also using Indian soldiers who were forced in foreign stations to eat and drink whatever was available. On their return, these soldiers were often rejected by their caste for having broken dietary and social taboos. From 1857, Indian soldiers were also required to bite open the cartridges of the new Enfield rifles before loading; it was believed these were greased with beef and pork fat.[11] For Hindu, Muslim, and Jewish men in the military, this broke religious dietary laws. Thus, the Revolt was sparked by the religious sensitivities of

native Indians. Due to the religious implications of the Revolt and the anti-British voice it assumed, it led to a popular uprising supported by many sections of society including peasants, artisans, religious mendicants, civil servants, shopkeepers, and boatmen.[12]

Within a few weeks of hostilities breaking out, the British Empire in northern India had all but disappeared.[13] By April 1859, however, the British had regained control of the entire subcontinent, ending the most formidable challenge to colonial rule India had ever seen. While this may have been the end of the Revolt, this anticolonial spark was the first step in the process of India freeing herself from foreign rule. Although the Revolt was the product of imperialist exploitation of the Indian people, the British did not see it this way. The Eurocentric discourse that ensued in the aftermath of the Revolt was typical of European representations of India. In British history textbooks, the Sepoy Mutiny has been presented as "the atrocities committed by ignorant and superstitious Indians on British men, women, and children, who were dutifully carrying out the burden of the Empire in the distant subcontinent."[14]

While news from the subcontinent did not always reach European shores, the press in France picked up the story of the Revolt, discussing it in a similar tone. In September 1857, the journal *Le Pays* wrote, "The end of the British Empire in India would signify the triumph of barbarism over civilization." Letters to various newspapers shine further light on attitudes towards India and her people. One reader wrote to the journal *L'Estafett* in August 1857 stating, "Who knows whether all the people of India will not chase out the British. If these eventualities are reached, France would have a great role to play on the banks of the Ganges, in making herself the protector of a vast confederation of Indian nations."[15]

THE BENE ISRAEL AND THE BRITISH

British conquest brought about great changes in the power structure of Indian society. In traditional India, different castes were not in competition with each other. Order and rank was well established. The British, however, transformed these hierarchal castes into competitive groups.[16] Various ambitious castes now quickly perceived their chance to raise their status. This was relevant not only to Hindu castes but to all the minorities of India including Muslims, Parsis, Christians, and Jews. As well, Muslims who had held power under the

Mogul Empire for centuries lost much of their political power under British rule. These two factors led to the availability of prestigious positions. Now not only the Hindus but also all groups and castes would have to compete for positions.[17] Therefore, when the British East India Company began to recruit for the Bombay army in the mid-eighteenth century, the Bene Israel enlisted, stood out, and earned promotions to officer ranks. They did so out of proportion to their numbers in the regiments.[18]

The response of the Bene Israel to the Revolt, unlike many other sectors of society, was support for the British. From the onset of British rule, more and more Bene Israel were moving from the villages of the Konkan coast to the city of Bombay where education, employment, and opportunities in the military awaited them. While under British rule the Jews in India were admitted into the military; the highest, most senior ranks were available, however, only to the British. Many Bene Israel, however, achieved the highest post available to Indians – that of Subedar Major – and many other Bene Israel achieved other high posts of great responsibility.

The numbers of high-ranking Bene Israel were significant.[19] In fact, the Bene Israel were enlisted into almost all native regiments of the Bombay presidency (a province that included what is today Gujarat, two-thirds of Maharashtra, northwest Karnataka, and parts of Pakistan), where they held almost all staff appointments and constituted almost half the native officers of each regiment for nearly a century and a half.[20] The Bene Israel fought for the British in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Burma, Abyssinia, and Yemen, as well as in both world wars, and, when the Revolt broke out, the Bene Israel remained loyal and fought against the sepoys.

The fact that the Bene Israel remained so loyal to the British is suggestive of a community trying to position itself within the most modern mechanisms for self-advancement at their disposal. This does not suggest an anti-Indian stance or that the community did not want to see self-government in India but that their idea of how to be pro-India was different from that of the sepoys and those who supported the Revolt. This can perhaps be understood as an example of how deeply the European discourse had penetrated the Bene Israel. Ideas of Western superiority, stemming from Britain's ability to control a vast empire, became internalized by many colonial subjects including many Indians. Many wanted to adopted British norms and behaviour and believed this was the key to making life better, both for their indi-

vidual communities and for the nation. As well, the Bene Israel were not alone in their antimutiny stance. Although the sepoys received sympathy from some, the country as a whole was not behind them. The merchants, intelligentsia, and some Indian rulers actively supported the British.[21] Like the Bene Israel soldiers, almost half of the Indian soldiers not only did not revolt but also fought against their own Indian brethren.[22]

Although the Revolt was put down by the British, it set the stage for India's struggle for independence from colonial rule. India was being influenced by European nationalist ideologies and began applying them to the concept of self-government. In 1885 the Indian National Congress was founded, and it was through this Congress that Gandhi, Nehru, and many other freedom fighters shed the colonial yoke decades later.

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS ON THE SUBCONTINENT

Another factor that influenced Bene Israel loyalty to the British was the Jewish community's positive view of the missionary activity, which the sepoys found so objectionable. With the lifting of the ban in 1813, Christian schools began to open up in and around Bombay. The American Mission in Bombay, founded in 1813, established numerous primary schools in the city and along the Konkan coast. This mission was joined in 1829 by the mission of the Church of Scotland and later the Church of England.[23] These Jewish and Christian encounters had few, if any, negative connotations. While the Christian schools were certainly interested in converting the Indian Jews, they in fact contributed to the proliferation of Judaism and Jewish identity through their translation of the Bible into the local language of Marathi. This made the text available in the vernacular for the first time and did wonders to strengthen understanding of Jewish traditions. In addition, the missionary schools initially hired Bene Israel teachers. Jewish students, therefore, although in Christian schools, received education in the Torah in their native language from Jewish teachers. Schifra Strizower describes the Jewish revival that resulted from the encounter with the missionaries: "Synagogues were built; periodicals devoted to instruction in the principles and practices of Judaism came into being; books on Jewish interest were translated into Marathi and so on. The religious revival was fostered by the trans-

lation of the Bible into Marathi by the missionaries."[24] In addition, schools were established for girls as well as boys, bringing literacy and opportunity to a segment of the population that had been traditionally neglected.

Many students who emerged from this school system maintained that they had received a better education than that available in Bombay and, most certainly, on the rural Konkan coast. Christian missionary schools have remained in India in one form or another to the present day, and many of the Indian-born Bene Israel who eventually immigrated to Israel came through this school system. Nissim Moses, honorary president of the Bene Israel Heritage Museum and Genealogical Center, who now lives in Israel but grew up in a traditional kosher, Shomer Shabbat Jewish home in Bombay, claims to have learned, "more of my religion from the Christians through studying the Old Testament with them, than I learned from my rabbi."[25] Regarding the influence of the Christian missionaries in India, he noted that,

> In terms of health care, sanitation and education the Christians did remarkable things. They set up schools, hospitals, orphanages, day care centers, and nurseries. If you look at what they've done on the ground, it was just unbelievable. Where were our people? Where were our rabbis? They were more interested in finding out who was a Jew and who wasn't a Jew than they were in really helping people to change their lives and improve themselves. I attended Christ Church School in Bombay and they never once tried to convert me. I studied there for twelve years and whatever achievements I have accomplished in my life I place right on the doorstep of that school.[26]

The Christian schools were also important because they often broke down many caste taboos. Even if it was not the intent of the missions, because these schools had Hindus, Jains, Zoroastrians, Muslims, and Jews all studying together, social barriers were dissolved.[27] Eventually, the Bene Israel and the Baghdadi community started their own schools in Bombay. The Israelite School was founded in 1875,[28] and the Elie Kadourie and Jacob Sassoon schools were both operational by the turn of the twentieth century. The 1881 census reported a 62 per cent literacy rate among school-age Jewish boys in Bombay, a rate exceeded only by Parsis (Zoroastrians) and upper class Christians.[29]

While the Christian missionaries played a large role in the Jewish revival, the Cochin Jews also contributed substantially to the renewed awareness of the religion. While the translation of the Bible into Marathi was underway, a group of Cochin Jews, including Michael and Abraham Sargon, David Baruch Rahabi, Hacham Samuel, and Judah David Ashkenazi, arrived in Bombay.[30] These men acted in different locales as teachers, preachers, and expounders of the law. Rahabi worked in the village of Revadanda, Samuel in Alibag, and Michael and Abraham Sargon in Bombay. During the working week they gave instruction to children, and on Shabbat they read and explained the Torah to the adults. The work of these men went on for a ten-year period; however, Michael Sargon dedicated his career to the task of educating the Bene Israel in their religious traditions and heritage, staying on in Bombay for thirty years before retiring to Surat.[31]

Shortly after the Bible was translated into Marathi in 1833, another group of Cochin Jews arrived in Bombay including Shelomo Salem Shurrabi, Hyam Joseph Helega, Mayer and Sillmon Kindil, and Baruch David Ashkenazi amongst others. These men arrived in Bombay one after the other, and all of them played key roles in bringing further awareness of the Jewish tradition to the Bene Israel. They began translating religious texts such as the Passover Hagadah into Marathi, followed by a Hebrew Shiroth or Song Book. In 1845, David Ashkenazi published a Jewish almanac in Marathi that contained the rules and stipulations for fixing the days of observances for 500 years. According to Samuel Kehimkar, the most important contribution was made by Shelomo Salem Shurrabi who served as the *hazan*, *mohel* and *shohet* in the newly formed Bene Israel synagogue in Bombay. He had arrived from Cochin with his grandfather on a boat that crashed off the Konkan Coast. His grandfather died in the crash, and he was washed ashore and nursed back to health by a Bene Israel in Alibag. Upon recovering, he dedicated himself to teaching the Bene Israel about their Jewish traditions.[32] In addition to acting as the *hazan*, *mohel*, and *shohet*, which he did on top of his profession as a bookbinder, he was responsible for the establishment of synagogues in Bombay in 1846, in Alibag in 1848, and in Panvel in 1849.[33]

As the Cochin community had maintained trade ties with mainstream Judaism since the medieval period, they were aware of and had incorporated changes to Judaism that the Bene Israel had not. Through contact with the members of the Cochin community, the religion of the Bene Israel began to resemble that of Sephardic Jewry.

This included the institution of the synagogue, which had largely bypassed the Bene Israel who, as noted previously, had been using homes in central villages for congregational prayer.

The builder of the first Bene Israel synagogue was Samaji Hassaji Divekar. Upon his death, his family endowed the new synagogue with an estate, the income from which served the upkeep of the synagogue.[34] The Divekars' adopted son, David, known as the *Dada Commadan*, became the headman or *Mukkadam* of the Bene Israel community. For forty-five years until his death in 1846 he tried to maintain a strict morality in the community and under his aegis the synagogue became rich.[35]

Influenced by the Cochin Jews, as well as by the new revival under the Christian missionaries, synagogues were established throughout the Konkan coast. Even with the establishment of synagogues, however, the services and rituals were carried out by laymen from the community as had been done for centuries in the villages.[36] While they had *hazanim*, *mohelim*, and *shohetim*, there were no ordained rabbis until much later, and sermons were rarely part of the service. As well, each Bene Israel synagogue was independent with no central authority connecting them. The synagogues served as the focal point for community life, as they did elsewhere in the world, just as Hindu temples throughout India served as the focal point for many Hindu communities.

The loyalty shown to the British during the revolt had positive results for the Bene Israel community. Not having enough British to fill every bureaucratic post, minorities were used to fill the civil administration as well as military positions. While the British in other parts of the Empire were not necessarily fond of the Jews, in India, along with the Parsis, the Jews became a favoured minority. In fact, the Bene Israel were treated with tremendous respect by the colonial power. The governor of Bombay attended important functions in the great synagogue in Bombay, built in 1796 and rebuilt in 1896. Sometimes even the Viceroy of India would make appearances. (In 1921, Lord Reading, Rufus Isaacs, was appointed Viceroy of India. Lord Reading was a Jew whose family was among the first to settle in England after the Spanish Inquisition.)[37] In addition, a Bene Israel member, Professor Ezekial Moses Ezekiel Talkar, at the University of Bombay was able to have Hebrew added as an official second language for the 1870 matriculation exam (the national exams to graduate high school). At that time Ben Yehuda had not yet revived Hebrew as a

modern language, and India was therefore the only place in the world where Hebrew was an official language for national examinations. Through the many Christian schools, the civil administration posts, and their full immersion in the military, the Bene Israel became exposed to Western ideas and standards in a way that perhaps other Indian colonial subjects were not.

Due to the British mistrust of the Hindu and Muslim communities, which was cemented by the revolt, Britain changed its administration of the colonial enterprise in India. Until the revolt, the East India Company was the ruling force in India; after the revolt the British government took the reins, making India an official colony.[38] With this change, the extensive railway that traversed the subcontinent needed trusted engineers. The well-educated and loyal Bene Israel were the perfect candidates. Soon the Bene Israel were working on the railways all over India, spreading the community throughout the subcontinent.

While some scholars suggest that the Bene Israel remained centralized in Bombay, by the turn of the twentieth century small Bene Israel communities were spread from Karachi in the north (in what is today Pakistan) to Hyderabad in the south, and from Mount Abu in the far west to Calcutta in the east. These communities established synagogues and continued a close relationship with the British. Because Bene Israel families often had to move according to the employment on the railways, their children were sometimes put into Christian and Zoroastrian boarding schools. This inadvertently strengthened the Jewish identity of the Bene Israel students, as their sense of isolation as the only Jews in their schools made them long for their own community.[39]

The tradition of tolerance in India was strong enough that in every locality, Bombay included, Jews were fully absorbed into society and had friends and often business partners from other religious backgrounds. In the dozens of interviews with Bene Israel community members conducted for this study, almost every interviewee described the closeness between the Jewish and other communities. Often someone's best man at his wedding was Muslim or Zoroastrian, or someone's father had a business partner who was Muslim, Hindu, or Parsi. Even at the time of writing this work, Muslim caretakers open and close the synagogues in Mumbai. The Jews' identity as a persecuted people kept apart from the majority was completely foreign to the Bene Israel, who were civil servants, military men, and railroad

engineers, a favoured minority of the colonial ruler, and the trusted friends and business associates of almost every religious community in India.

ZIONISM AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

In Europe, however, by 1880, after centuries of brutal anti-Semitism, the political ideology of Zionism was being created. Immediately prior to the birth of Zionism, some European Jews believed that anti-Semitism would be swept away by the modern era with its liberal humanitarianism, nationalism, and separation of church and state. By 1881, however, with multiple pogroms in Russia where mobs included university students and the educated elite, some Jews began to realize that anti-Semitism would never abate and that emancipation for the Jews could only come about through the creation of a Jewish state. Men such as Leo Pinsker, Moshe Lilienblum, and Theodore Herzl began writing about this.

Following two years of Russian pogroms that began in 1881, Pinsker wrote that the Jews must organize all their strength and whatever help they could muster from the world as a whole to found a country of their own – if possible, their ancestral home in the Holy Land – where the bulk of Jewry would come to live.[40] A decade later, Herzl came independently to the same conclusion and wrote the seminal Zionist work *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State). This nationalist idea arose alongside other European nationalist movements of the nineteenth century. However, while most other nationalist movements were based on political sovereignty over a territory in which the speakers of a particular language lived (such as Italian nationalism and the Italian language in Italy, or French Nationalism and the French language in France), Zionism had neither of these things. Instead, it proposed to acquire them as part of its endeavour. Moreover, the Zionism proposed by Pinsker and Herzl was a secular nationalist theory,[41] which presented a challenge to traditional Jewish communities.

From a traditional Jewish perspective, the advent of the Messiah is the criterion for the renewal of a Jewish national home. Modern Zionism, therefore, represented a crisis for those with a traditional perspective. Many writers have described modern Zionism as "secular messianism" to indicate at once what is classical in Zionism – its eschatological purpose – and what is modern – the necessarily con-

temporary tools of political effort, colonization, and the definition of Jewry as a nation – thereby laying claim to an inalienable right to self-determination.[42] Arthur Hertzberg suggests that Zionism is, therefore, "the consummation of Jewish history under the long-awaited propitious circumstances afforded by the age of liberalism and nationalism."[43]

The revolutionary idea of creating a Jewish state where none existed and recreating a language that had not been used for everyday affairs (Hebrew was used for prayer and as a literary language) for centuries presented seemingly impossible challenges. Jews were scattered all over the world and had no centralized authority. In most places they were also a persecuted minority. Almost half of world Jewry lived in Russia, which had recently undergone two years of pogroms, while the second largest Jewish population was scattered across the various communities of the Ottoman Empire. It would cost an unprecedented amount of money to gain access to land, create a state, revive a language, and relocate Jews to that state. Yet despite these challenges, the idea of modern Zionism began to take root, and, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, many Jewish intellectuals began to write about and disseminate Zionist ideas through communities all over the world. These men included Ahad Ha-am, Samuel Landau, Rav Abraham Issac Kook, Bernard Lazare, Mordecai Kaplan, and Vladimir Jabotinsky among others. All of them had their own unique – and sometimes competing and conflicting – ideas about what modern Zionism meant, how to go about creating the Jewish state, and what that state should look like.

While a Jewish state was eventually created, it took place against all odds. To begin with, the reception of Herzl's book was less than enthusiastic. In fact, Herzl was ridiculed by the European Press. One reporter described the work as, "the fantastic dream of a feuilletonist whose mind has been unhinged by Jewish enthusiasm."[44] Despite the many negative reactions to his work, however, there was a small positive response from like-minded Jews, many of whom were already living in the Ottoman Levant. Their numbers were tiny, but their enthusiasm for Herzl's work inspired him to continue his quest to create a Jewish state. He threw himself heart and soul into his vision and held the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland on 29 August 1897. He requested that the delegates wear frock coats and white ties to give the event dignity. The galleries were packed with Jews and Christians

alike, and most leading European newspapers sent correspondents to cover the event. Herzl took the stage and opened his speech with the words: "We are here to lay the foundation stone of a house which is to shelter the Jewish nation."[45] During the congress meeting, the "Jewish Society" Herzl had described in his book was created. An executive organ was also created, which comprised a general council as well as a central executive body. In addition, the aims of Zionism and of the congress were clearly delineated. The aim of Zionism was, "to be a Jewish homeland openly recognized, legally secured."[46] For the achievement of that goal, congress approved the encouragement of settlement in Palestine by Jewish agricultural workers, labourers, and artisans; the unification of all Jewry into local and general Zionist groups; the strengthening of Jewish self-awareness and national consciousness; and diplomatic activity to secure help from various governments.

Herzl spent the rest of his life struggling to achieve his dream but did not live long enough to see it actualized. The Ottoman Empire quickly made clear it would not support the idea and would certainly not give up the historical Jewish homeland within its empire. In the spring of 1904, Herzl suffered a heart attack, and he died on 3 July at the age of forty-four.

Despite Herzl's untimely death, his work had made a tremendous impact. Jews began to leave their homes for Palestine, not all Jews and not necessarily in great numbers, but migration began, nonetheless. Russian Jews began to settle there as a place to escape the pogroms; Yemenite Jews, caught up a messianic fervour, picked up their belongings and began walking to the Holy Land in substantial numbers, walking to the ports of Hudayda and Aden on the Red Sea, where they boarded ships for the Ottoman Levant. Twenty-five thousand Jews entered the Holy Land between 1882 and 1903, an immigration referred to as the First Aliyah.

The Bene Israel were among those invited to the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897. According to Joan Roland, the educated members of the community held a meeting to discuss whether to send a representative to the congress.[47] Like many other Jewish communities across the globe, they decided not to; the creation of a Jewish homeland in the Holy Land would come through messianic intervention not through political action. They felt that, "Jews in India were an Orthodox community and looked upon the fulfillment of the restoration of the Jewish kingdom by the divine hand and would undertake

nothing that would give even the smallest chance or opportunity to anti-Semites to rise against Jews."[48] These views were articulated by Samuel Kehimkar who wrote,

> The Bene Israel and the Jews in general have no ambition to gain even an inch of ground anywhere except Palestine, the possession of which they expect to acquire by some miraculous agency. Their predilection therefore lies in the direction of that country, and the dream of their life is the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the country of which it forms the natural capital.
>
> Happy, therefore, shall be the day for the Jews and the Bene Israel when the proud dream of theirs is realized, and glorious will be the condition of Palestine when Jerusalem is rebuilt by the chosen people of God. But until this desired event is brought to pass, the Bene Israel, as well as all the Jews on the face of the earth, loyally regard the country in which they are living as their fatherland, and consequently they are entitled to have every disability under which they labour entirely removed.[49]

When the meeting of the congress adjourned, the Bene Israel community received a report of its proceedings along with a letter imploring them to send a representative to the next annual congress.[50] It was, however, not until many years later, when the Zionists sent the Polish emissary Immanuel Olsvanger to India, that the Bene Israel became strongly associated with Zionism.[51]

By the time of the First Zionist Congress, India was going through its own nationalist struggle for independence from Britain. A young, relatively unknown Indian lawyer named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi would lead the Indian nationalist movement that would have a profound effect on the Bene Israel. In 1897, he was in South Africa fighting for the rights of Indians there. He had arrived in South Africa from India in 1893 and by 1897 was seeking a nonviolent way to oppose institutionalized injustice. He cemented his ideas of civil disobedience and passive resistance, which became known as *Satyagraha*, derived from two Sanskrit words, *satya* meaning truth and *agraha* meaning insistence.

As a young man of twenty-four, Gandhi travelled from India to South Africa to serve as a barrister on a small case which was only supposed to last for one year but which turned into a twenty-three year

stay. While in South Africa, he became the close friend of two Jews, Hermann Kallenbach and Henry Polak.[52] Both men were instrumental in several of Gandhi's most important campaigns in South Africa, and spent several months with him in prison.[53] Henry Polak was born in England in 1882 and moved to South Africa in 1903.[54] In his autobiography, Gandhi related that, "Polak's candour drew me to him. The same evening we got to know each other. We seemed to hold closely similar views on the essential things in life. He had a wonderful faculty for translating into practice anything that appealed to his intellect."[55] Polak was to become one of the most influential people Gandhi would meet, for it was he who gave Gandhi a copy of John Ruskin's book *Unto This Last*, which Gandhi described as, "the book that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation" in his life.[56] Polak became Gandhi's "right-hand man," serving as his articled clerk from 1905 to 1908 and then as his attorney.[57]

Kallenbach, a German architect who grew up in the Prussian town of Memel, bordering on Lithuania, and who moved to South Africa in 1896, was also very close to Gandhi. In fact, Tolstoy Farm, one of Gandhi's first communes, named after the Russian author Leo Tolstoy, was originally purchased by Kallenbach,[58] and together they established it as a passive resistance colony. Kallenbach was a Zionist, and he later worked for the Zionist Executive in South Africa after Gandhi's return to India. Of Gandhi's many friends, Kallenbach was one of the dearest, and their correspondence fills an entire volume of Gandhi's collected works. Their closeness is revealed by Kallenbach's words in a letter written decades after the two had parted ways: "One day, if I am permitted, I want you to give me a small modest quarter in your ashram. I would like to die there near you."[59] More than thirty years later, the Yishuv sent Kallenbach to India to try to get the Mahatma to endorse Zionism.

When Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he found his homeland caught up in a struggle to rid itself of the British, a struggle he would go on to lead and win through the practice of nonviolent civil disobedience he had honed in South Africa. His foray into Indian politics began on 10 April 1919 when nationalist Indian leaders were arrested in the northern city of Amritsar and deported from the district. When their followers tried to march to demand the release of their leaders, British troops fired upon them. Several of their number were killed or wounded, and the enraged mob rioted through Amritsar's old city, burning British banks and murdering several Englishmen.[60]

In response, the British sent General R.E.H. Dyer to restore calm. Although events had calmed down by the time he arrived, Dyer had fifty soldiers march into an enclosed garden, Jallianwallah Bagh, where they opened fire on a protest gathering. By all accounts there were approximately 10,000 unarmed men, women, and children in the enclosed garden. Dyer had his troops fire into the unarmed crowd without issuing a warning or providing any way for the victims to escape. Dyer reportedly kept his troops firing for ten minutes, until they had shot 1,650 rounds of ammunition into the crowd. Somewhere between 400 and 1,000 civilians were killed and about 1,200 wounded. Dyer then quickly removed his troops, leaving the civilians without medical assistance. Still infamous as one of the darkest days of colonial rule in India, the Eurocentric discourse at the time was so ugly that Britain actually applauded this act, and General Dyer was brought to England and retired with honours.[61]

This act of violence against an unarmed crowd set the stage for Gandhi's *Satyagraha* movement and brought support for the nationalist struggle from almost all segments of Indian society. This struggle was unique in that it was led by a man who insisted on nonviolence. The Indians outnumbered the British 40,000 to one, and it would have been easy to get rid of the colonial presence in one bloody coup. Yet Gandhi insisted on nonviolence, and the people supported him. In addition, the struggle was outstanding as a modern movement with a democratic vision of a civil, libertarian, and secular India based on a self-reliant, egalitarian social order and an independent foreign policy.[62] From the beginning, the nationalists fought state attacks on the freedom of the press, expression, and association, and they made these elements an integral part of the movement. The Indian nationalists also accepted the need to develop India through industrialization. Under Gandhi's leadership, the movement also adopted a socialist, pro-poor orientation. The commitment of the movement to secularism is notable considering its leadership and the deep religious traditions of India. Although the people identified themselves as members of religious communities and their traditional religious institutions were very powerful, the movement remained secular from the beginning.[63]

Gandhi sought to gain independence from British rule through civil disobedience, but he also spoke of peace with the British, never discouraging Indians from being part of the British military. In both World Wars, more than half a million Indians fought for England in France, Flanders, and Palestine among other fronts.[64]

Using civil disobedience and passive resistance, Gandhi led a revolution in India which in 1947 toppled the most powerful empire on the planet. He would go on to become, as George Marshall, the American secretary of state said, "The spokesperson for the conscience of all mankind."[65] When he died, Sir Stafford Cripps, the British statesman, wrote of him saying, "I know of no other man of any time or indeed in recent history who so forcefully and convincingly demonstrated the power of spirit over material things."[66] Einstein wrote of him that, "Generations to come will scarce believe that Gandhi actually did what he did."[67] In Ben Gurion's bedroom in Sede Boker – the hut, now a museum, which has been left exactly as it was when Ben Gurion lived there – hangs only one picture on the wall and it is of Gandhi.[68]

It is important to realize that Zionism emerged at the same time as Indian nationalism and that Indian nationalism would have had a great influence on how the Bene Israel conceived of and reacted to Zionism. After the incident at Jallianwallah Bagh, loyalty toward the British changed, and a split emerged within the Bene Israel community between members who were pro-British or pro-India. This split was political and not social. Extended families were quite large and often split on this issue. Some Bene Israel members who were pro-India understood Indian nationalism as the struggle for righteousness over a cruel colonial presence. Gandhi formulated his campaign on moral grounds. The struggle for independence was not simply about casting off the British yoke but was also a struggle against the caste system and a struggle for Hindu-Muslim unity. It would, therefore, have been very difficult for Indian Jews to understand Zionism as a completely different form of nationalism. Zionism, too, took on moral tones and was understood by some as a struggle for freedom even if the Bene Israel were not a persecuted minority. Indeed, Zionism and the Indian nationalist struggle were two of the most powerful nationalist movements of the twentieth century; to live through both of them at the same time was to experience two powerful ideas in such proximity that the overlap would be almost impossible to untangle.

PORTRAYALS OF INDIA

The colonial and premodern portrayal of India had a great impact on how the Bene Israel were perceived when they arrived in Israel. When Europeans Jews responsible for the creation of the state of Israel in the

early twentieth century wanted to know about the Indian communities, there was little accurate information to be had. The fact is that the Jewish world was largely unaware of India, and India was largely unaware of Judaism. As Michael Brown points out, before World War I both Ben Gurion and Ben-Zvi believed that "only one country in the world" deserved their support: Turkey, which had welcomed Jewish exiles from Spain in 1492 and now provided a nurturing home for Jewish "national consciousness."[69] But actually India, more than Turkey, had offered a nurturing home, having gone so far as to give the Jewish community something close to sovereignty in the city of Cranganore, near Cochin. They were granted the right to adjudicate all disputes in the area. In the fourteenth century Rabbi Nissim ben Reuben of Spain made his way to the region and wrote a song to commemorate his visit with the lyrics "I traveled from Spain. I had heard of the city of Shingly. I longed to see an Israeli king. Him I saw with my own eyes."[70] Whether there was a Jewish king or not is difficult to prove, but what can be said with some certainty is that Jews had been welcomed in India and that Hindu rulers did not hesitate to assist non-Hindus in religious matters and that there was no antagonism between the local Jews and Christians, unlike conditions in Europe.[71] But by the modern period, knowledge of India and the hospitable relationship it had with its Jews was mostly forgotten.

The writings that portrayed India as exotic, fantastical, backward, and degenerate had far-reaching implications and seriously affected almost every encounter between Indians and non-Indians, both within Israel during the creation of the state and outside of Israel when Indians traveled or became part of the Indian Diaspora. Although this type of writing intensified during the colonial period, it was not new. As early as 300 BCE, Megasthenes, the Greek ethnographer, wrote that, "In India there are tribes of men with dog-shaped heads, armed with claws, clothed with skins, who speak not in the accent of human language, but only bark, and have fierce grinning jaws."[72] This type of portrayal was not unique to Europe. When the Muslim conquerors came to India more than a thousand years later, the Islamic scholar Raihan Muhammad Al- Beruni wrote, "The Hindus, like other people, boast of this enormous range of their language, whilst in reality it is a defect ... [The Hindus] are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited, and stolid. They are by nature niggardly in communicating that which they know … I showed them what they were worth, and thought myself a great deal superior to them, disdaining to be put on a level

with them."[73] Therefore, when the British colonized India, first as the East Indian Company and later as an official colony, there was already a legacy of writing that portrayed India in a negative light.

One of the most influential writings of the colonial period was that of the Frenchman Francois Bernier who wrote in 1667 that, "The eclipse of 1666 is also indelibly imprinted on my memory by the ridiculous errors and strange superstitions of the Indians. The deluded people plunge [into the river], mutter, pray, and perform their silly tricks until the end of the eclipse ... on retiring they threw pieces of silver into the water at a great distance and gave alms to the Brahmins who failed to not be present at this absurd ceremony."[74] He went on to speak of the Brahmin priests, saying, "I need scarcely say how much my own indignation has been excited, and how ardently I have wished for the opportunities to exterminate those cursed Brahmins."[75] That being said, however, there is an equally long tradition of portraying India as a mythical place of exceeding bounty and spiritual enlightenment; not all the depictions were negative. Dionysus Periegetes, the Greek traveler, wrote of India toward the end of the second century CE. His works became so popular they were translated into Latin and used in school textbooks to teach geography. He wrote, "Some of the Indians are so tall they can mount elephants with as much ease as they mount horses. Others who pursue wisdom go about naked, and what is wonderful, look with eyes undazzled on the sun, and, while concentrating their vision on his rays, concentrate also their minds on the holy themes, and in his light, grasp the meaning of the secret signs of what is to be."[76]

Centuries later, Muslims would also write of India in the same fantastical vein. Mahmud Balkhi who visited India in the seventeenth century wrote extensive memoirs of his travels and described the women of what is today Sri Lanka saying,

> I have heard from true reports that Singaldip is an island near Silan whose air is salubrious and whose climate is rare. The women of this island are superior to those of all other parts of the world in terms of their suppleness, beauty, coquetry, and attractiveness. Their special quality is that when their virginity is lost, they recover it immediately. No matter how much one sports with them, one's strength grows and one's desire is not diminished but on the contrary expands. Their breath is flavoured with musk.[77]

And of course there are more modern European portrayals such as those of Roberto de Nobili, an Italian missionary who arrived in India in 1605 and wrote of the Buddhists saying,

> These men, [The Buddhists] have left remarkable writings on natural philosophy and on other liberal sciences, while their works have added singular beauty to the Sanskrit language and to Tamil as well. As to skill in arguing, they are deemed so shrewd and so well versed in subtle dialects that it has become a proverb to say … "He argues with the subtlety of a Buddhist." Since this sect glories in being the most ancient and since once upon a time it lorded over all realms, it is little wonder that the fame of perfect wisdom should have adhered to it and should continue to do so even to this day.[78]

All of these examples are consistent with Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism*, which discusses how representations of the Orient are often constructed in opposition to the West. According to Said, the portrayals of the Orient are entrenched in western discourse, where the West is portrayed as superior. The discourse then justifies exploitation of the Orient in order to "civilise" it or to have it serve as the pleasure area of the West.[79] The colonial representations of India and the entire Orient have been written about extensively and fill many volumes. The references given here don't even scratch the surface and are provided to illustrate that over many centuries the depictions of India adopted stereotypes that became almost indelible in the minds of many Europeans and Arabs. Certainly in the modern period, colonial representations of India often found that it was primitive, degenerate, and backwards.[80] Very little evidence was found of any civilization by the foreign aliens, and if there was some evidence it was found in relics of a distant past. Hinduism, in particular, was seen as primitive in that it was polytheistic. The Europeans searched for and found parallels of polytheism in ancient Greece and Rome, although felt that the polytheism of Greece and Rome had ultimately failed as it was unable to challenge the "true" faith of Christianity. Hinduism, therefore, was ultimately doomed in their minds to fall to Christianity as well. Particularly perplexing for the colonists was the way in which Hinduism seemed to govern all facets of life, its social institutions, legal system, government, and even the dietary habits of the various social groups that comprised the religion.

Two major schools of thought were developed in the British colonial discourse that was disseminated throughout Europe. The first school of thought argued that Hinduism had always been an immoral, heretical, barbaric creed, while the other school of thought felt that it had once been moral and even glorious but that those days were gone.[81] Of course, the problem for the colonists was lack of real information about Hinduism. Until the late eighteenth century the British public had little access to any real study of the religion, and European representations were not accurate. A Danish missionary wrote in *Gentlemen's Magazine* in 1745 that, "The Malabarians of the lowest class, called Pareas, are very vicious, stupid and ignorant, occasioned by their wretched way of life."[82] It was not until more than a century later that a learned Hindu was brought to the West. The first incident of a Hindu addressing a Western audience on Western soil was 11 September 1893 when Swami Vivekananda spoke in Chicago at the World Parliament of Religions at the World's Fair.[83] The response to Swami Vivekananda was enormous. The dean of Harvard Divinity School, C.C. Everett, spoke of him, saying, "Hegel said that Spinozism is the necessary beginning of all philosophizing. This can be said even more emphatically of the Vedanta system.[84] The reality of the One is the truth that the East may well teach us; and we owe a debt of gratitude to Vivekananda that he has taught us this lesson so effectively."[85] The swami was immediately offered a teaching position at Harvard University, which he declined.

The colonial writings all served the purpose of the coloniser as it represented India as being so backward that it became the responsibility of the European to save India from itself. Or as one author in favour of British rule wrote, "It can surely be of little importance to the men who are born under such despotic governments as that of Indostan, who are their masters. To men who from birth are in a state of actual, if not nominal slavery, what matter it whether under the East India Company or the Great Mogul."[86] Said's hypothesis, while focused on modern European representations of the Orient, can easily be extended to understand premodern European, Muslim Arab and Persian depictions of India as the "other." As he noted, "The discourse is a regulated system of producing knowledge within certain constraints whereby certain rules have to be observed. To think passed it, is virtually impossible because there is no knowledge that isn't codified in this way about that part of the world."[87] In Israel when the European Jews encountered Oriental Jews, they had been influenced

by Orientalist imagery and depictions, but for the Bene Israel, there was more. For the Bene Israel, the European Jews and the Jews from Arab lands viewed them as the other, as the Arab Jews had likewise been influenced by many inaccurate premodern depictions of the subcontinent. For the Bene Israel, the writings on and about the Orient and India in particular (for the purpose of this study) are important because only through understanding what many perceived India to be can we fully understand the way the Bene Israel were perceived when they arrived in Israel.

CONFLICT WITH THE BAGHDADI COMMUNITY INTENSIFIES

Indian nationalism, while embraced by some members of the Bene Israel community, was largely rejected by the Baghdadi community who were overwhelmingly pro-British. By 1870, the Baghdadi community had begun to cast off their Middle Eastern garb, taking on European clothing in the attempt to Anglicize themselves. After the rebellion of 1857, the British felt it was important to keep the Indians "in their place," so it was not in the interest of the Baghdadis to be classified as Indian. The Bene Israel, on the other hand, while largely pro-British before 1919, had spent centuries identifying as Indians, wearing Indian garb, speaking Marathi, and referring to India as "mother India." This led the Baghdadi community to take further steps to distinguish themselves from the Bene Israel.

There was, however, another reason why the Baghdadis needed to align themselves with the British and be separate from indigenous Indian communities and this had to do with their lucrative trade endeavours. While the Baghdadis were central traders in many diverse markets, the most important and profitable market, both for them and the East India Company, and thus the British Empire, was the opium trade. Vast fortunes were made; indeed, the entire modern history of East Asia was shaped by this trade. According to a memoir written by a Rabbi Musleah of the Baghdadi community,

> The import trade was dominated by Jews. The Indian farmer sold all his produce to the British government of India which auctioned it to the highest bidder, to the value of five to six million rupees annually. Then it was exported privately to Penang, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore mainly in Chinese boats. Even the shipping of opium was almost entirely in Jewish hands. In Janu-

> ary 1888, for example, 4,546 chests were exported, 2,870 being through Jewish merchants – David Sassoon 1,220 chests, Elia Shalome Gubbay, 1,554 chests, Elia David Joseph Exra and co. 580 chests, Meyer brothers 475 chests, and Saleh Menassah 150 chests. By and large, fate seemed to have favoured the Jews. So lucrative was their business that Arthur Sassoon accumulated a fortune of four million rupees in the eight years he resided in Hong Kong, one of the receiving ends of the trade. [88]

These Jews found themselves at the source of a very lucrative business, but at what cost? The Chinese government had recognized the dangers of opium and banned its trade, only reopening the market after the British, so dependent on its revenues, went to war with China in 1839 and won. This opened up the market, and the effects were brutal for China. By the 1830s, opium was a serious vice in China. Virtually all men under the age of forty smoked it, and the entire army was addicted to it. Due to the smuggling of opium, the trade deficit, which the Western countries previously had with China, quickly turned into a trade surplus. China could not export enough tea and silk to balance the trade. Instead, the difference in trade was made up by the export of Chinese silver, which was highly valued for its fine qualities. In the fiscal years 1835–36 alone, China exported 4.5 million Spanish dollars worth of silver. In 1839, the Chinese opium smokers spent 100 million taels, while the government's entire annual revenue was only 40 million taels. The drain of silver significantly weakened the Chinese government. One government official wrote, "If we continue to allow this trade to flourish, in a few dozen years, we will find ourselves not only with no soldiers to resist the enemy, but also with no money to equip the army."

The Baghdadis and the British knew of the disastrous effects of the drug. One of the British wrote, "Although to many persons some thing is known of the traffic in opium, which is being carried on between India and China by the British government, I am sure that the country generally cannot be aware of the true character of that traffic; of the dreadful wrongs it inflicts upon the Chinese people; of the total disregard it indicates of our high responsibilities in that region; or of the retribution which must await this country, unless we repent and speedily put away the iniquity from us."[89]

Hence, it can be concluded that if the Baghdadis knew of the brutality of their trade but, nonetheless, continued to profit from it, they

were also obviously interested in protecting that trade. For them, part of that protection meant being distinguished within India from the Bene Israel lest they be seen as backwards. It was of the utmost importance that the Jewish religious denomination not put the Baghdadis into the same category as the Bene Israel, which might jeopardise their position as key traders in this most lucrative venture. Hence, aggressive dispersions were subsequently cast on the Bene Israel, and vehement allegations that the Bene Israel were not pure Jews ensued.

As well, the Baghdadis, who were fairer skinned than the Bene Israel, believed or accepted notions of race as long as they were on the more advantaged, pale skin side of the equation. In the effort to be considered as part of the "superior" European race, they needed to adopt notions of race that set them apart from the Bene Israel. They went so far as to request European status under the British. The Baghdadis were, to a certain extent, embarrassed by the Bene Israel whose presence they felt hindered their acculturation with the British.[90] They could not be considered European if they were viewed as part and parcel with the dark skinned, Indian Jews. Roland suggests that in the 1870s and 1880s the racial arrogance of the British in India began to show itself openly, creating the context in which the rift between the two communities really took root. By 1881, the Baghdadis were successful in their attempts to be viewed as a separate entity, as illustrated by the census of that year which distinguishes between "Jews proper" and "Bene Israel" in Bombay.[91] While the division could have successfully ended there for the Baghdadis who were now officially in a separate category from their Indian counterpart, the attempts at division continued.

The Baghdadis alleged that the Bene Israel were "impure Jews" that had over the centuries taken on Hindu wives and not converted them properly. They had, therefore, produced non-Jewish offspring. As well, they alleged that the Bene Israel did not follow Jewish traditions concerning the divorce of women who were separated from their husbands. In Jewish tradition, if a woman who has not received a proper divorce document remarries, the children are illegitimate (*mamzerim*). This accusation was a deep blow to the Bene Israel community, and its implications were enormous. According to Jewish law, an illegitimate child could not be part of the community even in the tenth generation. Therefore, the entire Bene Israel community was in danger of being ostracized by all of mainstream Judaism if the allegations were taken seriously. Fortunately for the Bene Israel, these accusations

were not taken seriously by outsiders, and rabbis from abroad had proclaimed the Bene Israel to be a community that was not problematic. In 1859, Rabbi Samuel Abe of Safed visited India and remarked that the "Bene Israel observed all the *mitsvot* of the written and oral law and all the *halachic* ordinances of the Jewish people."[92] In 1870, the *hahamim* of Safed and Tiberias announced that it was a great mitzvah to be close to the Bene Israel, who were good Jews in every sense, and cautioned against those who sought to set them apart.[93] This caused considerable controversy when it was published in a Baghdadi newspaper in Bombay. Many Baghdadis remained unconvinced, and the relationship between the communities remained strained.

Whatever the rabbis said, the accusations by the Baghdadis were a harsh insult to the Bene Israel who had welcomed them into their homes and places of worship. The Baghdadis had no proof or real knowledge of what had happened in India over the centuries and, further, very little understanding of the strict Hindu caste laws that would have made mixed marriages extremely unlikely.

In fact, by the Bene Israel's own admission (well before the arrival of the Baghdadi community) there had been occasional marriages with non-Jews, but the offspring of such unions were not allowed to marry other Bene Israel. Just as caste existed everywhere in India, the Bene Israel, being Indian, divided themselves into two subcaste groups called Gora (white) Bene Israel and Kala (black) Bene Israel. Because they were said to be descended from the children of intermarriages, the Kala Bene Israel were kept apart from the majority Gora Bene Israel. They did not share the same eating utensils, did not pray at the same time, and, as was the norm everywhere in the caste system, they did not intermarry. There was only a tiny number of the Kala Jews, but they had been identified for centuries by the larger Gora Bene Israel community. Therefore, the accusation of impurity by the Baghdadis was not only slanderous but also an attempt to create a problem where a solution had been in effect for centuries. As well, it is very important to understand that marrying a Hindu would not have been easy.

Even if the Bene Israel had wanted to marry Hindus, the social fabric of Hindu India militated against it. The hegemonic Hindu caste system based on a belief in reincarnation dictates that only through the proper fulfillment of one's duty (*dharma*) could one get closer to the final spiritual goal of *moksha*. This was and is taken extremely seriously by Hindus. To marry out of one's caste would be to go against

one's *dharma*, and the repercussions in the next life could be catastrophic. Therefore, while over the centuries there were the occasional marriages with Hindus, the community set those Kala Bene Israel apart, and intermarriage by and large was not an option. India was not the Islamic Middle East or Christian Europe where conversion was an option and where, with conversion, one could marry into the hegemonic culture. In India, conversion to Hinduism was impossible, making intermarriage extremely difficult.

Divorce, while very rare, had always been recognized by the Bene Israel. A *get*, written in English or Marathi, was drawn up before witnesses, signed by the husband, and attested to in front of witnesses. The Baghdadis claimed that because the document was not written in Aramaic, in accordance with rabbinic custom, it carried no legal weight. The Bene Israel responded that, as no one was able to understand Aramaic until the modern period, the document was written in a language that everyone could understand so as not to cause confusion, saying that it did not matter how the bill of divorce was written up as long as it was written up and clearly proved that the divorce had happened and that the parties were now legally able to marry another partner. This issue remained alive with the two sides unable to reconcile their differences. As late as 1936 the communities sought advice from experts outside of India. According to Joan Roland, Chief Rabbi Dr Moses Gaster, head of the Sephardic Jews in England, replied in 1936 to the question of whether a document that was not written in Aramaic could be valid by stating that a *get* written in any other language was not valid because "no translation could take the place of definite and detailed prescriptions formulated down to the most minute particle."[94]

Once again, this accusation by the Baghdadi Jews illustrated ignorance of Indian culture and tradition. In India not only was divorce almost entirely unheard of, especially in the rural villages where the Bene Israel had lived for centuries, but also remarriage for divorced women was almost impossible, as was the remarriage of widows.[95] Therefore, while divorce was most uncommon, remarriage was almost as foreign a notion as conversion.

While the issue of purity was the cause of serious concern and was deeply insulting to the Bene Israel, many in the community felt and feel to this day that outsiders can always raise rumours about a community to which they don't belong. Thus, the issue was never resolved in India, but it was effective in driving a wedge between the commu-

nities and insuring that the Baghdadis were a separate community. As the two communities became further separated, more outsiders were approached for clarification. When the Bene Israel had to work on the Sabbath in order to earn their daily bread, the Revered Isaac E. Sargon, a white Jew from Cochin who was serving as a *hazan* in the Bene Israel synagogue in Bombay, wrote in 1911 to Chief Rabbi Dr Moses Gaster in England for guidance. Sargon explained,

> There are in Bombay a congregation of Jews named the Bene Israel (you are already aware of them). These people are very religious and observe the mosaic laws as our co-religionists do, but unfortunately most of them cannot observe the Sabbath as they are poor and are forced to earn their daily bread by working on the Saturday. They have got synagogues and prayer halls, in which they attend their prayers. They have appointed me as their chazzan and I therefore request you to kindly let me know, if our law permits to count those Jews working on Sabbath for Minyan and Kedusha.

Dr Gaster replied that although one must not sanction Sabbath breaking, it was a fairly universal phenomenon, and if the Bene Israel were excluded from all religious services, a *minyan* would be difficult to obtain unless formed by a small minority. Instead, they should be given full rights so that they would not be driven away. He added, "I know the Bene Israel very well, and I know they are religious and good Jews. I have often taken up their cause, and I have personally declared them to be identical with the rest of the house of Israel."[96]

Many years later, most Bene Israel felt they had been slandered by the Baghdadi community for the simple reason of colour prejudice, claiming that the Baghdadi community went to great lengths to insure they were never mistaken for the dark skinned Indians and that they were seen by the British as light skinned Europeans.

INDIA'S GREAT CHALLENGES

By the time Zionism and Indian nationalism became powerful forces, the Bene Israel had served in British military posts all over India and the Empire, were employed throughout India as engineers on the railway, were trusted civil servants, and had lived under a Jewish viceroy. They felt strongly connected to India as their home and their com-

munity. As one interviewee commented, "I love my India." Yet India faced enormous challenges.

It is difficult to paint a picture of such a vast and diverse a land as India, especially as things change very quickly. That said, certain problematic circumstances in India remained consistent throughout the first half of the twentieth century. These included, among other problems, a colonial legacy of underdevelopment, gross poverty, near total illiteracy, wide prevalence of disease, and stark social inequality. The colonial legacy of underdevelopment can be summed up as centuries of British control of Indian farmland and production without any interest in bettering the situation of its people. India was seen as a land to be drained for the empire not developed for the Indians.

The pattern of Indian foreign trade was an indication of the colonial character of its economy. As late as 1935–39 food, drink, tobacco, and raw materials constituted 68.5 per cent of India's exports, while manufactured goods made up 64.5 per cent of its imports.[97] Economic development depends on the size and utilization of the economic surplus or generated savings for reinvestment and expansion of the economy. From 1914 to 1946, the net savings of the country was only 2.75 per cent of the national income (GNP). This low number is directly related to the colonial appropriation of funds. It has been calculated that rent paid by peasants to the colonial landlords amounted to 1,400 million rupees per year.[98] This was only one of many ways the colonial enterprise was able to divert the wealth of the country into British pockets.

India was also almost completely illiterate. In 1921, the *Interim Report on Education* noted that of the population of 247,333,423 in 1917, only 4.85 per cent of males had been educated at a recognized institution. For women, the figure was 0.97 per cent.[99] While this document was produced by the British and is therefore problematic, and the criteria for recognition of institutions are unknown, these numbers indicate abysmal levels of literacy. This is further indicated by the statistics for those who passed and failed university entrance and university examinations. In the period 1864–85, 48,251 passed the university entrance examinations, and 70,509 failed; 12,518 got through the First Arts examination, but 18,902 failed. By the early twentieth century there were nearly 30,000 Indian graduates, roughly one out of every 10,000 of the population.[100]

These numbers also reflect the fact that Indians, then as today, lived primarily in villages. The *Interim Report* indicated that in Madras, a

major urban center, 39.2 per cent of boys and 10.1 per cent of girls were literate, and in Bombay 37.2 per cent of boys and 9.7 per cent of girls. These numbers reflect the greater access to education in large urban centers. In 1921, however, only 10.2 per cent of the population lived in urban centers, rising to 16.1 per cent by 1951.[101]

In the villages, where the bulk of the population lived and literacy was very low, peasants paid high taxes and rent to the British. Most often in the villages, even if there was access to education, which often there was not, many families needed the children to stay home to work in the fields or help in their fathers' craft or service. Even more problematic was the condition and treatment of women. Women were not favoured in India, and the birth of a girl was often seen as a calamity. Almost every woman in India has heard the expression "May you be the mother of a hundred sons,"[102] a well-known blessing for Hindu brides. About 75 per cent of the country's female population were village women from small peasant families that farmed on an acre or less. Such a woman was typically illiterate and ventured less than twenty kilometers from her place of birth during her lifetime. Her occupation was fieldwork, chiefly harvesting, planting, and weeding, for which she usually received half the wages of a man for the same job.[103] She did this job on top of her other full-time work of caring for the home and the children with little help from her husband. A customary day often involved walking several miles to fetch water, harvesting wheat in the blazing sun, and then grinding the wheat by hand. While she cooked, she breastfed one child and watched the others.

The nationalist struggle in India sought to remedy these things. Gandhi summoned the mass of women into the freedom struggle, and in 1925 chose Sarojini Naidu as president of the Congress Party. In 1931, in response to women's participation in the movement, the Congress Party passed a resolution endorsing political equality for all women regardless of qualifications. At that time, women in some European countries had not yet won the right to vote.[104] Therefore, although the Bene Israel were embraced by India and felt a part of that community, India faced seemingly insurmountable challenges.

CONCLUSION

The Bene Israel in the modern period were exposed to Western ideas and standards through the British military, Christian schooling, civil administrative posts, and exposure to both Zionism and Indian

nationalism. In the period immediately before the rise of Zionism, the community was educated, entrenched in and loyal to the colonial system, and deriving great benefit from colonial rule.

But as Indian nationalism grew stronger, community members had to ask themselves what their future might look like in an India independent of British rule. Would their Indian brethren forgive them their loyalty to the British? And as tensions arose between Muslim and Hindu communities during the first half of the twentieth century, eventually resulting in partition, it seemed clear that the Bene Israel would not be safe in Pakistan. Almost the entire Bene Israel community of what is today Pakistan left around the time of partition. Some left during the mass migration, along with many Hindus and Sikhs, and others after partition through remote border crossings or by telling the border guards that they were visiting relatives in India and would return after a brief trip. Often this involved leaving home and possessions behind, as no border guard would believe it was a short vacation if those crossing carried trunks filled with household goods.[105]

The community was not sitting idly by but leaving their homes, as their future in a postcolonial India seemed unsure; certainly in Pakistan, their assumption proved correct. When Zionism emerged, it provided an opportunity to take a further step towards a Western way of life that had already been the norm of many in the community. For some, Zionism became understood as a moral cause in the same way that Gandhi couched his struggle. For others, Zionism was wrapped up in religion, and the fact that it was a Jewish ideology meant it could not be separated from creed, despite being primarily secular.

This was also a community with a very strong Jewish identity. While loyal to the British and never a people apart while in India, theirs was still a Jewish revival with the Torah being translated into Marathi. Very few Jews in what is today Pakistan converted to Islam; rather, they left out of fear. Because, however, India was so far removed from Europe or the Ottoman Levant, it is not exactly clear how accurate their information about Zionism was in the first half of the twentieth century. What is clear is that, despite a strong Jewish identity and the fact that many community members were well-educated professionals, the Zionist movement did not spend much time and energy on the subcontinent.

2

Zionism Comes to the Bene Israel

On 8 April 1947, four months before India gained independence from British rule, a memorandum marked "secret" was sent to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem from a cadre working in the Bombay Zionist Association office. The memorandum was titled "On Hindu–Zionist Relations." It noted that, "there is an increasing realization on the side of the Zionists that Asia will count a great deal more in world policies, and that Asia is not predominantly Islamic but Hindu and Chinese."[1] The memo went on to discuss the importance of Hindu-Zionist relations: "On the Hindu side there is an appreciation that a Zionist Palestine may be an important link in the defense policy of India, that it may, with the support of European nations, be an effective counter-weight to the alliance of Islamic countries."[2] To foster such relations, the memo suggested investing in cultural exchanges,

> No attempt has been made in the past to create such an understanding, which is due to a large extent to the neglect of India by the Zionists themselves. This is due no doubt to "Western" attitudes of Jews in general. The immediate question is one of procedure. The first approach should be cultural. If we accept that it is futile to expect India to support Zionist claims in the immediate future, then the program will be seen to be one of cautious preparation which will not attract too much public attention. The normal methods of developing cultural relations like the exchange of professors, popularization of books, invitations to leading personalities, exhibitions, etc., can also be undertaken without causing unnecessary public curiosity. As well, it is of the utmost importance that the Jewish Agency should have a representative in

> Delhi. The representation need only be unofficial in the first instance, but the person chosen should be of sufficient intellectual and political caliber as to be an intimate contact of leading personalities. India has a full appreciation of Zionist influence in world politics. The Zionist leadership has not fully realized that in the years to come India will have a very considerable influence in shaping policy in Asia. An orientation of Jewish policy in terms of this fact is urgently called for.[3]

This memo sheds light on just how little cultural exchange and awareness existed between the Zionist and Hindu communities as late as 1947. While considerable amounts of time and money were spent to influence European powers, very little time or energy had been spent trying to become closer with one of the only non-Muslim nations in Asia. This admission that the Zionists had neglected India's importance is noteworthy and specifically identifies Western attitudes as the cause of this neglect. It is also worth noting that these Western attitudes, an allusion to a Eurocentric discourse, were so sufficiently understood, that the author saw no need to elaborate.

The document was likely marked "secret" because of Hindu support for Muslim international issues. It was written as violent tensions were rising between the Muslim and Hindu communities preceding the partition of India. The Hindu leadership in India was going to great lengths to try to appease the Muslim community and to reduce tensions between the two communities. The Muslim League in India condemned the idea of a Jewish Palestine, which they perceived as a colonial body. The Zionists were aware of this and wanted to proceed with caution to avoid bringing undue attention to their cause. While the memo's admission of neglect was accurate, it was untrue that no attempt had been made to create understanding between Zionists and Hindu communities. By the time this memo was written in 1947, the Jewish Agency had sent several emissaries to India, the most influential for the Bene Israel being Dr Immanuel Olsvanger, who stands out as the cornerstone of the movement that brought the community to Israel.

THE ZIONIST EMISSARY

Olsvanger, who was born in Poland in 1888 and received his doctorate from the University of Bern in 1916, had an in-depth knowledge of Hinduism, was a Sanskrit scholar, and had translated the Bhagavad Gita into Hebrew. He joined the staff of Keren Hayesod, Zionism's

principal fundraising organ in 1921 and became a traveling lecturer for the organization and for the Zionist movement in general.[4] He was largely responsible for putting the Bene Israel on the map by uncovering in India on his 1936 trip a work of great scholarship: Samuel Kehimkar's manuscript on the history of the Bene Israel. Olsvanger brought it back to Israel and had it published there in 1937. Because of the positive reception the manuscript received and Olsvanger's impact on the community, a legend has grown around him, which members of the community often recount and believe to be true. It is a classic Indian tale of a student who finds a guru, and it exemplifies how Indian mythology can encapsulate anything on Indian soil, including things Jewish.

The legend relates that during Olsvanger's 1936 trip to India he traveled through the villages of the Konkan Coast looking for signs of Judaism, including the Star of David, artifacts, and neglected old synagogues, hoping to find people he could organize and help emigrate to Mandate Palestine. One day, while walking through the village of Alibag, he came upon an old, illiterate Hindu man putting out stones on which to perform *puja*, a Hindu prayer ritual. Olsvanger asked him, "Do you believe in God?" The man smiled and said, "It doesn't matter if I believe in God or if you believe in God. What matters is that God believes in us." According to the story, Olsvanger became so enraptured by the man's sincerity that he became the man's disciple and studied with him daily.[5]

This story is problematic on several levels. First, in 1936 the villagers of Alibag spoke Marathi almost exclusively, which Olsvanger did not speak. Second, neither this episode nor any reference to a teacher appears in Olsvanger's diary. That said, we know that he did spend time in Alibag. We also know that Olsvanger was different from many of the *schlichim* sent to Asia and Africa in that he had positive attitudes concerning India. Many of the *schlichim* had very negative feelings about the places they were sent.

The Jewish Agency had sent Olsvanger to India as a cultural representative in the hopes of gaining favour for the Zionist cause. Moshe Shertok, head of the Jewish Agency at the time, said of Olsvanger's mission, "This mission is not to be a political campaign conducted by means of public meetings or interviews in the press, but a very cautious and discreet method of procedure."[6]

Many Bene Israel interviewed in 2008 maintain that it was not until Olsvanger made contact with their community that they were really

exposed to Zionism and the idea of immigrating to Israel.[7] Before his arrival in India, Zionist activity was steadily gathering momentum but was often dominated by the Baghdadi community, leaving the majority of the Bene Israel feeling ostracized. By 1934, the tension between the Baghdadi community and the Bene Israel had reached its zenith over an incident that occurred not in India but in Burma. The Musmeah Yeshua synagogue in Rangoon was used by a Jewish community of approximately 1,300 people, sixty of who were Bene Israel while the rest were primarily Baghdadi. Since 1926, the Bene Israel had participated fully in the congregation and had participated in the election of the trustees, although they were not allowed to become trustees themselves.

On the eve of the new elections in 1934, the retiring trustees not only refused the request to have some Bene Israel be eligible for election but they also declared that the Bene Israel did not observe the Jewish laws of divorce and were not good Jews. As Roland notes, the dispute became so heated that the case was submitted to the High Court, and both communities sought the opinions of authorities in Iraq, Mandate Palestine, and London. Rabbi Dr J.H. Hertz, the chief rabbi of the British Empire and the London Beit Din, said that equal privileges and rights, including being counted in the *minyan*, might be extended to the Bene Israel if they promised to abide by and carry out all Jewish laws and practices. Rabbi Gaster reiterated his support for the Bene Israel stating they were full-fledged Israelites. Judge Alfred Leach, the presiding judge, after studying the situation declared that the Bene Israel did not differ from other Jews and were thus eligible for appointments as trustees and eligible to vote.[8] It was an important victory for the Bene Israel but created further animosity between the two communities, and Olsvanger met with each community separately.

The Bene Israel formed the largest Jewish community in India, and Olsvanger was extremely successful at bringing them into the Zionist fold. Even years after the state of Israel had been created, when many Bene Israel had already moved there, appeals by the community were often directed to Olsvanger rather than to the Jewish Agency. A letter from an Indian *oleh* from Be'er Sheva to the Jewish Agency in 1956, states,

> It is entirely through the personal efforts of Dr Olsvanger that the Indian immigration has been started and restarted. There is no doubt that he has a great affinity for Indian Jews, and as well has

> conquered our hearts by substantial actions, actual deeds, timely help, hospitality and most valuable advice, whenever and wherever required during our critical times. He visited India twice and has definitely studied the Indians very minutely. And if I am not exaggerating he is always of the opinion that Indians are well behaved, well mannered, cultured, hospitable, social and etiquetted. I am confident that you will definitely concur with his honored opinion about our Indian Jews.[9]

While it is not accurate to say that Indian immigration was started entirely through Olsvanger's personal effort, this letter accurately describes the community's feelings towards him.

In 1941, Nohman Shohet, editor of the Indian Zionist journal *The Jewish Advocate*, commented that, "Olsvanger had forged a link between Indian Jewry and Palestine as no other delegate before him had done."[10] On Olsvanger's 1941 trip he told a gathering of Bene Israel, "Your ancestors came here at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple; we want you in Palestine to assist us in building the Third Temple."[11] By the end of his 1941 visit to Bombay, his campaign had yielded the highest total sum of money yet collected by any Zionist delegation in that city.[12]

While his 1936 trip involved meeting many important Indian leaders, both Hindu and Muslim, as well as the Jewish Agency leadership in Bombay, his mission was not limited to dignitaries. He spent time with the Jewish communities, encouraging them to immigrate to the *Yishuv*, and gaining their respect and friendship. Dr Olsvanger's 1936 diary provides insight into his trip, which lasted from 12 August to 7 November. The focus of this trip was not only to spread awareness of Zionism among Indian Jews, raise funds for the *Yishuv*, and gain Hindu support for Zionism but also specifically to gain the support of Mahatma Gandhi. Zionism had recently gained a considerable public relations boost from the support of Albert Einstein. Gandhi's support would add moral stature to the movement. A meeting was therefore arranged between Olsvanger and Gandhi, but it did not go as hoped. It took place at Gandhi's ashram while Gandhi was recovering from an illness, and Olsvanger later wrote in his diary,

> A very weak *Leammel* sat on his bed just recovered from his illness. On the floor sat about fifteen of his students. I got a place at the edge of the bed. I talked with him for about twenty minutes. I dis-

> liked the whole environment. But nobody could notice it. I told the rebbe everything in detail. The rebbe was silent and the students listened. When I told him that Kallenbach [a Jew from South Africa who was one of Gandhi's closest friends] was an active member of the African Zionist Federation, he said, "I know. But then he has so many poor relatives!" That's how he understands Zionism! I decided to let Kallenbach deal with this goat hero.[13]

He refers twice to Gandhi as a *rebbe*, which could be a sign of respect, but as most secular Zionists in the 1930s had no great love for religion or rabbis, it may have been demeaning. He also refers to the man as both a "goat hero" and a *leammel*, a Yiddish word literally meaning "little lamb" but used to refer to someone who is foolish or submissive. This may be indicative of certain attitudes he brought with him to the meeting. It is interesting that Olsvanger did not like the environment but believed that "nobody could notice it." How could he be sure? It is also strange that Gandhi, champion of the poor in India, responded to Zionism by declaring that Kallenbach had "so many poor relatives." Olsvanger's diary not only reveals some of his own experiences but also Gandhi's ignorance about Zionism and a nationalist struggle – involving both the British and Muslims – beyond India's border.

This encounter led to bitterness towards Gandhi, which later spilled over into the Zionist movement. The movement never did gain Gandhi's public support and later tried to discredit the Mahatma, succeeding to a certain extent in holding Gandhi up to ridicule for his advice to the Jews in Nazi Germany. On November 26, 1938, Gandhi wrote,

> If I were a Jew born in Germany and earned my livelihood there, I would claim Germany as my home even as the tallest German may, and challenge him to shoot me or cast me in a dungeon. I would refuse to be expelled or submit to discriminating treatment and for doing this, I should not wait for the fellow Jews to join me in rival resistance but would have confidence that in the end the rest are bound to follow my example … The calculated violence of Hitler may even result in the general massacre of the Jews by way of his first answer to the declaration of such hostilities. But if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a

> day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race at the hands of the tyrant. For to be god fearing, death has no terror. It is a joyful sleep to be followed by a waking that would be all the more refreshing for the long sleep … I am convinced that if someone with courage and vision can arise among them to lead them in non-violent action, the winter of their despair can in the twinkling of an eye be turned into a summer of hope. And what has today become a degrading man hunt can be turned into a calm and determined stand offered by unarmed men and women possessing the strength and suffering given to them by Jehovah. It will be truly a religious resistance offered against the godless fury of dehumanized man.[14]

The discrediting of Gandhi over these statements is unfortunate. In many popular discourses both within Israel and in Jewish communities throughout the world, this has led Gandhi to be often referred to as an anti-Semite, which is not accurate.

Gandhi, however, was not the only Indian leader Olsvanger met on that trip. According to his diary he also spent time with Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru, who was a leader in the Indian Nationalist movement at the time and who went on to become India's first prime minister, was arguably one of the great political and social leaders of the twentieth century. Radhakrishnan, one of India's most acclaimed intellectuals who taught at Oxford for more than a decade, said, "When we watch Nehru at close range, we feel we are in the presence of a man of extraordinary gifts, of talents that amount to genius, who has given himself to the service of his fellow men. Posterity will look upon him as one of the great liberators of humanity."[15]

In the words of British Prime Minister Atlee, "India was fortunate in finding Jawaharlal Nehru a man of exceptional character and wisdom."[16] As Britain's Lord Boyd commented, "With his great intellectual powers and his wealth, he could have attained high rank in any social or governmental circle. He sacrificed that comfortable and honorable position for the ideal of freedom for his native land and the political and economic uplift of its poverty stricken millions. Nehru will live in history as one of the greatest and most interesting figures of this century."[17]

Olsvanger, however, seemed unimpressed when he met Nehru on 20 August 1936. He wrote in his diary, "First visit with Jawaharlal. Mixture of nationalism, which he fully admits, socialism, even commu-

nism, but not fully agreeing with Sovietism. A slim, beautiful man, but not very clever. He is very proud of knowing 'the affairs of the world' with all their implications. All implications, that is of, British imperialism. He doesn't know anything about Zionism; has seen Palestine once as he flew over the country. Maintains though to know Zionism and its connections with 'the affairs of the world.'"[18]

It is remarkable that Olsvanger refers to Nehru as "not very clever." Nehru had many enemies and many Indian citizens disliked his political decisions, but even they respected his intelligence. Also, it seems unfair to expect Nehru to have an in-depth understanding of Zionism or of Mandatory Palestine at the time. Even those Zionists who were not on the ground in the Yishuv had little idea of what was really happening.

Was Nehru seen as "not very clever" simply because he was the "other" to Olsvanger? It would seem unlikely as he was such a scholar of India, but it may have been the case. Clearly, however, the Jews of India were not the "other" for Olsvanger. To him they were never anything but "pure."

It is not unusual for visiting Jews to see the Jewish inhabitants of a place as very different from the non-Jewish population. Nahum Slouschz, in his text *Travels in North Africa*, discussed the Libyan Jews he encountered in 1906: "Our host received us with the utmost cordiality. He was a handsome fellow, of a pure, brown, southern type. His wife wove girdles, like the women of the Bible." Eight paragraphs later he describes the Arab inhabitants: "Among the Arabs the filth and stench are simply indescribable; they are so lazy that, were it not for the Jews, they would never get anything done."[19] Clearly Olsvanger is not alone in his ability to hold one attitude towards India's Jews and another towards other Indians, even Gandhi and Nehru. Nevertheless, Nehru and Olsvanger maintained contact long after the 1936 visit and there was correspondence between the two men as late as 1958 concerning the well-being of the Indian Jewish communities in Israel.[20]

ORGANIZATIONS

While Olsvanger was the most influential Zionist emissary to go to India, he was not the first. Others had come before, and, as early as 1917, the Bene Israel began to form unofficial social organizations that later became formal Zionist bodies. The Israelite League, later known as the All India Israelite League, was created in 1917 following

the first Bene Israel Conference held in Bombay on 25–27 December. According to Joan Roland, the League, like the Indian National Congress, began all meetings with expressions of loyalty to the British and to the king, prayed for victory in the war, and welcomed important British officials visiting India. In December 1917, the guest was Edwin Montagu who was congratulated for being the first Jewish secretary of state for India.

The League was to serve as a central body to address social and political grievances. A journal entitled *Friend of Israel* was created as the mouthpiece of this organization, and in May of that year it printed an article in favour of the Jews moving to Palestine. The second annual conference of the League, held in 1918, stated these objectives: "The Bene Israel conference shall be to promote the progress of the Bene Israel community by deliberating upon social, religious, educational, and economic questions relating to the well being of the community and to take steps to carry out the resolutions passed by the conference."[21]

Shortly thereafter, the *Times of India*, a leading national newspaper, published an article on the Balfour Declaration. The article stated that "liberal and cultural Jews had no desire to resettle in Palestine and preferred assimilation to their countries of residence."[22] A *Friend of Israel* editorial entitled "The Fall of Jerusalem" presented an opposing view. In discussing how Palestine would be run under the British, it reasoned that the Balfour Declaration had raised the hopes of Jews throughout the world that a free Palestine would be made into a Jewish homeland at the end of the war. Thus the *Friend of Israel* publication can be seen as an instrument of Zionism even if it did not necessarily consider itself to be so.

On 2 April 1919, the Sha'ar ha- Rahamim synagogue in Bombay convened a public meeting of Bene Israel members to discuss the ideology of Zionism, something the organizers felt was largely misunderstood by the community members. Three hundred and fifty people attended the gathering to hear a variety of speakers who both championed and denounced the ideology. While most supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland, the arguments of those against it were interesting. Dr Abraham Erulkar, who had been educated in England, suggested that a Zionist state would provide an excellent breeding place for racial hatred based on color prejudice and that the bond of religion would be a mockery. His brother, David Erulkar, a barrister, also educated in England, argued that to form a Jewish

nation from peoples who were widely divergent in civilization, way of thought, and economic conditions would set back world progress by several centuries. He cautioned that Western Jews were not free of color prejudice, even towards fellow Jews, and noted that the Bene Israel had been denied their rights as Jews by the Baghdadi synagogues in India. He suggested that this was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of social problems that might arise.[23]

After much discussion, the synagogue passed a resolution stating that the meeting was in full sympathy with the Zionist cause. Shortly thereafter, a more cautious resolution was passed,

> The meeting was in sympathy with the intellectual aspects of Zionism, but deferred consideration of political or national aspects of Zionism until (a) details of the political future of Palestine were finally decided upon and announced and (b) the Zionists have publicly and authoritatively declared that any Bene Israel who choose to emigrate to Palestine enjoy all the rights and privileges and that no distinction, preference, or disability based on color prejudice shall be tolerated in the state intended to be set up by the Zionists and that the claims of every colored people shall be accepted without impugning their purity of race.[24]

It is evident from this that these people were far from "backwards," that their educated leaders carefully considered the situation based on the information at their disposal, and that they were aware they might face social problems if they decided to support Zionism. In fact, David Erulkar's predictions of racial tensions were borne out almost exactly as he had foreseen.

In response to the resolution, a lengthy article was published in *Friend of Israel* suggesting that fears of prejudice were unfounded as Jews from all over the world would be part of the movement and, thus, asking the Zionists to guarantee freedom from discrimination was ridiculous. It stated, "We should not show our inferiority complex by suggesting that we might be questioned as true Jews."[25] *Friend of Israel* supported Zionism, while the mouthpiece of the new organization, *The Israelite*, opposed it or at least voiced reservations about the challenge of creating a Jewish state.

In May 1919, the Bene Israel community of Karachi in the province of Sind elected Abraham Reuben as a Zionist delegate to represent the Sind community. Reuben wrote to the World Zionist Organiza-

tion that his 650-member community was in full support of the movement and asked how they could become affiliated. The following year, the Sind community sent Reuben to Palestine to report what was going on and what the possibilities were for the future.

In August 1920, the World Zionist Organization (WZO) sent David Rogon, a traveling lecturer, to give a talk on Zionism in Bombay and to encourage the formation of a Zionist organization. One month later, the Bene Israel Zionist Organization was created, with Dr Solomon Moses as president and Jacob Aptekar as treasurer.[26] Like the Sind community before them, they immediately asked the WZO for a copy of the Zionist constitution, any other written material of assistance, and advice on how to proceed. The WZO responded that they were pleased at the emergence of the organization and that the Indian Jews should "do their utmost in collecting a large fund towards the rebuilding of Palestine."[27] Things seemed to be moving rapidly, as the WZO must have noted.

In 1921, the WZO sent Israel Cohen as their first Zionist emissary to the Far East. His trip included Egypt, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, and India, and his primary task was to canvas aggressively for Keren Hayesod. His first stop in India was Calcutta, a city with a predominantly Baghdadi community, and here he helped the Baghdadis create the Calcutta Zionist Organization. From Calcutta he traveled to Bombay where he gave four lectures on Zionism.[28]

At a lecture to the Bene Israel community (he spoke separately to the Baghdadis) the Bene Israel specifically asked if they would encounter discrimination in Palestine. He responded that they would be just as welcome as the Yemenite Jews or any other Easterners who had recently arrived. At that time, in 1921, the Yemenite community in British Mandate Palestine was made up almost exclusively of manual labourers, often in remote desert areas. The Europeans regarded them as accustomed to hot weather and hard labour and, therefore, satisfied with very little.[29] In line with that mindset, a general plan drawn up by the Yishuv by 1943, entitled "The Uniform Pioneer of Eastern Lands,"[30] stipulated separate plans for European and Oriental immigrants. For Europeans, transit camps would be established along the coastal plain from Haifa to Gaza, where they could spend three months. Oriental immigrants would be placed in transit camps in the Negev desert, where they would be "educated" in Zionism for a year or two and then settled there. This plan was never fully implemented, but it is indicative of what lay behind Cohen's answer to the Bene Israel. While the Bene Israel may have found his response acceptable,

being unaware of the conditions in Palestine for Yemenite and other Eastern communities, it suggests the lack of accurate information the Bene Israel were receiving and the discourse between European Zionists and the Indian Jews. More than 500 Bene Israel members attended the lecture, however, and Cohen later reported that he found the Bene Israel animated by a keen Jewish consciousness, a love of Jewish learning, and a strong desire to do their share in the national task of restoring the land of Israel.

All over India, the Bene Israel watched the development of the Zionist movement as closely as they could. When the League of Nations awarded Britain the Mandate for Palestine in June 1922, it was quickly known throughout the community. The Mandate strengthened the Zionist cause and was a source of joy to all in favour of the movement. Despite Cohen's support of Indian immigration and the British Mandate, however, by the mid-1920s the Zionist movement decided that immigration from the Orient had been unsuccessful. They began to limit the numbers from those communities whom they would bring to Palestine. This, however, did not stop individuals and communities coming of their own accord, many entering the country illegally.[31]

On examining the Zionist activity in the 1920s in some other non-European communities, such as Morocco or Iraq, it can be seen that the WZO was not actively pursuing the goal of immigration. A closer look reveals that emissaries to those communities were primarily raising funds for the *Yishuv*. In India too, while openly supporting immigration, Israel Cohen saw fundraising as his foremost mission. For the Bene Israel, however, the very idea of an emissary represented a link to both Israel and world Jewry. After being cut off from world Jewry for centuries, it gave the community a sense of belonging. The notion of the emissary and the visit by Israel Cohen may well have set the stage for Olsvanger's visit more than a decade later.

After Cohen left India, activity in the Bene Israel Zionist Organization seems to have slowed down. As early as 1924, Cohen complained that he was not receiving replies to letters and telegraphs he sent the organization. In 1926, Keren Hayesod sent another emissary to India, Dr Alexander Goldstein, again to raise funds for the *Yishuv*. Although Goldstein tapped into some of the wealth of the Baghdadi Jews, the Bene Israel were slow to contribute, feeling that the financial concerns of their own community came first.[32]

Goldstein returned to India again in 1928 and 1929. On the last visit he wrote for the first time of the political situation in India and

its effects. He wrote that the Bene Israel were frightened by the class struggle going on and that Muslims were holding meetings of sympathy for the Arabs of Palestine. Also, during the 1920s, Gandhi had supported the Khalifat movement against the weakening of the Caliphate, in an effort to win over Indian Muslims for his struggle against the British. Because of this, Goldstein found that his task took longer and was more difficult and had to be done with as little publicity as possible. This was the first time a representative of the Zionist movement wrote about the political situation in India, a situation that would become increasingly significant for them.

DUAL LOYALTIES

As Indian nationalism and Zionism grew stronger, both within and without India, so did the debate among those Bene Israel who felt pro-Indian, pro-British, and now pro-Zionist. By the 1920s, a pro-British attitude was largely being replaced by an ongoing debate within the community, that was to last several decades, on the question of their identity as Jews or as Indians. Some maintained that these identities conflicted, others that they were not mutually exclusive. As nationalistic tendencies arose and the divide between India's Hindu and Muslim populations became violent, the dual loyalty debate grew more intense. The Bene Israel had never had to distinguish between being Indian and being Jewish; never during their nearly 2,000 years in India had this question arisen.

At the nineteenth annual Bene Israel conference in Bombay in 1935, the president, Dr Elijah Moses, who became Bombay's mayor two years later, urged the community to maintain their Indian identity to secure better positions within India,

> A minority community like ours can have no chance, therefore, unless we have merits out of the ordinary or can at least stand as high as the best in other communities. We should emulate the highest in the land in education, trade, professions, politics and character, forgetting we are Bene Israel and remembering only that we are Indians. We are part of the vast Indian Nation. We have to participate as Indians in the progress and developments of this country. The needs of this country should, therefore, be our needs, and our efforts as a community should be directed towards supplying those needs, so that not only should we be able to hold

> our own with other communities but also to cooperate on the onward march of the country.[33]

The concept of dual loyalty to Israel and India indicates their deep feeling of belonging and attachment to India. Even after the creation of the State of Israel and the emigration of many Indian *olim*, this issue still received great focus. The fact, however, that the Bene Israel made *aliyah* despite this strong sense of belonging in India reveals how deeply they felt their Jewish identity. As scholar Gary Jacobsohn noted, "to be sure, in Israel, the symbols of collective identity were primordial rather than idea driven."[34] The minutes of the All India Zionist Conference of 27 August 1950 show the heated debate still under way. At the meeting, a Dr Petzel stated,

> Though by the establishment of the state of Israel the most important aim has been achieved, to the Jews of the Diaspora, Zionism means something more. Zionism does not mean disloyalty to the state in which the Jew lives. When there is a conflict between the policy of Israel and that of his native land the question of dual loyalty therefore does not arise. No person can be accused of being disloyal to his country when he sympathizes with the lot of a section of his brethren elsewhere. Now with regard to the question of dual loyalty, if a person migrates to Israel no question of dual loyalty arises, then the person becomes a citizen of Israel. If war was to break out between Israel and Britain then the Jews who are British citizens should take part in a war against Israel. But if we consider it a matter of truth and righteousness we may become conscientious objectors.[35]

Mr Japeth, a well-known Baghdadi Jew who had shocked his community by marrying a Bene Israel, responded, "As far as India and our dual loyalty are concerned, I think Dr Petzel begs the question when he says he is not going to fight against Israel. I hope there will not be a need to fight against Israel, but if such an occasion does arise I could always say I am not going to fight for anybody against anybody – whether I am a Jew or an Indian I could still be a conscientious objector. But there is not going to be a war between India and the Jews – both people are truly religious and both love peace. I think these are very important points."[36]

Dr. Solomon Moses continued the debate, stating, "We in India are

the foster children of India, so that the dual loyalty should not interfere with feelings to Israel. I have only got to say that one thing as far as that point is concerned. If any one of you is asked whom you love more, your father or your mother, what would you say? Rightly India has become our mother. It is our motherland and Israel is our fatherland; that cannot be eradicated as long as Jewish blood flows in each and every one of us."[37]

As in other countries, particularly Britain and the US, the debate over dual loyalty was widespread and could be found in many sectors of Indian Jewry, both within and without the Bene Israel community. So far-reaching and important was this debate that in 1954 Rabbi Ezekiel Musleah, a leader in the Calcutta Baghdadi community who later moved to the US, refused a request to join the committee of the Calcutta Zionist Organization due to the incompatibility of being both an Indian citizen and a member of a foreign political party – the Zionist Organization.[38] This response from an active rabbi and community leader was especially problematic.

The Calcutta Zionist Association responded in a lengthy letter, stating,

> This is a rather serious view as it involves an important problem generally concerning the great majority of the members of our association and its community who, equally Indian citizens, are in the same situation as you. If your opinion be taken as correct, all of them would find themselves not only second class Indian citizens but straightforward traitors of their country, participating in activities of a foreign organization to the detriment of the interest of the state to which they owe allegiance. Such an opinion coming from the spiritual head of the community is most astonishing and rather serious. We therefore consider it our duty to tackle the problem before it be exploited by enemies of Israel should your opinion come to their knowledge.[39]

The letter discusses why Musleah's views were problematic, then turns to the topic of world Jewry,

> The Zionist movement from its inception has developed its activities all over the world including the most anti-Semitic countries such as Russia, Poland, Rumania, Germany, etc. etc., and nowhere have these activities – except lately in the communist governed countries and of course in Arab countries – been considered detri-

> mental to the interests of the State in which they took place. Since then, the world over, Jewish communities are openly and not secretly deploying intense activities and displaying great interest in the upbuilding of Israel with the consent of the various countries in which they dwell, helping it financially, morally, and politically to the utmost of their abilities. And nowhere are their endeavors on behalf of the Jewish state considered detrimental to or in any way incompatible with their duties as loyal citizens. We find it therefore altogether incomprehensible that you as a young rabbi should find yourself sharing such a wrongful opinion on Zionism with the most vehement anti-Semites and enemies of Israel.[40]

Under immense pressure, Rabbi Musleah partially backtracked,

> As you know I was a very active member of the Zionist movement and Habonim before the inception of Israel, and to impute an anti-Zionist bias to me is as shocking as it is absurd. I am still a staunch supporter of cultural ties between Israel and the Jews outside Israel. I firmly believe that Israel has the most prospects for any young Jew and for that I have been and am working actively by supervising the emigration to Israel of several groups of young people and older adults. I wish to see the state of Israel prosper and go from strength to strength and I rejoice at reports of favorable deployments and progress therein. I agree, as you say in your letter, that Jewish communities throughout the world are openly supporting the upbuilding of Israel financially, morally and politically. In my judgment, however, such support must be limited to financial and moral spheres. Politically Israel must fend for itself.[41]

To have a rabbi advocating for India demonstrates both the special place India held for its Jews and their inaccurate understanding of Zionism. Even many in the Baghdadi community, who had been slow to warm to the subcontinent, shared this feeling. For the Bene Israel, who had been there for more than a thousand years, the ideology of Zionism was more difficult to grasp, emerging as it did alongside many other ideologies in India in the first half of the twentieth century.

The dual loyalty debate is an important indication that the Jews of India actually had a choice as to which community to belong to. It is impossible to guess what the Bene Israel imagined both the Jewish and

the yet unborn Indian nations to be. Benedict Anderson suggests, however, that all nations are "imagined, because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[42] A nation is also imaginary because, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."[43] While modern Zionism was the creation of secular modern Europeans, secularism was not widely understood by traditional societies in India, even in the modern city of Bombay. The Bene Israel may have imagined Israel differently from the Europeans, but the discussion of dual loyalty was not unique to the Jews of India. Jews in Britain, the United States, and even Germany before the war held similar discussions. Whatever their vision, it was apparently exciting enough that many in the Bene Israel community eventually immigrated.

REFUGEES

It was not only through official Zionist activity that the Bene Israel were exposed to Zionism. India served as a haven for a few Jews fleeing persecution in Europe, and many refugees brought with them a contagious zeal for the creation of a Jewish state. In 1934, the Jewish Relief Association (JRA) was organized in Bombay as a "purely charitable association to assist European Jews who found their way to hospitable India but had no means of livelihood as in most cases they were victims of racial persecution."[44] The JRA established contact with the Central Council for Refugees in London and guaranteed maintenance to the government of India for every refugee admitted to India. It was, as well, supported by the Council for German Jewry, and by March 1939, the Indian government and the Jewish Relief Association in Bombay had agreed to give initial support to whomever the government chose to let into the country for a period of five years. Shortly thereafter, similar offices were opened in Madras and Calcutta.

The problems associated with absorbing Jewish refugees were extensive. By the late 1930s boats were arriving in Bombay carrying penniless Jews en route to China, Colombo, Manila, Hong Kong, and Japan. The JRA tried to provide financial assistance, but due to limited funds they found their resources increasingly strained.

As well, by 1939 the British were not interested in providing Indian entry visas to Jews from Germany or from any other country sympa-

thetic to Germany. Jews who did enter India from these places experienced a difficult transition. Israel Minner, a German Jew who had been in Dachau and Buchenwald until February 1939, was arrested and imprisoned for two months in India where he was interrogated and released only when it was clear that he was not a German spy. Upon his release, the Jewish Relief Association issued a circular, stating,

> The Committee would like to advise all Jewish refugees of foreign nationality that in their own interest it is most desirable for them to conduct themselves in all matters with the utmost circumspection … They owe this duty also to the government of India which is showing them great consideration and which might come in for criticism if the fact that a number of German citizens are left free comes specially to the public notice … German should on no account be spoken, even among themselves, and even over the telephone, and not a word should ever be uttered on political subjects. It would be better to avoid all foreign languages and speak only English, as the average inhabitant of this country is unacquainted with Continental languages and may mistake any language for German. Not only should any sort of loud conduct be avoided but also acts, however correct in ordinary circumstances, which are capable under today's conditions of being misconstrued by mischievous persons.[45]

The threat of being mistaken as a German spy was not the only difficulty facing the Jewish refugees. India's pro-Arab Muslim communities also objected to letting Jews into the country.

Despite this, Nehru tried, more than many other world statesmen, to accept Jewish refugees. The All India Congress received many applications through the German Indian Society, the German Emergency Committee, and other organizations in Europe, and Nehru played an important role in getting many of these applicants into the country. He also persuaded the reluctant Indian Medical Association to recognize the doctors entering the country, enabling many to practice legally in India. Most of the doctors went on to have successful careers and even introduced new industries into the country.[46] As a place of refuge for Jewish doctors fleeing Europe, India compared well to other locales. For example, the Syrian French journal *L'Orient* reported on 13 June 1933: "Two Jewish doctors fleeing Hitlerian persecution in Germany arrived in Damascus and have addressed a

request to the Ministry of Hygiene for the authorization to exercise their profession in Damascus. The news provoked great emotion in the city, as other physicians will arrive after the first two. There is no room for them in Syria."[47]

Nevertheless, India was still a colonized country when the war broke out, and Nehru's first duty was to the Indian struggle against the British. This limited his powers. "I need hardly assure you," he wrote, "that the suffering of the Jews in Germany has greatly shocked all people here. I wish we could help these unfortunate sufferers. To some extent I have been trying to do so. I have received scores of applications and I have sent the information to the various provincial governments and industrialists. I understand that a number of Jewish refugees have already come to India, but I fear that it will be more difficult for others to come, as the difficulties placed in their way by the British are many."[48] Most refugees settled in the larger cities of Bombay and Calcutta.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, a reported 1,000 Jewish refugees had been granted Indian visas. In 1941, the Jewish Agency archives indicate that India had 700 refugees from Austria and Germany alone, and in 1943 the JRA published a figure indicating that there were 1,080 continental Jews on Indian soil.[49] As not everyone went through the JRA, these numbers do not reflect all Jews who came to India. The government of India in fact stated that it had no precise information on how many Jews entered the country, as immigrants with valid passports were not asked if they were Jews. Therefore, unless the refugees went through the JRA there would have most likely been no record of their presence in India. Also, many who came to India left shortly thereafter for Palestine. For these reasons, the numbers reflect only the Jews present at the time of counting. One can assume that more Jews came through India than these numbers suggest, although exact numbers are difficult if not impossible to calculate.

Benjamin J. Israel, a scholar and member of the Bene Israel community, wrote, "India proved to be a generous mother, not only for the Jews who came to live here permanently, but she opened the doors freely to those who sought refuge with her temporarily when they were driven out or could no longer endure the disabilities imposed upon them in countries in which they dwelt. Hundreds of highly qualified German and East European Jews were given refuge in India and provided facilities for the exercise of their professions here."[50] While it is not accurate to say that India "opened the doors freely," it

is true that hundreds if not several thousand Jewish refugees escaped Hitler's Europe by entering India.

Most refugees never planned to stay in India, but a few became enraptured by the culture and ended up living there many years. Some had formalized contact with the Bene Israel community and many more with the Baghdadi community who were culturally more similar to the Europeans. It is recorded that refugees attended Bene Israel synagogues in the cities of Bombay, Poona, Ahmadabad, and Karachi, which led to contact among individuals. Sara Israel, a Bene Israel member, recalls a family friendship with a Dr Fred Tauber and his wife G.L. Gabriel. She recalls that, "the main contact we had with the refugee Jewish people who came to India was on a personal basis rather than a community basis."[51] These personal relationships meant contact with Jews who were on their way to the *Yishuv*. These individuals would have recounted the situation in Europe and emphasized the dire need for a Jewish state. Perhaps this is why Olsvanger found a very different audience in 1941 from the one he encountered during his 1936 visit.

In general, India received little news about the treatment of Jews in Europe. Its newspapers were filled with the struggle for national independence from the British, Indian soldiers fighting for the British on fronts all over the world, and the war in the Pacific. As a whole, Indians knew little about the Jews and were not fully aware of the intensity of their problems in Europe or their connection to the "Land of Israel."[52] Much of the news about the European Jews and the importance of a Jewish state may have come from the refugees in India on their way to Palestine.

One European refugee who stayed in India soon became an important member of the Bene Israel community, despite being an outsider. Hersch Cynowitz became active in various Zionist movements, eventually becoming chairman of both the Bombay Zionist Association and the All India Zionist Federation. He participated in many annual All India Zionist conferences and, over many years, exerted tremendous influence over the different Zionist organizations in India. When Israel became a state in 1948 and the Bene Israel began to immigrate on a large scale, many of its active members immigrated. Cynowitz stayed on in India, however, and his seniority eventually provided him a central position in the community.

It is strange that this outsider was able to exert such influence, but perhaps it was due to the very fact that he was an outsider. With the

Bene Israel divided among themselves on the question of immigration, Cynowitz, as chairman of the All Indian Zionist Federation, allowed both these voices to be heard without either becoming dominant. His outsider status facilitated his role as a neutral third party, despite his own Zionist preferences.

Also, the fact that this European attained a central position may indicate a notion of European superiority internalized by the Bene Israel. His European status gave him legitimacy in the eyes of many, which was reinforced by his background in Zionism. To a degree, the Bene Israel also believed in the idea of European or Western superiority. In addition, he arrived in Bombay able to speak Hebrew and a number of European languages. The community, over time, watched him deal with Zionist offices both in Europe and in Palestine, and it must have become clear that it was often more productive being represented by a European than an Indian. Cynowitz became a kind of cultural interpreter. Between 1945 and 1969 he visited as many consulates as he could, attempting to befriend minor officials, and he attended all kinds of community meetings and political gatherings that had nothing to do with Judaism or Zionism in order to become acquainted with other communities and organizations. By 1968, he reportedly had connections at the highest level of the Maharashtra government. He acted as an entrepreneur in a land divided by caste and formality. As one of his aides said, "Whereas we the Bene Israel stand on dignity, Mr Cynowitz just goes up to people and introduces himself. For him the ends justify the means."[53] By 1948, when large-scale immigration of the Bene Israel began, he was in a powerful position to facilitate that immigration. According to *The Jewish Advocate*, Cynowitz went to Israel for four months, from May to the end of August 1949, where he was received by President Weizmann and the Israeli foreign minister, Moshe Sharett.[54]

For the Zionist organizations in Europe and in Palestine, it was beneficial to have a European in a position of influence in India. It helped them get across their messages and doctrines without going through an Indian intermediary who might not understand the realities in Europe and the urgency of creating a Jewish state in Palestine.

On the other hand, there was tremendous criticism of this influential outsider. Letters written by the community in 1955 cast him in a poor light. A five-page open letter to Cynowitz from the trade commissioner of Israel for Southeast Asia, F.W. Pollack, listed numerous complaints against him, stating,

> I feel that now it has become imperative in the public interest that light be thrown on your "activities" of the past. I cannot but hope that this letter will convince those not yet convinced that you are not just a nuisance – but a positive danger to the good and proper functioning of Jewish public life in India. The president and chairman of the Central Jewish Board are aware of your having written many letters on letterheads of the board without showing copies to anyone or filing them in their proper places. The contents of those letters could only be reconstructed from the answers received from overseas during your absence, but it was abundantly clear that those communications contained detailed accounts of your alleged "negotiations" with all kinds of important personalities, institutions and governmental departments. In your own cable you had called yourself a leading personality on Indian Jewry, a designation which you should rather leave to others to confer upon you. This incident brings into the limelight your usual working method of getting falsehood and then using the printed word to impress unsuspecting people.
>
> Around the end of 1948, whilst you were away, the work of preparing the Aliyah proceeded smoothly and with the fullest cooperation between the central Jewish board and Bombay Zionist Association. When you came back in January 1949 from your tour in Israel you stated that you had been placed in sole charge of Aliyah and that no one was allowed to leave India for Israel without your written authority. You had however not received any authorization what so ever to this effect and when your colleagues asked you for your credentials you stated that the instructions had been given to you in secret and that you were not authorized to show them to anyone.[55]

The existence of many such complaint letters does not necessarily mean that Cynowitz is guilty of all charges made. Yet, if even a small portion of these accusations is accurate, they reveal that the community was receiving information about Zionism from less-than-ideal sources. Due to India's geographical distance from Europe and the *Yishuv*, exposure to Zionism was limited and problematic. While Europe before the Second World War had a multitude of Zionist organizations, all with slightly different ideologies and agendas, India had very few. This limited contact suggests that the community in India

would have had a limited understanding of the goings-on in British Mandate Palestine and the aims of the *Yishuv*.

CONCLUSION

Despite limited contact with Zionist organizations outside of India, Zionist ideology deeply penetrated the Bene Israel community leading to the creation of Indian Zionist organizations, which promoted it further. Visits by emissaries and the arrival of refugees from Europe further ignited the community. As early as 1936 there was keen interest in immigrating to Palestine, and, with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, large portions of the community were interested in packing up to leave the place that had been their ancestral home for almost 2,000 years. Representation of the *Yishuv* as a place of equal opportunity may have fostered their enthusiasm, as the harsh realities of British Mandate Palestine were not made clear to them. The articles in journals such as *Friend of Israel*, *Zion's Messenger*, and *The Jewish Advocate* were overwhelmingly supportive of the ideology, and emissaries who conducted evening programs aimed at educating young people about life in British Mandate Palestine, *kibbutzim*, and Zionist ideals painted a rosy picture of the future and the situation on the ground.[56] While it is true that Zionist emissaries such as Olsvanger did have enormous impact on the Bene Israel community, one cannot dismiss the power of the print media.

A Bene Israel member interviewed in 2008 said, "I can't remember exactly why I decided to come to Israel, but I can remember the exact moment. I was reading an article in *The Jewish Advocate* and was overwhelmed with emotion. I made up my mind to move there and then."[57] The idea of being reunited with the Jewish people in a Jewish country, coupled with a lack of real information, created an illusion that did not accurately portray either how difficult life would be or the opinions and attitudes of the European Zionists towards those from the Orient.

3

The Ingathering of Exiles

The country that the Bene Israel would move to was one filled with challenges and instability. Israel's absorption of hundreds of thousands of immigrants in the first years stretched the capacity of the new state beyond its limits, and the situation became socially, politically, culturally, and militarily chaotic. During the first three years, from 1948–51, the bodies responsible for the absorption of immigrants were confronted with overwhelming material, organizational, and spiritual problems,[1] and the strain on the country almost tore it apart. In the words of Howard Sachar, "[No] influx like it had been seen in modern times. It was an open door from which older and vastly wealthier countries would have recoiled in dismay."[2] Because no country in the modern period had ever absorbed such a diverse group of immigrants so quickly, there was no precedent to follow and no map to guide those responsible for overseeing the ingathering.

To begin with, the sheer numbers of people went well beyond what anyone had expected. Minutes of the meetings of a special subcommittee of the ruling Mapai Party on 14 and 21 January 1948 indicate that Giora Josepthal, the director of the Jewish Agency's Absorption Department, hoped for 150,000 immigrants over two years. Others at the meeting suggested the number could be 250,000.[3] No one imagined that 684,000 people would come or that the country's Jewish population would double between 1948 and 1951. This meant that the new country was ill equipped to deal with the situation; it suffered from a shortage of raw materials, means of production, funds, and trained personnel making life extremely difficult not only for the Bene Israel *olim* but for everyone.

In fact, Dr Josephthal indicated at the subcommittee meetings that the absorption of just 150,000 immigrants would be a catastrophe. He noted that no high-powered politicians were even present at the subcommittee meetings and that the Jewish Agency itself had no forum for him to voice his concern. He felt that the only person attuned to the dimensions of the looming problem was the Jewish Agency's treasurer, Eliezer Kaplan. But when he saw Kaplan speaking to Ben Gurion, he was, "sure that he was taking money away from the treasurer that was meant for *Aliyah*."[4]

The Jewish Agency was not even designed to oversee the immigration. Prior to 1948, it had two distinct tasks, neither of which focused directly on immigrants: The first task was political, conducting the diplomacy of the national home and the second focused on creating agricultural settlements.[5] While the Jewish Agency had an immigration department, this served to maintain Palestine offices abroad and to contest immigration with the British during the Mandate period. In neither case was the department directly involved with the absorption and social adjustment of individuals. Before the creation of the state, most immigrants had been of pioneering spirit and had not sought special treatment. After the war, the pioneering spirit was most often lacking in the newcomers.[6] The aged and the infirm, the destitute, and the weary all poured in on a tidal wave not seeking the challenge of state-building but rather security and peace, and it was only with the arrival of the destitute from Europe after the war that the Jewish Agency added an absorption section to their immigration department.

Dr Josephthal's primary concern was the shortage of housing. He stated at the Mapai subcommittee meeting that, for an influx of 150,000 immigrants, the country was 40 per cent behind in supplying housing. Numerous proposals were made to facilitate the anticipated 150,000 immigrants, such as the building of an additional 53,000 housing units at a cost of 96.6 million dollars, which the country did not have. Initially, Dr Josephthal also suggested quickly built wooden structures. As the number of immigrants rapidly exceeded the 150,000 estimate, the idea of these wooden structures had to be replaced with a less expensive alternative.

Coupled with this concern was the location of the housing. Public housing near cities such as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa was virtually unavailable. This would force newcomers to live far from the cities, and far from available work. The transportation costs were beyond the

means of most newcomers who arrived destitute. Jews leaving Eastern Europe were forbidden to remove any capital, and other European countries permitted only very small sums to be taken out. Jews from Arab countries were forced to leave their possessions behind or sell them for a fraction of their worth.[7] Jews from India found that their rupees were worth very little when converted into other currencies.[8]

An unforeseen solution to the problem of both housing and location emerged as a result of Israel's War of Independence, which saw the flight of hundreds of thousands of Arabs from cities, towns, and villages. By June 1950, there were 123,669 Jews living in abandoned Arab dwellings.[9] Eventually, one third of the immigrants who arrived during the mass immigration would live in abandoned Arab homes. Towns that had previously been Arab centers became almost vacant and soon had new Jewish tenants. Jaffa, adjacent to Tel Aviv, had lost a significant percentage of its Arab population during the war, as had Ramla, Lydda, Tiberias, Acco, and Ashkelon. Haifa's lower town was also abandoned and was turned into a Jewish quarter.[10]

LIVING CONDITIONS

This solution was facilitated by the Jewish Agency, as it did not want squatters and sought to ensure that all housing was physically fit for residency. Signs were put up stating, "This property has been put at the disposal of the Jewish Agency,"[11] and no one was allowed to live there until these dwellings had passed inspection. Eventually, however, all the abandoned dwellings had been filled, and there was still a significant lack of housing. One alternative Josephthal suggested to Ben Gurion were huts that could be built at the rate of 4,000 a month. These huts were to be temporary housing units to get immigrants through the first few winters and were to be individual one-room units of 3 to 4 square meters with common bathrooms. Unfortunately, the country had neither the raw materials to create these huts nor money to buy them. Ben Gurion opposed the idea, as he disliked the idea of temporary housing, wanting something more permanent.

An alternative to huts was sought in the army barracks left behind by the British. These barracks were quickly turned into reception camps intended to provide housing for a few days to a month after the immigrants' arrival.[12] Due to the overwhelming numbers of immigrants, however, many ended up in these camps for many months and some for more than a year. It was in these camps that the

incredible social challenges facing the new country became all too clear.

The first army barracks to be turned into a reception camp were just outside Haifa and were named Sha'ar Ha- aliyah (Gateway of Immigration).[13] The barracks had been destroyed by the British on their way out of the country, and everything from the windows and light fixtures to the toilets had been smashed. The structure of the barracks however was solid and was repaired as much as possible by the Israelis. Very quickly, a second barracks, Sha'ar Ha- aliyah B, was opened at Atlit; others were created shortly thereafter. Upon arrival at the camps, immigrants underwent a medical examination, inoculation against TB, and disinfection, a process that involved them removing their clothes and being deloused with DDT powder.[14] The newcomers were then screened for military service and put through an orientation session during which their skills were assessed.[15] The camps were initially surrounded by barbed wire, which gave them a gruesome appearance, but the wire was eventually replaced.

Upon entering the camp after the screening and delousing, immigrants found themselves in a sea of humanity from more than thirty countries and many cultures. There were central Europeans, Middle Easterners, North Africans, Indians, and eastern Europeans amongst others, pushing suitcases, crates, babies, and children through a dense crowd shouting in every language – a true Tower of Babel. Immigrants had to find a bed in one of the rooms designed for two or three but now so crammed with beds that there was no room to move. The camps quickly filled beyond capacity, and beds became hard to find. The immigrant camps held 28,000 people in January 1949 and 90,000 by the end of that same year.[16]

Living conditions were deplorable. Overcrowding, inadequate sanitary conditions, and poor nutrition caused rapid deterioration in the health of many newcomers. Tsvi Hermon of the Absorption Department reported to the Zionist executive that conditions in the camp were unacceptable. "It is not an exaggeration to say the conditions were better in the refugee camps in Germany, after the war."[17] The camps had no hot water, so in winter very little bathing took place. Thousands of people shared a single cold-water tap. The bathrooms with a few taps for washing hands were utterly filthy, and, due to the overcrowding, toilets in many camps became nothing more than holes in the ground without sewage treatment or running water. The holes soon filled up, but people had to keep using them even as they overflowed with excrement.[18]

Life in the reception camps was not conducive to proper nutrition. Although meals were prepared to meet caloric needs, the food was far from tasty, and lines were long. In the communal dining halls, people waited hours for a table where they would sit with strangers of different cultures. Epidemics set in, and those who had arrived in poor health became even more ill. Disease spread rapidly through the camps, and the health of those most susceptible, including a large percentage of the children, deteriorated rapidly.[19] It was reported that in July and August 1949, 200 of the 370 children in the Raanana camp were ill.[20] In April 1949, the government felt compelled to impose food rationing, and later it rationed other consumer goods.[21] The children did not go to school, as initially there were neither schools nor daycare centers, and the adults sat idly waiting for jobs, while the food rationing became a food shortage. In September 1949, with vegetables at the camps reduced by two thirds, immigrants at the Pardes Hannah camp staged a hunger demonstration. With no knowledge of how long this situation would continue, frustration and depression set in. Josepthal, who was kept up at night by the conditions and was scrambling against all odds to find a solution, claimed there was, "nothing to be done but quietly cry."[22]

As immigrants kept coming, the Jewish Agency opted to buy prefabricated huts of Finnish and Swedish design. At the same time, a national housing manufacturer, Amidar,[23] was established to build permanent housing for new immigrants by all means at its disposal although with negligible resources. By the end of 1949 it had built 25,000 tiny structures, and the number doubled during 1950. But even this could not house the vast numbers of newcomers arriving each month, and, thus, tent cities were erected. By early 1951, some 16,700 tents housed 97,000 men, women, and children – one tenth of the population.[24] During violent rainstorms in winter, tents frequently blew away leaving the inhabitants fleeing for shelter.

The executive of the Absorption Department, which included Josephthal, Zvi Herman, and Yehudah Braginsky, eventually created a new plan. Based on the realization that permanent housing could not keep up with the rate of immigration, the focus shifted to a more substantial form of temporary housing that would take people out of the reception camps to shelter more solid than tents. The idea was to erect what in effect were shantytowns throughout the country. These communities were given the name *ma'abarot*, meaning transition communities.[25] Most of their housing was made up of shacks of sheet metal, sometimes wood, and often a combination of aluminum and canvas.

The first such community was established on the outskirts of Tel Aviv as an experiment. Soon these communities were being created all over the country.

Life in these communities was still very difficult, only a slight step up from the reception camps. The inhabitants lived in poverty, and their shacks had no water or electricity. The water available was of poor quality and had to be boiled for drinking. The public toilets and showers were often no better than those of the reception camps. An Iraqi Jew who spent five years in the *ma'abarot* said that, "If there was a plane going back to Iraq that same second, I would have taken it."[26] While the *ma'abarot* were nothing more than shanty towns whose inhabitants still depended on aid from municipal authorities, there were small improvements over the camps: instead of food, these residents received a small income from the Jewish Agency, and many *ma'abarot*, though not all, were positioned near city centers with access to nearby jobs. This led to employment, although often only part time, but the promise of something better did wonders for the depression and frustration that accompanied the idle days and months in reception camps.

By November 1951, there were 127 of these communities outside of city centers. By 1952, more than 223,000 people were living in such communities, and the reception centers of Sha'ar Ha- aliyah were being emptied of inhabitants, although not closed down. As much as possible, the government tried to get newcomers straight to the *ma'abarot* to avoid their becoming stuck in the reception camps. (The number of *ma'abarot* residents dropped to 187,000 in 1956 and below 64,000 in 1960.[27]) The *ma'abarot* communities were being provided with schools, kindergartens, children's homes, synagogues, and clubs.[28] By 1952, these shantytown communities stretched the full length of the country from the Lebanese border in the north to Eilat in the south, serving as nuclei wherever there were jobs available, existing settlements expanding, or new towns being planned.[29]

As these communities were by their nature transitional (despite existing sometimes for many years), the government worked hard to create a permanent solution for the newcomers. This was found through the creation of agricultural settlements. Agricultural settlements solved a number of problems for the new state, the first of which was population dispersal. A large percentage of the population was living in *ma'abarot* near city centers, and this had to be changed – the Galilee and the Negev had to be settled as quickly as possible to

block Arab infiltration from across the armistice lines.[30] In addition, the new country was critically short of food. The government produced a vigorous and daring program, devoting 35 per cent of the budget by 1950 to getting the population out of shantytowns and onto agricultural settlements.[31] The building of these communities was, however, not without problems. In 1950, only 1 per cent of the population was trained for agricultural purposes, and more than 50 per cent were unskilled in any craft. European immigrants resisted the idea of agricultural development, and many who had survived Hitler's Europe had been stripped of their resilience and ideals. As a result, the agricultural settlements were created overwhelmingly by the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews. Although fewer than half of newcomers between 1948 and 1951 were Sephardic and Mizrahi, 136 of the 231 agricultural settlements established between 1950 and 1951 were founded by non-Europeans.[32]

Conditions in the initial settlements can only be described as harsh, and perhaps it was only in contrast to the reception camps and the *ma'abarot* that this venture could have appeared hopeful. Although the Jewish Agency devised a plan to provide each settlement family with one cow, fifty hens, and ten to fifteen dunams of soil (3.7 acres), in reality many families received virtually no economic support. It was often a full two years before proper irrigation was provided, and many communities had no main road nearby. Often they had no electricity and were completely cut off from supplies during the rainy season. This led to shortages, which caused social conflict and ethnic tension forcing many of these communities to split into two or even three separate communities. Despite assurances from the Jewish Agency, inadequate equipment, crop failures, lack of water, and sheer physical hardship took their toll. Communities often resorted to eating their hens or selling the farming equipment that had been provided. Through the early to mid 1950s these communities struggled to survive, but after several years their production became viewed as a success.

By the winter of 1951, with immigrants still arriving, reception camps and *ma'abarot* still in existence, and the agricultural settlements just beginning, daily life became unsupportable. Housewives were waiting an average of three hours a day in food lines, as demand always exceeded supply. The country was struggling to get sufficient supplies of protein (meat, poultry, eggs, and milk), and there were serious shortages of baby food and bread. Rationing meant there was no extra food, and children were often fed from their mother's rations.

The situation was so severe that the government imposed draconian methods to ensure that rationing legislations were observed. Inspectors arrived unannounced to inspect people's homes, often carrying handguns as they searched without a court order, holding the women responsible for any transgression.[33]

Rationing of food and clothing had become so onerous that there were protest marches by housewives, factory workers, and merchants. Agriculture was providing only one quarter of the nation's food supply, and industrial production was even lower. That winter there were also work stoppages due to a lack of raw materials and electricity. Newspapers were operating on half format due to lack of newsprint, and the Israeli pound was collapsing. During this time, a visiting United Nations expert on nutrition stated unequivocally that he had encountered more cases of malnutrition in Israel than anywhere else in the world.[34] This severe situation brought about an exodus from the country, and many who were able to go to Canada, the United States, Australia, or Britain did so. In 1952, the shortages abated somewhat, and rationing ceased.[35]

By 1952, the agricultural settlements had evolved into groups of four or five small villages around a small urban center where schools, banks, clinics, shops, garages, synagogues, and occasionally light industry were established. Despite the best efforts to have different ethnic communities live together, the tensions became so great that it was necessary to separate ethnic groups, and it quickly became apparent that it was desirable to have small, separate communities living in semi-homogenous environments to avoid conflict. For example, the Lachish settlement in the northern Negev had a village of Moroccans near a village of Tunisians both sharing an urban center with a village of Romanians and a village of Israeli-born youth whose mother tongue was Hebrew. The shared space eventually led to mixing and then to marriages between these communities, although initially there were more marriages between Moroccans and Tunisians than Moroccans and Romanians.

CULTURAL ANXIETY OF THE *OLIM*

Separation was needed because of the extreme situation that led to a hothouse of deprivation and anxiety among the diverse populations. The Ashkenazim often found the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews backward, while the Mizrahi and the Sephardic Jews often found the

Ashkenazim slavish about schedules. These attitudes had been there for decades, but the waves of immigration aggravated the situation. As an example, the second prime minister of Israel, Moshe Sharett, allegedly said of the North Africans,

> There are countries – and I was referring to North Africa – from which not all Jews need to emigrate. It is not so much of quantity as of quality. Our role in Israel is a pioneering one, and we need people with certain strength of fiber. We are very anxious to bring the Jews of Morocco over and we are doing all we can to achieve this. But we cannot count on the Jews of Morocco alone to build the country, because they have not been educated for this. We don't know what may yet happen to us, what military and political defeats we may yet have to face. So we need people who will remain steadfast in any hardship and who have a high degree of resistance. For the purpose of building up our country, I would say that the Jews of Eastern Europe are the salt of the earth.[36]

Eurocentric attitudes were prevalent as the society was more than half European. In Israel these elements came to light not necessarily because of any actual negative experience of the "other" in their midst but because of the effects of the diaspora experience in Europe. In 1949, the Foreign Office warned diplomats that, "the preservation of the country's cultural levels demands a flow of immigration from the West, and not only from the backward Levantine countries."[37] Yaakov Zrubavel, head of the Middle East Department of the Jewish Agency, concurred. "Perhaps these are not the Jews we would like to see coming here, but we can hardly tell them not to come."[38] At the same time, when prominent scholars from the Hebrew University, all of European origin, were asked to comment on the Sephardic and Mizrahi immigrants, Karl Frankenstein wrote, "we must recognize the primitive mentality of many of the immigrants from the backward countries"[39] and compared this mentality to the primitive expressions of small children and the mentally disturbed or retarded. Ella Shohat has described this type of Eurocentric thinking as, "an ideological substratum common to colonialist, imperialist, and racist discourse ... a form of vestigial thinking which permeates and structures contemporary practices and representations even after the formal end of colonialism."[40]

In 1949, the Ashkenazi journalist Aryeh Gelblum wrote about the Sephardic immigrants as follows,

> We are dealing with people whose primitivism is at a peak, whose level of knowledge is one of virtually absolute ignorance and, worse, who have little talent for understanding anything intellectual. Generally, they are only slightly better than the general level of the Arabs, Negroes, and Berbers in the same regions. In any case, they are at an even lower level than what we know with regard to the former Arabs of Israel. These Jews also lack roots in Judaism, as they are totally subordinated to savage and primitive instincts. As with Africans you will find among them gambling, drunkenness, and prostitution ... chronic laziness and hatred for work; there is nothing safe about this asocial element. [Even] the kibbutzim will not hear of their absorption.[41]

These attitudes were not universal, and there were those who could see beyond this type of ignorance. For example, a moving response was written to Gelblum's article by Ephraim Friedman, an *aliyah* activist in North Africa,

> Is it possible to write in this way about an entire Jewish community without knowing it? Is it possible to publish this in an Israeli newspaper? Is this our love of Israel, is this our deep relation to the rest? I have not visited the Jewish camps in Europe. But I have many friends who have, and who spent not just one month but several, as refugee emissaries, and did so illegally. And I have heard from them. And had anyone been as hateful of European Jews as Mr. Gelblum is hateful of African Jews, could he not use the very same phrases to describe the Jews in the camps? To describe scalping, and moral decline, of aversion for work, of prostitution etc.! ... What does Mr. Gelblum know about longing for the Messiah? Did he see women and children from desert oases, who had never seen the sea, rushing into the deep waters and putting their lives at risk in order to reach a boat? Did he see the thousands who lived for months, some for years, under inhumane conditions only to reach Aliyah? ... Let Mr. Gelblum embark on a tour of Jarbah, the only place in the East where the Jews fought against the Alliance school for fear of assimilation, and he shall find there Jewish roots, a habitation of thousands of Hebrew speaking Jews. He shall find there, on that lonely Island, two Hebrew Print shops, there he shall find learned students well versed in the Torah; and not there only, but also in Casa and Marrakech, in the

> south of Algeria and in the desert ... And how do we call them? *Frenk*, Black, Arab. Why does Mr Gelblum fail to mention this? Or has he, perhaps, not heard it? ... If you have the courage, Mr. Gelblum, please see the problem as it is, don't evade it. There's racial discrimination and there's racial hatred, and you have become its mouthpiece.[42]

It was, however, Gelblum's depictions, not Friedman's, which became the norm in Israel. This philosophy found its way into many representations of the Eastern communities. Textbooks in Israeli schools, such as *The History of the Jewish People in Recent Generations* written by Dr Shimshon Kirschenbaum, dedicated a total of nine out of 400 pages to the Jews of the North Africa and Asia. Dr Shlomo Horowitz, author of another history textbook, dedicated six out of 638 pages to nonwestern Jewry. Those pages speak for themselves, as in the following passage,

> While European Judaism goes through a stormy revolutionary process, and while a new important and powerful Jewish center emerges across the Ocean, some eight hundred thousand members of Jewish communities in the backward Muslim countries of Asia and Africa – formerly strongholds of Jewish culture – are submitted to the double burden of Oriental tyranny and Muslim zealousness, enclosed for the most part in their special quarters, limited to a few professions, especially as artisans and peddlers, frozen in their ways, deep in a spiritual sleep. The masses of populace lived in a degenerated poverty, spoke like the commoners, and those who inhabited faraway districts, removed from the hi way of modern history were on an even lower level, their way of life and their cultural level much like the those of their half-savage Muslim neighbors. The absolute majority of the Jews were ignorant, and much like their neighbors, steeped in bizarre superstitions.[43]

Similarly, the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews criticized the Europeans harshly. They felt that the Europeans seemed to do everything by the clock, that they rose, washed, worked, returned, ate, and rested by the clock. They probably made love by the clock. It was felt that time was to be used, not measured. The Europeans were stereotyped as cold, overly cerebral, joyless consumers of bad food.[44]

Theses attitudes found their way into the division of labour in the new country. In setting its own goals for development, Israel had with the Sephardic and Mizrahi immigrant a relatively cheap labour force at its disposal. They played a large role in the development of agriculture, construction, and labour-intensive industries such as textiles, diamonds, mineral, metals, and chemicals.[45] Thus, there quickly emerged a different pattern of economic development between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim and Mizrahim. Those patterns of development were accompanied by the formation of a large social welfare apparatus whose main purpose was to put the Sephardim and Mizrahim in the labour force, to maintain them in more or less decent conditions, and to mitigate the effects of low occupational status, few fringe benefits, and relatively long periods of unemployment. Throughout the first decades of the state, that apparatus was controlled by the Ashkenazim.

Thus, in almost all branches where intensive, nonmechanized, and nonskilled labour was required, the Sephardim and Mizrahim were found in higher proportions than the Ashkenazim. The wages that accompanied most of these jobs were very low, yet the profits that accompanied most of the industries by the Ashkenazim, such as agriculture, were very high. Citrus groves, which provided the largest export item of Israel in the 1950s, had Sephardic and Mizrahi workers earning very little and Ashkenazi developers receiving the high profits.[46]

The expansion and development of industries such as agriculture were accompanied by the growth of a network of ownership and control. This network, consisting of financial institutions, service industries, and sectoral associations, began development in the Mandate period and gained considerable power when Israel became a sovereign nation. Thus, the network played a significant role in determining the direction of development and the form in which benefits were distributed. The network included private farmers, the Histadrut agricultural establishment, the Jewish Agency, and the government bureaucracy. All of these bodies were staffed mostly by Ashkenazim. Thus, those who provided much of the labour for the country were insignificantly represented in those bodies and institutions that reaped the benefits of that expansion.[47] While the examples stated above are drawn from agriculture, almost all industry in the first decades of the state that required unskilled labour had a similar apparatus for controlling the division of wealth.

THE ARAB MINORITY

The country was not only facing enormous challenges in the absorption of immigrants. On 21 October 1948, the Arab population living in Israel was put under the control of a military regime and prevented from traveling without permission. Property was seized and many Arabs were relocated because of security concerns.[48]

The formal establishment of a military government gave power over the Arab population to five military governors in the predominately Arab districts of Nazareth, western Galilee, Ramle/Lod, Jaffa, and the Negev, areas that had been conquered by Jewish forces in the course of Israel's War of Independence. The treatment of the Arab inhabitants of these areas varied, depending on the individual governor.

A major concern of the prestate leadership struggling to create a Jewish country was the Arab population residing on the land. Prior to the creation of the State of Israel and the ensuing War of Independence, there was an Arab population of approximately 900,000 people in the whole of Palestine. Just prior to and during the War of Independence, approximately 750,000 Arabs left the state.[49] Chaim Weitzman proclaimed this mass Arab exodus, "a miraculous simplification of Israel's tasks."[50] Despite concern about the Arab population at the time the state was created, there were no explicit orders for dealing with Arabs. The "Arab issue" was seen as peripheral, to be dealt with in whatever way best served the Zionist objective.

Immediately after the state was created, the status of the non-Jewish population remained unclear. In 1947, David Ben Gurion assured the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine that, "the non-Jewish citizen will enjoy in full measure the rights which his Jewish fellow is entitled to exercise in the political, civic, religious and national domain. He will not be at a disadvantage because of his race or religion in the matter of employment in public office or in the public works."[51]

When the state was created and the military government imposed, however, Ben Gurion set an example of indifference to the minority question, refusing to finance the salaries of Arab policemen in Nazareth and treating the entire issue as one for which he had no time. Yakov Dori, the chief of staff until November 1949, said, "The military administration is none of my concern, Ben-Gurion dumped it on me. I could not refuse, but I did not want it; I have no interest in it. In

other words, don't bother me about it – do what you want." The attitude of Yigael Yadin, who later replaced Dori, was reportedly the same.[52]

The government seemed to believe that the minority problem had been all but eliminated by the mass Arab exodus and that the number of Arabs left was insignificant. In 1950, a pamphlet published by the state read, "As a result of the war and the flight of the Arabs, Israel has become a State with an ethnically almost homogeneous population. The whole economic and social life of the State is centered on the problem of absorbing new immigrants. The culture of the State is Jewish, the government administration, the army and all its important institutions are almost exclusively Jewish. It would be folly to resurrect artificially a minority problem which has been almost eliminated by the war."[53] The minority problem, however, was not altogether "eliminated by the war," and Muslims represented a substantial 12 per cent of the population.

Unfortunately, by the time the state was created, leaders such as Ben Gurion had already spent decades fighting Arabs and vice versa, which had led to animosity. As early as 1919, Arab attacks on Jewish settlements had become so frequent that the Haganah was created, not to prevent these attacks but in their wake. According to Ben Gurion's biographer, Shabtai Teveth, the violence in Jerusalem and Hebron in 1929 alone was enough to make Czarist Russia's greatest Jew haters proud.

Ben Gurion was quoted in America and Europe saying, "By now we are familiar with the people of this country. We know their manner. We have heard of and have seen many instances of robbery and murder. We have witnessed incidents of clashes, and those with a destructive bent do not discriminate between stranger and kinsmen. There was never a pogrom under Turkish rule so notorious for its degeneracy, impotence, and incompetence."[54]

Ben Gurion, however, never refused dialogue with the Arabs and made declarations of peace even in the face of war. By May 1948, while Arab leaders were calling for the destruction of Israel and for the sea to be red with Jewish blood, Ben Gurion extended an offer of peaceful relations to all Arab neighbours.[55] Still, the goals of the Jewish leadership during the chaotic first decade centered on building a Jewish state not on integrating Muslims and Christian Arabs.

SECURITY CONCERNS

Israel lost more than 6,000 citizens during the War of Independence. The end of the war in January 1949 did not end the threats from neighbouring Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan. As a result, the Arab population remaining in Israel after the war was also regarded as a threat, and security measures were probably the most significant aspect of Israeli policy towards this minority after 1948. In the effort to ward off a second invasion, the Arab minority was treated as a fifth column. In fact, the Ministry of Minorities, which lasted fourteen months from May 1948 to July 1949, was headed by the minister of police. With the ever-present danger of a resumption of war, the government gave priority to security when dealing with the Arab minority.

Arab propaganda relentlessly encouraged Israeli Arabs to support the struggle to eliminate Israel, and it would not be incorrect to assume that the propaganda found a responsive audience. For the forty years prior to the creation Israel, the Arabs had unrelentingly and often violently opposed the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. There were also strong family ties between the Arab minority in Israel and Arab refugees across the border. Many of the Arabs were living in sparsely settled areas along the Jordanian border and the Galilee, in villages that would be way stations for invaders if another round of fighting began. These Arabs were therefore regarded as an extension of the Arab enemy across the border.

This assumption may not have been incorrect. There was constant infiltration across the frontiers by Arabs who were now refugees in other countries. Many were armed and left a trail of blood and pillage in almost every frontier region. According to official statistics, by June 1951 eighty-six Israeli civilians had been murdered by infiltrators. It seems clear that these acts could not have been carried out without the aid of Arabs residing in Israel.[56]

To prevent infiltration as well as the return of Arabs who had fled Israel, the Arab population was relocated to compact Arab quarters that could easily be secured. Every effort was made to prevent Arab refugees from returning. Tens of thousands of people were found in the first years and sent back to the neighbouring Arab countries. Many individuals were expelled several times after repeatedly returning to Israel. It was impossible to differentiate between Arab infiltrators who were in the country to commit heinous crimes and those who simply wished to be reunited with their families. Yet despite all

the security measures, during the first year of the state 30,000 people managed to establish residency in Israel after crossing the border illegally.[57]

The border issue became critical, both for the security of the state and the relationship with the Arab minority, issues which at this point had become inseparable. The military recommended that all villages along the borders with Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt/Gaza be cordoned off from the Arabs across the border. On this recommendation homes were destroyed, Arab lands declared closed, and families relocated to areas far from the border. Jewish settlements replaced the Arab settlements along the borders, a process that quickly consolidated Israel's control over lands gained during the war as the Jewish Agency Settlement Department built hundreds of settlements.[58]

Arab villages that were not relocated were subjected to severe security measures. It became extremely difficult to travel beyond the village, as the necessary permission from the local military government was often difficult to obtain. But it was often necessary to work outside the village to survive, so security restrictions made survival difficult. The Red Cross brought food to these villagers, and many have stated that without this they would not have survived.[59]

Travel restrictions in the name of security became so strict that villagers were sometimes denied access to their own fields. In many cases, the fields were later confiscated as they were deemed to have been abandoned by the owners. While these security measures were often extreme and led to rifts between the two populations of the state, there was no respite from the ongoing *fedayeen* strikes against the Jewish majority and the threat of war.

Not all Israelis were indifferent to the minority population. In 1949, the second president of Israel, Yitzhak Ben Zvi, said, "We must educate ourselves, educate our children, our officials, our teachers, our soldiers and policemen, and the new immigrants ... that we are not like the Poles in Poland and the Arabs are not like the Jews in Poland."[60] And indeed all Arab citizens of the newborn country received voting rights and participated in the first elections, which saw three Arabs elected to the Knesset. The Arabic language appeared on coins, stamps, and banknotes; the official *Gazette* was published in both Arabic and Hebrew, and Arabic remained the language of instruction in all Arab schools. By the middle of 1951, Arabic-speaking Jewish welfare workers were assigned to the Arab areas to distribute food and clothing and to provide care for babies, adolescents, and

the sick and infirm. Health clinics were opened in Arab areas, Arab agricultural cooperatives were developed, and the number of Arab schools was increased from forty-six in 1948 to 102 in 1951, with a 300 per cent increase in the number of Arab students.[61]

Yet there was also a discourse regarding a transfer policy. Some argued that the remaining Arab minority should be exiled from their country of origin, although no such policy was implemented. In the first years, however, while some Arabs were slipping back into Israel, other Arabs were leaving Israel to become refugees in the neighbouring states or immigrants to the United States and elsewhere. Arabs who left had no easy way back into the country. Perhaps it was the plan of the military government to make the Arabs want to leave of their own accord.

Thus amidst the initial chaos, mass immigration, and economic destitution there was a very real security threat, and the intention of the neighbouring countries to destroy the Jewish state completely was no secret. These were the conditions under which the military government emerged and was imposed on the Arab minority in Israel from 1948 to 1966, and these were the conditions that the Bene Israel – as well as all the other *olim* – found the country in when they arrived.

ISRAEL'S LEGAL SYSTEM

Not only was the state challenged by the settlement of immigrants and the military situation regarding Arab Israelis but its legal system was also in confusion. When the new state was born, it adopted the British Mandate legal system. Apart from certain changes concerning the limitation of Jewish immigration, Jewish land purchases, and Jewish freedom of movement, the British Mandate legal system and remnants of Ottoman Empire laws remained. This meant that Israel did not have its own rule of law and had to create it as it went along. The Yishuv leadership had rushed to sovereignty in a disorganized hurry.[62]

On 14 February 1949, the first constitutional assembly was opened, and a speaker and deputy speakers were elected. This assembly passed what had been in the works for more than a year – a law that clearly defined the structure of a transitional government intended to function until a constitution was adopted. This transitional law became known as the "small constitution."[63] This basic law consisted of fifteen sections that established a republican form of government based

largely on the British system including a president, a cabinet, and a parliament. The constitutional assembly, however, was created to form a constitution not a government. Constitutions setting out a systematic and detailed account of the laws of the land were the norm for nations created after 1945. A committee under the auspices of Leo Kohn, legal advisor to the Jewish Agency, spent months of arduous labour creating one for Israel.[64] Yet Prime Minister Ben Gurion and his Mapai party rejected the finished draft, and Israel never gained a formal constitution. Instead the small constitution had to serve.

The small constitution, therefore, determined the future parameters of Israel's government, and the constitutional assembly created in February 1949 became the country's first operating Knesset. The new laws it began to pass were derived from a variety of sources, primarily the British mandate system and British common law but also from Ottoman jurisprudence and from biblical and Talmudic sources. Here the new country began to encounter enormous problems that proved a challenge for many years to come.

Although Israel was created as a state for Jews but not as a Jewish state, religious Zionism envisioned a theocratic state where Jews could live complete religious lives guided by religious leaders who had the political power to ensure the theocratic integrity of society and the state.[65] Immediately after Israel's creation, the religious parties, such as Mizrachi, HaPoel Ha Mizrachi, Agudat Yisrael, and Polei Agudat Israel, worked to secure a stronghold in the government and to establish a firm *halachic* basis for life in the state. While all political parties were trying to secure their position, the religious parties were not so much concerned with party politics as with the penetration of the *halacha* into the management and affairs of the state and, thus, into the lives of individuals as well.

The first task for these religious bodies was, therefore, to widen the power and authority of the rabbis.[66] In the wake of an electoral system that fragmented the government so that coalitions were needed to run the state, Ben Gurion's Mapai party had to form agreements that allowed small parties to set conditions. The negotiations about these conditions were termed the "ground rules" of the coalition. In a democracy, one would expect these ground rules to be established before the election process so that voters could be presented with the policies of the ruling parties, but in this case the ground rules were made after the elections, giving voters no chance to express consent or opposition.[67] Israel's Supreme Court Justice, Isaac Olshan, wrote of this phenomenon

in his memoirs. "What is called by the Israeli politicians in the area of legislation, 'the democratic system,' was in actuality party regimentation that allowed no choice but required compromise agreements and even conspiracies contrived by the coalition members after the fact, i.e. after the elections."[68] This led the Mapai party to form partnerships and coalitions with parties they thought would not interfere with most of what they sought to accomplish. From this standpoint, the parties most fit for partnership were the religious parties, such as Mizrachi (the oldest and largest, which was in every Knesset until 1974), which seemed concerned only with the religious aspects of life. For example, religious parties had been reluctant to say anything about the economy, making it convenient for the Mapai Party to give them sovereignty over certain areas on the understanding that they would not interfere in other areas for which they had professed no interest. This assumption, however, proved erroneous.

In 1949, the four above-mentioned religious parties formed a temporary coalition for the first Knesset election, receiving 12 per cent of the vote. The religious parties in the coalition were soon given such ministries as Religious Affairs, the Interior, and Welfare where they began to impose religious rules on nonreligious citizens. The religious camp began to move in the direction of religious coercion of the broad secular public. Initially this occurred very slowly without arousing suspicion or opposition. They first quietly expanded the jurisdiction of the rabbinical courts. As the first Supreme Court was being created in 1948, the religious parties demanded that at least one of the five judges be a rabbi. This was accepted without opposition. Rabbi Simhah Assaf was named and then confirmed by the provisional State Council. Yet this nomination was actually illegal, according to the conditions for the jurisdiction of judges of the state still attached to British Mandate law. While only a technicality, it is indicative of the process of transition from Mandate law to Israeli law. Judge Isaac Olshan said of Assaf, "We had to guide him along in connection with the application of various laws in cases brought before us. Cases that had a bearing upon questions of personal status, falling under the purview of religious rules, were decided in religious courts; the instances in which we in the Supreme Court had anything to do with them were few. With respect to the majority of the cases, we had to explain to Rabbi Assaf the secular law."[69] Therefore, Israel's first Supreme Court had a judge with little understanding of *nonhalachic* law.

By 1953 Judge Assaf had resigned, and the religious parties demanded that another rabbi be appointed in his place, lobbying for the appointment of the Sephardic judge, Eliyahue Elyashar. The members of the Supreme Court, however, fed up with the burden of explaining secular law to a Supreme Court judge, insisted that nominations be based solely on the qualifications of the candidate without religious considerations. Although members of the Supreme Court were thereafter elected on merit, the religious parties had learned that they could infiltrate powerful positions in the new state, and they succeeded in influencing numerous areas of Israel's day-to-day life. Municipal Sabbath laws were passed to close shops, theatres, offices, and public transportation for the day. Nonkosher meat was banned, followed by a ban on pig breeding and the sale of pork products in 1954. Soon the Ministry of Religions, the chief rabbinate, and the religious councils and courts had wide-ranging powers. Eventually, a religious judge had the power to demand that a husband divorce his wife, a wife accept divorce, or a childless widow abstain from remarrying without the consent of her brother-in-law, who, under the ancient law of *chalitzah*, was entitled to marry her himself.[70]

The religious parties also became involved in education, demanding religious education in the reception camps and the *ma'abarot* communities. This, however, received tremendous opposition from the secularists, and in 1951 the religious parties backed down somewhat. Nevertheless, they began to envision all Orthodox immigrants as under their jurisdiction. They argued that communities such as the Yemenites should not have the option of secular schooling for their children but be streamed immediately into the religious school system, which operated separately from the secular stream though both were state funded. Whenever the Mapai party or other coalition members protested too strongly against their demands, the religious parties would threaten to leave the coalition government. With the tremendous task of absorbing hundreds of thousands of immigrants and defending against Arab neighbours, there was little time or energy to haggle over what Ben Gurion deemed smaller issues.

The religious parties that eventually created the National Religious Party (NRP) in 1956 exerted their largest influence in the municipality of Jerusalem where a coalition of the Mizrachi and Agudat Yisrael parties were in control from 1949 to 1956. This meant that the religious school system was fully subsidized by the municipal treasury.[71] Tax relief was given to many of the ultra-Orthodox for a variety of rea-

sons, and the coalition seemed to have no grasp of the secular practicalities of running a city. Street lighting was continually failing, garbage often went uncollected, taxes were not collected on time, and municipal employees often waited months for their salaries. By 1955, the situation had become so intolerable that the municipal government was dissolved and a secular mayor, Gershon Agron, appointed.[72]

The divide between the religious parties and the government came to a head on 10 March 1958 when the minister of the interior, Israel Bar-Yehudah, instructed marriage registrars countrywide that a declaration of being Jewish was enough and "no additional proof shall be required."[73] This instruction went against *halacha*, which states that if the mother is not Jewish (in a mixed marriage) the child is not Jewish. This seemingly small act had enormous implications, as Bar-Yehudah felt that an administrative order issued by the government had authority over religious law.

In 1950, however, the chief rabbinate had issued directives that to perform marriages and execute divorces, rabbis had to investigate the couple's background thoroughly. On 12 March, two days after Bar-Yehudah's instruction was issued, the minister of religious affairs, Dr Zerach Warhaftig, gave the first indication of the impending crisis, stating that a Jew cannot be defined in a haphazard, free-for-all fashion. Jewish law had long determined who was a Jew and who was not, and he made it clear that this task could not be performed by a secular Jew. Soon religious elements complained that "the antireligious attitude of the Ministry of the Interior [had] treated religion and the religious councils with contempt."[74]

The problem connected to Jewish identity was the overlapping of three jurisdictional issues. The first was that of citizenship, the second that of nationality, and the third was personal status. The problems concerning citizenship were complex in that Israeli citizens included Jews, Christians, and Muslims, all of who had equality under the law with some exceptions such as the Arab exemption from the army. The second issue of nationality influenced the way in which citizenship was acquired. Israel is a Jewish state in practice, which meant that the doors were open to all Jews, yet the "law of return" had failed to define the term "Jew" in its national sense. Without clarification, people suspected of being non-Jews could be denied citizenship. The crucial concern, however, was connected to personal status in regards to marriage and burial, as both were controlled by the religious authorities. There is no civil marriage in Israel: those not married by a state-

approved rabbi according to the *halacha* are not legally married. If they live together without a ceremony in a common law marriage, their children have no Jewish status and could face considerable difficulties when their turn comes to get married.

According to an Ottoman law adopted by the state of Israel, people had to marry within their own faith, and it was therefore important to determine the religion of the couple accurately. Jewish status had to be determined in order to abide by this state law, and, prior to 10 March 1958, this had been done by the rabbinic authorities. On 30 March, the religious ministers formally requested that the instruction of the Ministry of the Interior be disregarded lest it destroy the unity of the Jewish people. In response, the government appointed a committee made up of the minister of the interior, Ben Yehudah; the minister of religious affairs, Haim-Moshe Shapira; and the minister of justice, Pinchas Rosen. After this committee presented its report, the decision was made that all those who stated in good faith that they were Jews who did not practice any other faith would have their identity cards marked "Jewish." When it was confirmed that this meant a person born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother could be classified Jewish, two NRP ministers resigned, stating, "the fateful decision was liable to destroy the Jewish people."[75] This resulted in the NRP leaving Ben Gurion's coalition government.

Although the Mapai party still had a majority government, Ben Gurion attempted to placate the NRP,

> The government has no intention of laying down Religious law and it does not consider itself authorised to do so ... In the declaration of independence however, we announced freedom of religion and conscience and we did not decide that the Jewish state would be governed by Religious Law, and that the rabbis should rule it. On the contrary, we proclaimed that it would not be a theocratic state ... The government did not consider itself authorised to decide who is a religious Jew. The question it had to consider was "who is a Jew by nationality?"[76]

The religious parties were unimpressed, however, and called upon Jews across the globe to protest the government's action. They alleged that the state may declare who is a citizen but not who is a Jew. Israel had to face the issue of whether Jewish nationality could be separated from Jewish religion. Many felt that Israel was a secular state and that

if the government could not determine who was to be regarded as having Jewish nationality for purely secular and security purposes, and if the criteria of Orthodox law were to apply, then Zionism would have failed to disengage Jewish nationhood from the traditional bonds of religion.[77] The question really became not who was a Jew but who would govern Israel. Ben Gurion introduced a resolution to appoint a special committee that would invite the opinions of Jewish sages both in Israel and abroad on this question.[78] Until the opinions of the sages had been obtained, Bar-Yehudah's instructions would be put on hold, and the religious parties accepted the compromise. When the results were received, the majority of the sages had indicated that they felt the state could not infringe on the traditional *halachic* interpretation of Jewish nationality. The NRP rejoined the government, and, feeling obliged to accept the opinion of the sages, Ben Gurion allowed new regulations to be issued in 1960. Those issues would be disastrous for the Bene Israel. According to the new regulations, a person could be registered as a Jew by nationality or religion only if the criteria of the *halacha* were fulfilled. This gave the religious the right to tell the marriage registrars what the criteria for marriage were. The religionists had won an unequivocal triumph.[79]

In 1960, the new minister redirected the Bureau of the Registration of Inhabitants to define a Jew by administrative fiat as "a person born of a Jewish mother who does not belong to another religion, or one who has converted in accordance with religious law." While this did not initially change the life of most Israelis, it would have enormous ramifications for the Bene Israel (as will be discussed in the chapter, "Samson J. Samson and the Fight for Bene Israel Equality in Israel").

The combined effect of a shortage of housing and food, rationing, racism and bigotry, insecure borders, a perceived fifth column in the country, and an increasingly powerful religious establishment meant that the newly created State of Israel was not at all the hospitable place the Bene Israel had envisioned it to be.

CONCLUSION

Only through understanding the severe conditions of the state in the initial years can one fully comprehend the experience of the Bene Israel as they moved to Israel. As it is such a small country, societal and social concerns affect everyone. Therefore, concerns such as the Arab minority and the security threat had an enormous impact on the life

of the public. While in larger countries external threats may not make a difference in the day-to-day affairs of the average citizen, in Israel those concerns influence many aspects of everyday life. In India, Maharashtra is so far from Pakistan that the security of that border can seem remote. In Israel, however, security concerns impact many aspects of travel, and the constant military presence in the country keeps one aware that a threat exists. These factors, combined with housing and food shortages, bigotry and intolerance, the division of labour and the divide between religious and secular, created a backdrop and context for the experience of the Bene Israel and other *olim*.

Israel was born into a particular set of overwhelmingly challenging circumstances. As the government was so focused on simply feeding and housing the population, concerns such as minority rights slipped through the cracks. This was made clear in the discussion about the Arab minority, and it will become even clearer when discussing the Bene Israel struggle for equality.

4

Arrival in Israel

Between May 1948 and May 1960, approximately 8,000 Bene Israel left India and moved to Israel where some of the challenges the community was forced to overcome included culture shock, housing, education, bigotry, and employment problems. These challenges drove some to return to India, although many of those who left eventually went back to Israel. The Youth Aliyah movement was responsible for bringing the first substantial number of Indian Jews to Israel.

Upon the establishment of the State of Israel, the immigration of families and adults of the Bene Israel community was organized in India by H. Cynowitz and J.S. Ezra.[1] While some wealthy community members were among the first immigrants, the majority of the first to move to Israel were children who went as part of the Youth Aliyah movement. From May 1948 to December 1950, Indian immigration was slow and steady. Then, due to the extreme conditions in Israel, immigration from India and many other places stopped altogether.[2] On the brink of collapse from more immigrants than it could support, Israel sent this letter to the Jewish Agency in Bombay on 10 December 1950, stating, "Since the arrangements for the transport of immigrants as well as most of the financial and technical burden of absorbing, housing, and settling the new immigrants fall on the shoulders of the Jewish Agency, certain temporary restrictions which the Jewish Agency feels compelled to impose on the flow of immigrants, owing to a shortage of housing and other difficulties of absorption, have to be borne with patience and dignity."[3]

When immigration resumed in late 1951, the Jewish Agency established an immigration center in Bombay, with F.W. Pollack, previous-

ly Israel's South East Asia trade commissioner, as immigration officer.[4] The Bene Israel soon began to immigrate in larger numbers, and by 1952 there were approximately 3,000 Indian Jews in Israel.[5]

YOUTH *ALIYAH*

The idea of bringing Jewish youth to Palestine began in Germany shortly after Hitler's rise to power and preoccupied the Zionist movement for many years.[6] For Jewish young people in Germany, their only hope of survival was to immigrate to Palestine where segments of the Jewish community were ready and willing to absorb them.[7] The first group of forty-five adolescents arrived in Mandate Palestine at the beginning of 1934 and was sent to Kibbutz Ein Harod in the valley of Jezreel. By 1954, 60,000 children and adolescents from more than thirty countries had been absorbed into 152 kibbutzim, nineteen *moshavim*, and seventy-seven educational facilities.[8]

Youth *aliyah* began in India in July 1949 as an outgrowth of the Habonim, a socialist Zionist youth organization started on the subcontinent in 1935 by the Baghdadi Jewish community through the Calcutta Zionist Organization. The Habonim program in India as described in its constitution was,

> an educational Zionist youth movement which aims at awakening Jewish youth to the realization of their heritage as Jews; encouraging them in the study of the Hebrew language, Jewish history and tradition, providing them with a cultural environment in which they can live a fuller Jewish life, and in particular, encouraging them to take an active part in the upbuilding of Eretz Israel as a Jewish homeland ... Habonim educates towards Labour Zionism which means we support the establishment of a Socialist Commonwealth in Eretz Israel, and for worldwide achievement of the aims of the Labour movement. We regard the Hisadruth [general Federation of Jewish Labour in Palestine] as the nucleus of the future commonwealth and as the worker's chief goal for attaining this end.[9]

The Habonim movement in India began to focus on youth *aliyah* in 1949 at the suggestion of Bennie Porath, a Jewish Agency emissary (*shaliach*) in Bombay and a member of the HaShomer HaTza'ir Zionist youth group. The group he formed quickly dissolved, however, as

Indian parents did not trust Porath, the foreigner. In October of that year, members of the Baghdadi community (including Menassah, Sopher, and Moses) restarted the project and established a group of forty youths to prepare for immigration to Israel. Their six-month preparation included Jewish education, Hebrew language training, and living in a kibbutz-like environment that Habonim had established near Bombay. The group received financial support from the Sassoon family who raised substantial funds in Calcutta.[10] The fund raising generated enough money to create a centre for Jewish children from the Orient on Kibbutz Lavi, a religious kibbutz overlooking the Yavneel Valley in the lower Galilee.[11] The first group left Bombay in May 1950, followed shortly by other groups from Jewish communities throughout India. Approximately 150 young people were sent to Israel through this organization, including some Bene Israel youth. But the Bene Israel quickly formed their own organization to send Bene Israel groups to Israel. The first such group, formed in late 1950, comprised thirty-eight children, ten of whom were girls.[12] After the provisional halt in immigration imposed by Israel, when both the Bene Israel and Baghdadi groups had to cease immigration, youth *aliyah* started up again at the end of 1952.

By 1953, as both Israel and India had learned from past mistakes, immigration involved much more red tape. Having absorbed as many as 3,000 immigrants with tuberculosis and 1,500 mental patients,[13] Israel now imposed health standards before accepting immigrants. For the Bene Israel this was less of a problem than for the Cochin Jews, some of whom suffered from elephantiasis, a mosquito borne disease causing severe swelling of the legs. For some time Israeli officials mistakenly thought the disease to be contagious, which made it difficult for many Cochin Jews to make *aliyah*.

From India there were, as well, new standards that needed to be met including a letter of consent from the Central Youth Aliyah Department in Israel declaring that there was space for the newcomers, so that they did not spend long periods in reception camps or have families scattered among different kibbutzim. Written confirmation was also required from the Immigration Department that the group would travel at the expense of the Jewish Agency and be sent within three months of acceptance. In the past, many groups of young immigrants had to cancel at the last minute because of payment complications or endless departure delays, causing terrible uncertainty leading to many of the groups being dissolved.[14]

Due to the extreme conditions on the ground in Israel, the shortage of funding, and the priority of getting European Jews out of the displaced person camps across Europe, even when the Bene Israel wanted to make *aliyah* the planes were difficult to arrange. As well, the 1950s–60s was not a time when foreign travel was affordable or accessible to most people. Many of the Bene Israel, like most people in the world at that point, had never been on a plane. The plane journey itself often went via Tehran or Cyprus where sometimes the flight halted for a few hours and sometimes for a few days.[15] Some Bene Israel recalled that the plane they were on was not even a passenger plane but was a cargo plane. One *oleh* who recounted his story to Singh said the cargo plane was enormous and the flight went from Bombay via Bahrain, stopping for two hours, then on to Cyprus where they stopped for ten hours. In Cyprus, El Al picked up the planeload of passengers and flew them to Israel.[16]

Because of all the new requirements and difficulties, Shlomo Schmidt of the Bombay Zionist office, working closely with the Jewish Agency, informed all youth planning to make *aliyah* that they would be sent to Israel individually, not as part of the Youth Aliyah organization. As a result, the youth *aliyah* movement in the hands of the Calcutta Zionist Organization was dissolved.[17] It appeared that the Bombay Jewish Agency immigration office wanted to control youth *aliyah* matters directly, not through the Calcutta Zionist Organization. The process was, therefore, taken over by the Jewish Agency Aliyah Office and controlled by foreigners working in India rather than by Indians themselves.

Israel's objective was to turn its immigrants into Israelis and to have them break away from their diaspora communities. The diaspora was generally viewed with disdain by the Yishuv, and immigrants were to take on the new (Western) Israeli identity.[18] Whether they were placed in a kibbutz, *moshav*, or educational facility, the educational aspect of the immigration process was virtually the same for all who came on youth *aliyah*, and in many ways it marked the start of a unified community in Israel. It was this educational process that cut the immigrants' ties with their enormously diverse cultures, languages, and histories. The process has been referred to as a disintegration process (although it was also an integration process)[19] as it dissolved ties not only with geographical backgrounds but also with social relations – relatives, friends, and acquaintances – and emotional, cultural, spiritual, and linguistic values and norms.[20] This

process meant abandoning old ways and beginning to integrate – establishing new connections, accepting new values, and acquiring new images and concepts. Many *olim* even took new names. Members of the youth *aliyah* were especially susceptible to this process, as the younger they were on arrival, the less attached they were to their place of origin.

The youth *aliyah* educational process was divided into seven parts: a change of environment; an organized social life (familiarizing them with the demands and prohibitions of their new society); a special and separate educational framework (in accordance with the new society's needs); integration of study, work, and social life within a single setting; adaptation of the study plan to the child's intellectual capabilities; placement in a village or rural setting; and physical labour.[21] The new norms represented a dramatic change for almost all newcomers. The new climate, food, manner of dress, language, and expectations were difficult for everyone. In the case of Indian *olim* the change was particularly dramatic, as the new norms were often the antithesis of those of their original culture.

One girl who was sent to Israel at the age of eight through the Youth Aliyah program reflected how in India one important cultural norm was that one was never to be fully nude – not even while bathing (while she spoke only for herself, this norm is practiced in most places throughout India). Bathing in India involved an intricate process of scrubbing and cleaning while never completely exposing oneself – she had never even seen herself fully nude. She recalled that upon arrival in Israel she was immediately sent to the large reception camp of Ramat Hadassah where she had to share the public shower with all the women, young and old, showering together completely naked. "We couldn't even think of anything more disrespectful and disgraceful than to undress in the presence of someone else or to look at someone else's unclothed body, especially when it was an older woman."[22] This was just one example of the enormous cultural differences between her rural home in India and her new setting in Israel.

She recalled how silence had been the norm in her village in India, where people spoke quietly. To raise one's voice, especially in anger, was shocking. She recalled how her father would not beat her or yell when she did something unacceptable but merely give her a look of reproach, which hurt as much as a whipping or scolding.[23] When she arrived in Israel, she was so quiet that her counsellors thought some-

thing was wrong; they kept encouraging her to speak more and participate in discussions. She shared a room with two North African girls whom she found loud and unruly. In Israel, she explained, the youth from India came, "to see ourselves in a different light … we'd begun to feel that our shyness, our exaggerated deference to the wishes of others, and the way in which we suppressed our own personal likes and dislikes – virtues we used to prize so highly – were distinct handicaps to us in our new lives here in Israel."[24] This statement indicates the degree to which the Youth Aliyah program was succeeding in its goal of separating immigrants from their backgrounds. They began to view their past as a handicap and rushed to embrace the new values and norms.

Another Indian, Ruby Daniels, from the Cochin community, who has written a book about her life in India and Israel, though not part of the youth *aliyah* movement, noted a similar experience in coming to Israel and having to adjust to the new environment. Clearly many of these cultural norms were not unique to the Bene Israel but were shared by many throughout India. A letter of hers sheds light on some of her experiences. She writes,

> My upbringing by a good Indian mother was very different from that of a young girl in Israel. I was forbidden to talk to a man, to laugh too much, and could never say that I wanted to learn to dance. I went to school and in the evenings helped mother. In Israel a young girl takes a partner and dances merrily without fear. Although an Indian woman may be thought of by her husband as a goddess, she does not play a very important role. In Israel I have seen that the woman plays a part equal to that of a man, and is entitled to the same freedom that he is.[25]

This again refers to the impropriety in India of being too outspoken or loud. By contrast, the Israeli culture they encountered is very outspoken: life is to be shouted about, laughed at, and disagreed with, often very volubly. To many outsiders, not only Indians, Israeli culture can seem loud, pushy, and even rude. This is not to say there are no loud Indians or quiet Israelis, only that the cultural norms of the two nations are quite different. Many Bene Israel who came to Israel, either as part of the youth *aliyah* movement or on their own, recounted similar stories of culture shock when interviewed in 2008.[26] Some

noted that when their parents arrived a year or so after they did they were often shocked and dismayed to see how their children had taken on norms they found strange and disagreeable.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES AND CULTURAL INTOLERANCE

The adults who arrived in the first years of Israel's existence found many of their preconceptions immediately destroyed. Upon landing, the immigrants were registered at Ben Gurion, a process most likely not too dissimilar to today's experience of taking Israeli citizenship upon arrival in Israel. After registration, in the early years they were occasionally taken to specific locations such as kibbutzim or small development towns, but for the most part they were taken to the reception camps of Sha'ar Ha-aliyah. Many Indians who arrived in Israel from the bustling cities of Bombay and Calcutta were shocked at how underdeveloped Israel was.[27] In some cases there were relatives or friends who could meet the new comers, but in most cases there was no one. Often, even if there were family or friends in Israel, the planes were so late that the familiar faces had already left the airport after having waited for hours. As well, if the relatives or friends were not situated near the airport, getting there in the early years may not have been possible. In the reception camps if one gave up their bed they were not necessarily able to get it back. Thus, going far from the reception camps to wait many hours, possibly overnight, at an airport was simply not an option.

It is important to understand that immigrants at that time would have had little understanding of the struggles the country faced – the mass immigration, the shortages, the security threats, and the legal confusion. So when they arrived at the reception camps, the Bene Israel, like most newcomers, were shocked. Writing of his arrival, one Bene Israel *oleh* wrote, "Shaar Aliyah is the first bitter blow at a man's pride and self respect. He is a refugee, nonentity, herded and prodded like cattle – is this the welcome for a long lost son come home? Nothing is explained to him, no hand extended to help him find his way."[28] Another Bene Israel *oleh*, Menchem Sogavker, wrote of his arrival and referred indirectly to the need to strip naked in front of strangers. "During my month's stay at Shaar Aliyah, I found the place to be like an improved concentration camp with Jews guarding the Jews. I do not wish to write in detail about that place, but one thing I would like

to mention: the fact that no information regarding the medical examinations, etc. in Shaar Aliyah was given to our people in India who wished to migrate, has sometimes resulted in much trouble and aroused ill feeling in the heart of some of our people."[29] This mention of the medical examination refers to the fact that during the initial bathing and delousing immigrants had to strip naked in front of strangers. This very alarming act was demanded of them immediately upon arrival, creating negative feelings in the Bene Israel.

Many Bene Israel spent long periods in the reception camps. Some communities were kept in the reception camps for longer periods than other communities. For housing, a selection policy was practiced which worked against the Sephardic and Mizrahi communities. Here's what Yehudah Berginski, head of the Absorption Department, told the Jewish Agency executive. "I have to present you with a tough problem, and one the public is concerned with: Discrimination against *edot haMizrah* ... We took four hundred apartments that were slated for earlier immigrants from North Africa, who were scheduled to move into housing, and gave them on credit to more recent immigrants ... We did not make this public ... I want us all to be aware that we have sinned in this way because we had no choice. I do not need to tell the board why we did it. It was done for political reasons and out of a human concern for the Poles."[30] One Bene Israel interviewee recounted how, during the nineteen months his family spent in Sha'ar Ha-Aliyah, his fourteen-year-old son became ill and died due to a lack of sanitary conditions and medicine. Berginski reported on immigration statistics up to 1956 in a special executive meeting saying,

> Over the last twenty-seven months 85,000 have emigrated from North Africa, and 85 percent of them (72,000) were directed to development town areas beyond the Gdera-Nahariya strip, to such municipalities as Beer-Sheba, Dimona, Eilat, Ofaqim, Azata, Quiryat Gat, Quiryat Shmona, Betzet, and Hatzor. Things are different with the Polish Aliyah. Over the last two months more than 2,000 people have emigrated from Poland. Some of them are placed in vacant locations within the strip such as Acre, Givat Olga and Nahariya, because there were vacant apartments left for us to use, and we will also send Poles to Zichron Yaakov and Benyamina, because we won't be able to place the Poles in shacks, for them we need reasonable housing.[31]

The compassion shown to the Polish community was most likely due to the hardship the community faced in the Holocaust. As housing was limited, there were many who felt the Polish community should be afforded whatever limited comforts the state was able to provide. Nonetheless, the Sephardic and Mizrahi communities, by Berginski's own admission, were often denied the better living conditions.

Not all Bene Israel were sent to settlement towns or to the *ma'abarot*. Some found their way to kibbutzim where they also faced difficult challenges. Menchem Sogavker's letter spells this out.

> If he finds his way to a kibbutz, too often *chaverim* are too busy with their own lives, tired and disillusioned by newcomers who came and left and faced with a difficult language barrier. No real effort to surround him with warmth and understanding is provided with his necessities. The basic order of life is explained to him, and he is left to face a new social order, difficult work, different food and climate as best he can without understanding the why and wherefore. His children are separated from him, his wife faced with a completely new set of standards, and if the adjustment is slow and difficult he is given little patience or help. He is a stranger, a misfit living in a society of equals and yet not equal.[32]

This letter touches on one of the most difficult cultural changes – the separation of the traditional family. The socialist ideal of the kibbutz movement, especially in the early years of the state, focused on communal ownership of everything including clothing and children. It was firmly believed that individual desires were evoked by the traditional family unit and that raising children communally would diminish bourgeois desires and free both parents to work. Therefore, children on the kibbutzim were all brought up together in a children's house. There they slept, were educated, and often ate. Children would spend a few hours each evening with their parents and then return to the children's house to sleep. (While the kibbutzim felt they were doing what was best for the children, today most kibbutzim no longer follow this practice to the same extent. This change is primarily the demand of those who grew up in such children's houses and who now insist their own children stay with them at night.)

This transition was difficult for many immigrants who came to the kibbutzim. For Indians, who sometimes lived with up to four genera-

tions in one home and were used to being surrounded by family, it was shocking and even bordered on psychological abuse. The separation of children from their mothers also meant that women were forced to relinquish their traditional motherhood role and take on entirely new roles. To give up their children would have been terrifying for many immigrants, and we can be certain that many tears were shed. This practice serves as a perfect example of the Zionist educational system that created Israelis out of diaspora Jews by destroying old norms and replacing them with new norms.

The reference, in Sogavker's letter, to a new set of standards for wives alludes to the social equality of women in Israel. While Israeli women have struggled to receive equal treatment, and while no law that stipulates equality can actually bring it about, the position of women in Israel was far more liberated than in India where before independence they had few civil rights. For the Bene Israel, who knew of Israel's attitude towards women and may even have been attracted by it, it would still have been shocking and challenging to have to assume such new roles immediately. Some Bene Israel were not even aware of what was happening on the kibbutzim before they left India and arrived with no time to prepare psychologically for the separation from their children, making their situation even more difficult.

On the agricultural settlements that were isolated, there were also great challenges. Getting fresh food was often a problem. Sometimes the source of basic foodstuffs like bread would be hours away. One Indian *oleh* living in Kiryat Shmona described how the bread factory was in Haifa, which was far away. The bread was delivered to all the *moshavim* and agricultural settlements between Kiryat Shmona and Haifa. Often the children on his settlement would have to wait until 11:00 or later to eat breakfast. As well, during the early years of food rationing, the rice the population was getting was a kind completely different than the Bene Israel had seen in India. In India, rice was a staple, but the new rice was found to be strange and was often referred to as "Ben Gurion rice." Others spoke of sharing one large pita between seven people and living off of bread, butter, and jam for several days at a time.[33]

Another shock was the racism to which the Bene Israel, and many other groups, were directly subjected to upon arrival. Sophie Benjamin, interviewed in 2008, recalled that as her family reached kibbutz Kfar Blum in 1950, the children of the kibbutz jeered at her

three-year-old daughter saying, "*Kushi, lechi mi-can*" (go away, black).[34] This incident encapsulated the harsh reality of arrival in the new country and the social challenges the newcomers faced. For the Bene Israel, who had never been racially differentiated from their fellow Indians, this was a terrible new experience. In this case, the children of the kibbutz all became friends and the child adjusted over time, but the Bene Israel of all age groups experienced this entrenched ignorance and bigotry, as recalled in almost all of the interviews conducted for this study. One particularly religious Bene Israel *oleh* who asked to remain anonymous recounted how he was brought to a non-religious kibbutz on arrival in Israel. No religious settings were available except at one small table in the cafeteria where several very observant eastern European Jews would *bentsh* (recite the Birkat Hamazon) after the meal. When he asked if could join the table, he was told he could not. It was made clear that he was unwelcome because of his ethnicity.[35]

Sometimes ignorance was due to lack of knowledge about India, in general, and the existence of Indian Jews. One interviewee, Asher Raymond, recounted how upon arrival in Israel from Bombay he met a young girl from New Jersey and they fell in love (they have been married for more than thirty years and have two grandchildren and another on the way). When the girl from New Jersey told her father that she was going to marry a boy from India, the father-in-law to be was amazed to hear of an Indian Jew. He wanted to find out if Asher was really Jewish and asked him, "Do you speak Yiddish?" When Asher responded that he did not, the father was taken aback and stated, "How do you not know Yiddish?! *All* the Jews I know speak Yiddish!" To which Asher replied, "Do you speak Marathi?" When the father said that he didn't, Asher retorted with, "Well all the Jews *I* know speak Marathi!"[36]

Ignorance about India and its Jews resulted in the Bene Israel being classified as Sephardim by the general public. This was doubly degrading for the Bene Israel. First, the Sephardim in Israel were considered backward by the Ashkenazim. In the words of Shama Iris, "Sephardim were observed to have ... a low level of formal schooling. It was thus concluded that they were also primitive and uncultured, had no appreciation of modern society, and were thus a group that should be completely transformed so as to fit into Israeli society."[37] The Sephardic communities had lived predominantly in the Middle East and under Islamic rule for centuries. By contrast, the Bene Israel had

attained elevated status under the British in India and high positions in the military and civil service, they were not from the Middle East, and lived predominantly under Hindu hegemony before the colonial period. They were now placed in a category to which they did not belong because of the color of their skin, their non-European origin, and the ignorance of the people around them about anything Indian. And, as became clear in time, the Sephardic community did not entirely accept them either (as discussed in chapter five).[38]

Initially the Bene Israel were deemed backwards due to the Eurocentric attitudes of this prevalently European society. Sara Horowitz suggests that, "the narratives absent from Western discourse reveal the impact of Westernization on Jewish experience – a form of inner colonization, because the colonized people live amongst the colonizers rather than in some other place."[39] Therefore, the Jews of the European Diaspora had internalized Eurocentric attitudes, and European Jews, despite being marginalized and brutalized in Europe, held to the idea of European superiority. The fact that the Bene Israel left India suggests that they held this view too, to some degree. The British had indirectly convinced many colonial subjects of Western superiority, and when the Bene Israel had the opportunity to leave India for Israel, which was deemed a Western nation, many did so.

Unfortunately it was not only the Europeans who viewed the Indians as primitive. Many in the Sephardic community shared this view, and the idea of equating darker skin with being inferior was not alien to the Indians themselves. The Sanskrit word *varna* can be translated as colour, and in India the higher the class, the lighter the skin tone. The Bene Israel immigrants and many other Indians, as discussed by Weil, preferred a lighter skin tone. Light-skinned children were considered more beautiful than darker children.[40]

As well, many among the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities viewed the Bene Israel as from the "Far East" and therefore the "jungle," which connoted all things primitive. This stereotyped view was encapsulated in a conversation between a Bene Israel *oleh* – an articulate, educated, and worldly engineer from the cosmopolitan city of Bombay – and his Polish neighbour in Israel. The Pole retorted to something he said with, "What do *you* know? You are from the jungle!"[41] In her autobiography, Ruby Daniels recounted a similar story indicating how synonymous India or Indian Jewry was with the jungle in the eyes of non-Indians. She wrote of her experience at the kib-

butz. "Before coming here I knew all about the conditions in Israel. I did not expect anything much different, but what I did not expect was the behavior of the people. Most of the members were from Europe. There were a few boys and girls from Cochin here, so I thought we could get on. But we did not get a good treatment. They thought we have come from the jungle. Everywhere we felt discrimination and still do. No one came forward to help and talk to me."[42] The Bene Israel community as a whole, however, was to suffer much greater challenges than racism and notions of the East by a society struggling with overwhelming diversity.

EDUCATION

By 1951, like many other communities in Israel, the Bene Israel felt that the key to securing their children's future was education, and they gave this priority over housing and jobs.[43] Between 1951 and 1960, however, educational opportunities for Bene Israel children were problematic. As Israel grew during the first decade, networks of schools expanded, new academies were established, and opportunities for attending school were extended to and even required of all its citizens. Public elementary schools, colleges, and universities developed to accommodate the needs of the increasing population. In Israeli culture, the value placed on education and the emphasis on learning were expressed in the development and location of educational institutions and in the provision of resources for educational development. The ethnic origins of families and the ethnic composition of communities played a role in the location of educational institutions, the quality of teachers, and the curriculum. In examining the educational system of Israel in the first twelve years, it becomes apparent that the Ashkenazi Jews were receiving better education, and according to the 1961 census of Israel, Ashkenazi students spent on average one and a half more years in school then the Sephardic and Mizrahi students, and four times as many Ashkenazi students had a university education.[44]

To combat this, the Ministry of Education expanded vocational training at the secondary level, extended the number of years of compulsory education, and introduced compensatory education at the primary level. Even with these changes, however, and the positive results that ensued, including the decrease in the gap between Ash-

kenazi and Sephardic/Mizrahi educational levels, ethnic origin remained a powerful force dictating the location and qualities of schools.

Having been well educated under British colonial rule, the Bene Israel community had for decades prized education. As early as 1917, a substantial Bene Israel education fund was established by Dr Joseph Benjamin Bamnolker, the president of the first Bene Israel conference in India, to provide academic scholarships and encourage achievement.[45] One of the first things the Bene Israel noticed in Israel was the difference in educational level between them and the Sephardic groups with which they were categorized. In 1960, a letter by Ezekiel Ashtamkar articulated what the community had been saying during their twelve years in Israel, "The position of our community is not on par with the other Oriental communities. Ours is an advanced community, therefore special efforts must be made to keep our educational level in Israel."[46] Shalva Weil has written that, "the higher average number of years of schooling which the Bene Israel have received in India is particularly striking when it is considered that in Israeli society in general Indians are thought to be uneducated."[47] She also noted,

> Certain social characteristics of the Bene Israel, however, distinguish them from other Afro-Asian immigrants [in Israel]. The most striking is the Bene Israel's educational attainment in [their] country of origin which exceeds that of other Afro-Asian immigrants either in Lod or nationally. Allied to this, is their favourable attitude to working women, particularly in certain professions, which aligns them with the Western immigrants. An analysis of the social characteristics of the Bene Israel demonstrates the anomalous situation of the Bene Israel as Sephardim who have Western aspirations.[48]

Because of the unequal educational opportunities for Ashkenazi and Sephardic/Mizrahi communities in Israel, by 1960 a gap had emerged between the economic opportunities of these two groups, creating bitterness, a sense of discrimination, and an obstacle to integration.

The letter from Ashtamkar in 1960 continued, "If the present state of affairs continues, the Oriental Jews will be relegated as a lower class reserved for inferior types of jobs. We must arise from our complacency and steer our ship of destiny away from a misguided and mis-

leading course."[49] This letter was based on twelve years experience of education in Israel, and its views are confirmed by the Falk Center Report of 1959/1960. "The major factors causing income differentiations were apparently differences in education and vocational training. Even cases where persons from different communities working in the same jobs and having the same educational qualifications received different pay may well have been the result of differences in the quality of their education and training and smaller opportunities for personal advancement for the earners from Oriental communities."[50]

By the time this report was issued in 1959/1960, severe damage to the Bene Israel community had already resulted from its inclusion in the Sephardic camp. Studies indicate that educational opportunities for Mizrahi and Sephardic children were not the same as for the Ashkenazim; they often went to schools that had been quickly created in the reception camps and *ma'abarot*, attended exclusively by Mizrahi and Sephardic students. The reception camps were perceived by the government as an extension of the diaspora, and only when immigrants left the reception camps were they truly living in Israel. Therefore minimal resources were directed toward education in these camps.[51] The education system outside the camps remained unequal, and when they attended the same schools as the Ashkenazim, they were often placed in separate classrooms, creating a form of segregated education within the country. Thus in 1951–52, 86 per cent of Sephardic and Mizrahi children were in exclusively Sephardic and Mizrahi classrooms with poorer education, inappropriate facilities, a high proportion of unqualified teachers, and a watered-down curriculum. Considering the country's struggle to feed and house the population at that time, it is no surprise that there were severe problems in education, but these problems had long-lasting consequences. By 1956 a full 25 per cent of Sephardic and Mizrahi first graders failed to pass to the second grade.[52] Alarmed at these numbers, the Ministry of Education attempted reform, but for the Bene Israel, educated in India under British rule, the high failure rate came as a shock.

As with education, the Bene Israel also felt the gap in economic norms between the Mizrahi/Sephardim and the Ashkenazim. The same letter from Ashtamkar in 1960 states,

> The problem of education is a cause of worry to many [Bene Israel] parents in Israel who find it difficult even to pay for books and other services for their children in the elementary schools.

> The economic condition of an average worker is not so encouraging and the children after finishing their elementary education have to start working to supplement the parent's income. Education in Israel is so costly that even well placed parents have difficulty footing the bills of their children's education. Higher education has become virtually a monopoly of the rich.[53]

By 1959–60, the Ministry of Education introduced drastic measures to try to level the playing field. By this time, however, almost an entire generation of Bene Israel children had passed through the educational system, and concerns had been prevalent among the Bene Israel for years. By the mid 1950s, the community already felt neglected and frustrated. Very soon after arrival, the Bene Israel, like many other communities, struggled to find jobs in their professions and were forced to take other employment, often far from their families at extra expense, creating additional stress and imposing on friends and relatives for board and lodging.[54]

STRIKES, PROTESTS, AND REPATRIATION

From 1951 to 1959, protests and demonstrations were staged in Israel by many communities, mostly North African or Asian, including the Bene Israel. Many in their community wrote letters of protest to the Indian press, the Indian government, the Israeli government, and to Olsvanger, complaining of a lack of jobs, good housing, education, and food (as the rationing until 1952 made both food and clothing scarce). Many even accused the Jewish Agency of spreading false propaganda to convince the Bene Israel to immigrate. Some of the letters clamoured for a return to India. A letter to Olsvanger complained that, "we were informed [in India] that there was no shortage of work and that all were profitably employed on land and other projects. Now with errors of back pay, up to two to three months pay are overdue."[55] The letter claims that their employer directed them to the *lishkat avodah* [labour exchange] where they were informed that the government had not allotted sufficient funds to pay them. The letter also addresses the heavy taxes for irrigation water for their uncultivated land, poor medical services despite paying taxes to cover such costs, inadequate rations, and that, "most of the community are not given work according to their trades" although this "was promised them

before leaving India."[56] Letters such as these reveal the low morale of the Bene Israel community by 1951. Indeed, engineers, clerks, carpenters, and civil servants from many cultures often found themselves doing manual labour. But the Zionist, socialist ideals attached to manual labour and the cultivation of land as honourable work were perhaps lost on many of the Bene Israel. The letter does not specify who in India made promises about employment, but if any such promises were made they were made in bad faith, as no one could have guaranteed employment, especially after the waves of immigration began in 1948.

Other letters shed light on the Bombay Zionist Association (BZA) in India. One letter of complaint written on 21 April 1951, typed out but signed by a Bene Israel in illegible handwriting, indicates that the BZA was in distress and hints at who may have made false promises. "When I began to piece certain facts together I came to the conclusion that my earlier confidence was misplaced. At the same I thought it would be better to appeal to the good sense of those responsible, and together with a few friends I spoke personally to Mr Ezra, Mr Cynowitz, and Mr Gourgey, appealing to them to lie low for a while and to give an opportunity to others to pull the BZA out of the mess to which they [had] consigned it."[57]

This letter is interesting because it brings to the forefront the important question of how one convinces a community that has prospered without persecution to uproot themselves and move as a community to another country. One possibility is that the community was indeed told lies about jobs, housing, and education being readily available. If such falsehoods were uttered, the men named above may well have been responsible. The assertion that the community was told lies is substantiated by dozens of other letters found in the central Zionist Archives, including one written in 1954. "At the time we were in India, the Jewish Agency in Bombay was making very sweet propaganda, and moreover they were promising very good jobs, according to our profession, good education for our children and decent places to stay. To our surprise when we arrived in Israel, we found ourselves in Shaar Aliyah Camp. Can you tell us sir, why did the Jewish Agency in Bombay bring us to this country? Why did your agents deceive us? Why did the Jewish Agency make false promises?"[58] It is impossible to ignore so many letters claiming false promises. Interestingly, this letter clearly identifies the Jewish Agency in Bom-

bay as the source of these promises, yet the Bombay Zionist Association was responsible for the initial organization of Bene Israel immigrants. Could the writer have confused the BZA with the Jewish Agency? Were their offices working so closely together that they seemed to be a single organization?

It was not only the Bene Israel who seemed to be receiving false promises. Ruby Daniels commented in her autobiography that,

> Representatives of the Jewish Agency … made false promises that they [would] take all of the Cochin Jews to Israel by Rosh Hashana. One of the men took money from the synagogues for their passage, and people were getting ready to leave. They resigned from work, sold houses and property they had, and waited … Two years passed and there was still no reply from him. They ate away the money they had, leaving them with no food to eat and no house to live in … When I came to Bombay in 1951 on my way to Israel, I went to the office to see this man … "Where is the ship?" I asked him, and he said to me, "It's in the air." I felt like spitting in his face.[59]

While no written evidence of promises such as those mentioned in these letters and autobiography have been uncovered, the writings that emerged from the BZA do use language that suggests a false reality. The rhetoric invokes a land of milk and honey as opposed to a war-torn country struggling for survival. A letter to Israel by J.S. Ezra, the president of the BZA and a Bene Israel himself, paints a most unlikely image. While this letter was written some years later, in 1956, the rhetoric provides important insight into imagery that may have been presented to the Bene Israel in India.

> Far out on the horizon, Israel beckons. Israel to the Jew in India presents a spiritual reawakening. His longing to be in Israel is the climax of years of hopes and dreaming that there in the land of his forefathers his physical inconveniences will be amply rewarded in his spiritual satisfaction. It is this thought which sustains the Jew of India and keeps him alive. There is an ever present yearning, a consuming ardour which is keeping him hopeful and alert for the future. He is happy because very soon he will be in Israel and his burdens will be lightened, because there the dream of centuries will come true.[60]

It is disconcerting that the president of the BZA should have used such hyperbole to describe their desire to go to Israel as "a consuming ardour" or a "thought which sustains the Jew of India and keeps him alive." It is also strange that Israel, governed by those who did not necessarily have high regard for religion and sought a secular Jewish state, would receive a letter phrased in such mystical language. Perhaps, with such ignorance of India, the letter intended to portray the Indian Jews as similar to the Yemenites, who had indeed gone to Israel out of religious fervour. Regardless of J.S. Ezra's intent, it is clear that many Bene Israel expected jobs, housing, and a good education to be awaiting them in Israel and that the situation they encountered lacked these necessities of life.

By 1951, many Bene Israel children in Israel were in a wretched state, undernourished and with few winter clothes due to the rationing that lasted until early 1952. To rectify this, the community began to organize peaceful sit-ins on their kibbutzim and at the offices of the Jewish Agency, influenced by Gandhi's *satyagraha* movement in India. On 21 November 1951, 150 Bene Israel, including children, seven pregnant women, and a nine-day-old baby, held a hunger strike outside the Jewish Agency offices in Tel Aviv. A second protest on the same spot in March 1952 demanded repatriation to India. On 11 May 1952, twelve Bene Israel again protested outside the office, demanding repatriation.[61] Protests recurred in 1954, once again demanding either repatriation or an immediate solution to the problems of housing, employment, and education. While these protests by the Bene Israel were always peaceful, the police, who were dealing with many different protest groups in Israel, did not always react peacefully.

The physical violence during these protests came to a head in April 1956 at another peaceful sit-in outside the Jewish Agency office over unmet housing, work, and educational needs. Dr M. Young of the Jewish Agency promised that their needs would be met and asked them to cease the protest. The group ceased and went to the offices of those who could make good on the assurance where they were told that the Jewish Agency did not currently intend to meet Dr Young's promises. After appealing to every available government agency for help, the community resumed its protest. The official complaint report issued by the community records that the police battered all those present including the elderly, the children, and the infirm. A five-month-pregnant woman beaten by a police officer was taken to hospital where she miscarried.[62]

The strike continued despite some members being taken to hospital. During the night more police arrived, assaulted the protesters more severely, forced them into police vans, and dumped them on a roadside far from the Jewish Agency office. One young man was arrested and sentenced by a magistrate to a month's imprisonment.[63] Some members of the community were then scared to protest for fear of violence.

This further trauma to the community, in addition to all their hardships and thwarted expectations, was shared by other immigrant communities. What was unique to the Bene Israel, however, was their status and position in their country of origin as a community that had never experienced any violence from the state. For this reason, as early as 1951, many in the community urged the Israeli government to repatriate them to India.

Shalva Weil has written that the community's initial demand for repatriation marked, "the first time in the short history of the country that a complete group of immigrants demanded to be returned."[64] This is not entirely accurate. Although some demanded repatriation to India, later work by Joan Roland suggests it was not the entire community. A Jewish Agency enquiry headed by Olsvanger found that, "fewer than thirty-five families, mainly in Bersheba, were unhappy," and that they, "had been stirred up by agitators – a few Bene Israel men."[65] While there are no exact figures of how many wanted to leave, there were those who would never have left Israel even with the opportunity to do so. And it was not only Bene Israel members who left. As previously noted, in the difficult first years of the state many who could leave for Canada, the United States, Australia, or England did so. (There were more such opportunities among the Ashkenazim.) Certainly, the Bene Israel who were dissatisfied and wanted to leave were not alone. It is clear, however, from interviews among the community in 2008 that more than thirty-five families wanted to leave Israel. What is particularly interesting is that many of those who were repatriated to India then decided to return to Israel.

The government of Israel did pay their repatriation costs, and on 2 April 1952 an initial group of 115 flew back to India.[66] Shortly thereafter, more Bene Israel were returned to India by Israel. They discovered, however, that India was no longer the home they had left. Most had left jobs that were no longer available, had sold their homes and many of their belongings. Some communities had sold communal

properties such as synagogues, so that when they returned they found no jobs or readily available housing nor an intact community. While Israel certainly had problems with housing, education, and work, the challenges in India now appeared even more overwhelming. Within a year of the first repatriation, a letter from many of the returnees to the Israeli government requested their return to Israel.[67]

Between 1952 and 1953, due to the repatriation of the Bene Israel community, the Indian press contained articles accusing Israel of being a racist state. In the *Times of India* and the *Bombay Chronicle* claims that, "Indian Jews weren't up to the mark" painted a picture of a racist state that would not accept the Bene Israel due to their skin color. The Bene Israel now seeking to return to Israel fought these allegations, and by May 1953 the journals were retracting their accusations in articles such as "Indian Jews Back Israel – Discrimination Denied."[68] Reprinted in many newspapers across India, this article said, "Neither at work, nor socially, was there any trace of discrimination on account of color or origin. It is indeed contrary to the very spirit which inspired the creation of the state of Israel."[69]

The articles denying racism in Israel were a response to the declaration in India's parliament by Lakshmi Menon, deputy minister of external affairs in Nehru's cabinet, that, "one of the reasons which prompted the Indian Jews to return from Israel to India was the colour bar."[70] On 17 May 1953, a prompt response to the Indian government, signed by fifty-eight Bene Israel returnees, denied any trace of discrimination in Israel on account of color or origin. It continued,

> We regret the controversy which attended our return to India – it was a confession of failure to come up to the high standards demanded by a pioneering country. As you are fully aware there are many of us today who would like to be given another chance to take part in the great work of reconstruction that is in place there. Had we the means, many of us would have already been in Israel today. If the Jewish Agency gives us another opportunity and pays for our passage again, we would today be all going to Israel with a greater determination to make good. In the interest of truth we would like you and hereby authorise you to convey this letter to all concerned. We feel that the good name of Israel should not be sullied by unjustified criticism of its government or people.[71]

The community was dependent on the Jewish Agency, as most could not afford to reimmigrate on their own. Because of the cost to the Israeli government, their repatriation was not a high priority for the Jewish Agency. Over the next several years, however, most of the repatriated Bene Israel who sought to return were brought back, along with additional Bene Israel *olim,* at the expense of Israel. On their return to Israel, housing, education, and work remained problematic even if they felt this was not due to racial discrimination.

By 1959, however, many Bene Israel felt the greatest hindrance to the prosperity of the community was its disunity. The community had arrived in Israel without official or recognized political or religious leadership and by 1959 was just beginning to form unified bodies to meet the issues facing the entire community. Factions, dissention, and jealousies (Bene Israel who were from Bombay felt distinct from those from the villages of the Konkan coast, and those from Karachi felt they were distinct from the Bombay community) had seriously obstructed progress and caused demoralization.[72] In the community organ, *Truth,* Daniel Talker of Rishon LeTzion wrote that, "to raise our standard of living and to live in peace and plenty in spite of turmoil and discord, it is up to us alone to help one another by active co-operation".[73] This call marks the start of community organization. It had taken just more than a decade for the Bene Israel to relinquish their expectation that they would all be integrated and looked after equally as Jews in the State of Israel.

The first step towards unity was the creation of a Bene Israel Conference, which sought to address the community's problems including absorption, economic progress, provision of technical and professional education, encouragement of fine arts, sports, and guidance for new immigrants.[74] The Bene Israel were now spread across the country in towns such as Kiryat Shmona, Haifa, Ramle, Lod, Ashdod, Be'er Sheva, Kiryat Gat, and Dimona.[75] Communication between areas was often difficult, as most homes did not have telephones in the 1950s, but the effort to bring the community together from as many regions as possible was largely successful. Although the conference took place in 1959, it was not until 1961 that the community successfully established an Action Committee.

CONCLUSION

The initial challenges the Bene Israel faced on arrival were not unique to their community. All newcomers had to deal with culture shock, a lack of housing, employment, and often unequal education. It was slightly different for the Bene Israel in that things like Indian spices were initially unavailable which affected what they were used to eating, but this is not vastly different from other communities; Germans, for example, who were not used to olives had to eat them frequently as that was the food that was available. What was unique to the Bene Israel, however, was the contrast this presented to the situation in the country they had left behind.

While almost every other community that entered Israel in the early years had been a persecuted minority, persecution was unknown to the Bene Israel. Conditions in Israel would have been difficult for all newcomers, but Israel would still have been a place of refuge. In the first years of the state, few immigrants came to Israel from countries where Jews thrived, such as Canada and the United States. Instead, Israel drew those who had lived in Hitler's Europe or in the Middle East and North Africa, which had increasingly violent anti-Jewish sentiments. The Iraqi community had seen riots in June 1941, which led to the death of 180 Jews and many more injured. In Libya in November 1945, 140 Jews were killed in Tripoli, and all the synagogues in the city were looted. In Egypt in the same year, a synagogue, a Jewish old age home, and a Jewish hospital were burned to the ground. In India, however, there had been no similar persecution.

Because the Bene Israel had not suffered in India but prospered there, their experience of the struggles and challenges in the first decade of the State of Israel was perhaps unique. The fact that they had a country to return to may also have made their hardships more difficult to bear. Those who can never "go home" are psychologically more prepared to face the challenges that confront them, for what choice do they have? But a sense of being able to return to a kinder, gentler place may produce resistance to an educational process aimed at renouncing the past and embracing a new reality. Most who did return to India seemed eager to return to Israel upon discovery that there were no longer jobs or homes waiting for them. In

fact, for the Bene Israel community the first twelve years in Israel may be seen as a time of coming to terms with the notion that there was no going back. This assertion may be supported by the fact that only after thirteen years did the Bene Israel create a unified representative body.

5

Samson J. Samson and the Struggle for Religious Equality

In the Proclamation of Independence of Israel, it states that, "The State of Israel ... will be based upon the principles of liberty, justice and peace as conceived by the prophets of Israel. It will uphold the complete equality of social and political rights for all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race or sex. It will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience, education and culture … It will be loyal to the principles of the United Nations Charter."[1]

Despite this, however, the Bene Israel community was specifically and officially targeted by Chief Sephardic Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim who questioned the authenticity of their Judaism on the grounds that they did not practice *chalitzah* (ceremonies to be performed before the remarriage of childless widows) in India. In October 1960, Nissim refused to declare that the Bene Israel were acceptable for the purpose of marrying Jews outside of their own community in Israel.[2] The following description of events is based on Samson J. Samson's recollections from interviews conducted in 2008 as well as from primary documents found in various archives throughout Israel.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Long before the Bene Israel community began to immigrate to Israel, a number of outsiders investigated and commented on whether or not the community came from authentic Jewish ancestry and tradition. One of the dignitaries in the congregation of Cochin, Rabbi Ezekiel Rehavi, investigated and found that in 1767, "According to the ritual and customs which they observed that they were Jews and that they do not mix with the non-Jews. When a Jewish visitor comes into

view they greet him and receive him with great affection and are philanthropic both to him and the Holy Land."[3] In 1843, the Baghdadi Jewish community in Calcutta, having recently arrived in India, turned to their sages in Baghdad and asked about marrying their sons and daughters into the Bene Israel community. One of the leaders of the Calcutta congregation, Ezekiel Judah, wrote, "They give birth to sons and circumcise them as we do and when they grow up, they teach them Talmud-Torah with our children. They are exactly as we, without any difference, and we always call them to the Sefer Torah in accordance with the custom of the Jewish people. May we give them our daughters and may we take their daughters?"[4] Unfortunately, there is no record of the response by the rabbis in Baghdad.

In 1883, Rabbi Solomon David Sassoon wrote, "because the Hebrew and religious education is so neglected and has become almost unknown in the Bene Israel community, and because of the abysmal ignorance and lack of caution concerning essential religious observances, Jews who come from other places, under an erroneous assumption, conclude that the Bene Israel have assimilated with the native Indians."[5] While in India in 1859, Rabbi Shmuel Abe of Safed wrote, "the Bene Israel observe all the mitzvoth of the written law and the oral law and all of the halachic ordinances of the Jewish people."[6] In 1870, rabbis in Tiberias wrote, "it is a great mitzvah to be close to them [the Bene Israel]," and cautioned against those who sought to keep them apart.[7] When the establishment of the State of Israel drew near, the issue was raised once again, this time by the Jewish Agency who wanted to establish offices in India. In 1938, the Mandate rabbinate, in reply to an inquiry about the community, said, "not only were they Jews and to be brought close to the community but it was permitted for Jewish women to marry them."[8] In 1944, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog discussed and clarified the matter for all, unequivocally coming to the judgment that the Bene Israel were *halachically* Jewish in every respect.

Despite all the inquiries and evidence supporting the Jewish authenticity of the Bene Israel community, in 1960 Rabbi Itzhak Nissim, then the chief Sephardic rabbi of Israel, prohibited their marrying other Israelis. At the time this prohibition was made, Rabbi Nissim had uncontested rabbinical authority in the state, as the position of chief Ashkenazi rabbi remained vacant from Rabbi Isaac Herzog's death in 1959 until 1964 when Isser Yehuda Unterman became chief

rabbi. (The Chief Rabbinical Council, jointly headed by the Ashkenazi and Sephardic chief rabbis, was carried over from the Mandate period as the highest rabbinical authority at the apex of a network of local religious councils formed by periodic election and rabbinic courts. Each local rabbinical office maintained a court – *beit din* – and was responsible for all the administrative and judicial affairs assigned to it by law. The Chief Rabbinical Council constituted the highest court of appeal in the rabbinical jurisdiction.).

Rabbi Nissim gave several explanations for his ruling and thus set the Bene Israel as a people apart. His report stated,

1 There is a concern that they intermarried with non-Jews.
2 There is a concern that their divorces were not in accord with the law.
3 There is a concern that there were among them forbidden marriages between close relatives.[9]

These assertions are problematic in that India's caste system is so strict that it would have been very difficult for an Indian to marry into the Bene Israel community. Furthermore, divorce is relatively unheard of in India, certainly in the villages on the Konkan coast, where women, traditionally, had few civil rights and sometimes could not even leave their villages unaccompanied by a man.[10] In fact, Nissim's own written work, *Bene Israel: Halachic Decisions and the Sources for the Investigation of Their Laws and the Question of Their Origins*, indicates that even when a marriage was not amicable, instead of divorce the woman would be sent back to her father's house where she would remain and live like a widow.[11]

Because the Bene Israel, however, had been cut off from world Judaism for so many centuries, Nissim was unsure that they practiced their faith in accordance with Jewish law and assumed that they had either married non-Jews, producing non-Jewish offspring, or had practiced divorce without a proper rabbinical *get*.[12] According to *halacha*, a Jewish couple can be divorced only if the husband writes a bill of divorce, a *get*, which he hands to his wife, saying, "This is thy get, thou art divorced and permitted to marry whomsoever thou wilt." If there is no *get* and the woman remarries and has children those children are considered illegitimate (*mamzerim*). According to Jewish law a *mamzer* is the child of a married woman and a man to whom she is

not married, including the child of a woman whose previous marriage had not been ended according to Jewish law. For the Bene Israel community, this assumption called into question the legitimacy of their Jewish identity. This community, which had lived as Jews in India for almost two millennia without prejudice, was now being told that they were not Jewish or not Jewish enough to marry other Jews according to Jewish law.

The question that remains is why was the Bene Israel community singled out as the community of *mamzerim*? Almost every community that had existed in the Diaspora had faced incredibly difficult times as a persecuted minority. The concerns regarding the Bene Israel would hold true for many communities in the Jewish Diaspora. Did no Jew outside of India have sexual relations with the wife of his brother or the wife of his neighbour? The idea that there were no children born of adulterous or incestuous unions in other Diaspora communities is difficult to accept. One does not need to look to India to find a Jewish community that might be deemed problematic and one does not need to look to the Bene Israel to find *mamzerim*. They might be found in every community. (It is much more likely that the Ashkenazi communities in Eastern Europe, that suffered countless pogroms where women were undoubtedly raped, produced "misbegotten" offspring.) Why single out the Bene Israel? Nissim's background may hold part of the answer to this question.

Rabbi Nissim was born in Baghdad in 1895 and received his rabbinical training there.[13] Before becoming chief Sephardic rabbi of Israel in 1955, he took a prominent role in the religious leadership of the Iraqi community.[14] The Judaism he grew up with in Iraq was not the Judaism of Europe, in that it had not been exposed to the *haskala* or any secular modern thought. Like many in the Iraqi community, upon arrival in Israel he would have been unprepared for the diversity of the population. As well, Baghdadi Jews from India largely merged into the Iraqi community in Israel, often attending Iraqi synagogues and becoming reabsorbed by the Iraqi community. As a result, Nissim would have been further exposed to the Indian Baghdadi attitudes towards the Bene Israel, with so many Baghdadi Jews joining his community from India.

Another reason Nissim may have singled out the Bene Israel community as a risk for producing *mamzerim*, when there were so many communities that could have been equally targeted, was that in Israel the Sephardic community as a whole was made to feel inferior by the

Ashkenazi community. The Bene Israel community was small and had arrived without political or rabbinical leadership. They were a minority within a minority, which made them easy prey. Perhaps Nissim, needed to "other" another community so that he could feel part of the larger community, a feeling that he may have lacked, as he was not part of the dominant Ashkenazi culture. Or, as Ella Shohat suggests, "By provoking the geographical dispersal of the Arab-Jews, by placing them in a new situation 'on the ground,' by attempting to reshape their identity as simply 'Israeli,' by disdaining and trying to uproot their Arabness, and by radicalizing them and discriminating against them as a group, the ingathering of exiles project itself provoked a dislocation that resulted in a series of traumatic ruptures and exilic identity formations."[15]

In reaction to the trauma of being uprooted and redefined, therefore, Nissim may have looked at a community that had lived among idolaters and interpreted the text in a way that allowed him to separate from them, to reembrace his own Arab identity and the sense of power he had lost.

THE BENE ISRAEL COMBAT THE RABBINATE

Whatever his reasons, Rabbi Nissim refused to declare the Bene Israel acceptable for marriage to the non-Bene Israel. Immediately, the community sprang into action to combat this gesture of oppression. The highly educated Bene Israel were not yet organized or united in Israel. To organize themselves and combat Nissim's ruling, they had first to create a body from which to act. At the time the prohibition was issued, the only existing body formed specifically for the Indian *olim* was the Organization of Indian Jews,[16] which was supposed to represent all Jews originating from what is today India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. However, the Baghdadi community dominated this organization, and, thus, it was of no help to the Bene Israel.

The community then contacted one of their own, a man named Samson J. Samson, who would go on to fight and win their battle for religious equality (although he would never admit that he played such an important role, maintaining that the community fought together). Samson's relative, Isaiah Samson, had been a judge in India, and his uncle, David Samson, had been a landowner and active in public service within his community.[17] Nevertheless, Samson, who had arrived from India with his family in 1954, had no spe-

cial status, political clout, or access to anyone in a position of power in Israel.

In December 1960, Samson agreed to become involved with the struggle. Along with other members of the community, he then began to contact community leaders of the synagogues in India to gain as much information as possible to build a case.[18] News of this inquiry reached Dr Michael Neer in the Israeli government's Ministry of Religious Affairs, who became the first government member to make contact with the Bene Israel community about the issue.[19]

On 6 May 1961, a weekend-long meeting of the Bene Israel community was held in Haifa, bringing together two or three representatives from every Bene Israel community in Israel.[20] They decided that the first step to combat the prohibition was to break away from the organization of Indian Jews dominated by the Baghdadis. Next, an Action Committee was created to focus on resolving the problem. This committee included Asher Kollette, as Chairman, Haim Reuben from Haifa, Sassoon Ashton from Be'er Sheva, Ezekiel Ashtamkar from Rishon LeTsiyon, and Samson J. Samson from Jerusalem as both honorary secretary and treasurer.[21] It was agreed that only Samson could make statements to the press, the public, and the government in agreement with the rest of the committee. This put Samson at the heart of the issue, making him a leader in the community. Samson, a shrewd and clever man, did not like the spotlight and had no interest in personal accolades. He neither desired the position of leader nor was he interested in cutting deals to make his own life easier. He proved an ideal candidate for the job and a fierce opponent of the rabbinate.

That same month, the Indian press printed a series of articles highlighting the discrimination against Indian Jews in Israel. They were printed in *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India*, *The Free Press Journal*, *The Hindustan Times*, and *The Maratha*.[22] An editorial in *the Hindustan Times* stated, "It is intriguing to find the Rabbis of Israel set upon social ostracism of the Indian Jews after all these years. Their policy amounts to the establishment of a new kind of ghetto in Israel. Now the proverb is truly borne out, that he who would cheat a Jew must be a Jew."[23]

Although this issue was not picked up by the mainstream Israeli media, it cast Israel in a bad light. In response to these articles, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that the Action Committee write a letter presenting a positive view of relations between the Bene

Israel and the State of Israel – a request they refused.[24] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs wanted an official copy to placate the foreign press and wave in the face of anyone making disparaging remarks about treatment of the Bene Israel and other Jews from India. The government failed to obtain such a letter from the Bene Israel but successfully persuaded the Cochin community to write letters about their wonderful lives in Israel.[25] Perhaps they felt the international press would not distinguish between one Indian Jewish community and another and hoped that the word of the Cochin community would be enough.

Among the Bene Israel community, the feeling of being "othered" had far-reaching emotional, political, and religious repercussions. Community member Daniel Ezekiel commented that, "the community felt isolated from the rest of the population. The rabbinate said that it had reached its initial decision [not to sanctify marriages] after laborious research. Thus by the stroke of a quixotic pen, the reputation of a whole community of harmless, peace-loving citizens was irreparably damaged. Whole ties of blood and ancestry were bastardized."[26] Another community member interviewed in 2008 said that he had attended synagogue all his life but stopped attending after the directives were issued. He added, "I go back to visit family in India when I can and always attend synagogue there. But in Israel it seems like big business and I don't feel welcome."[27]

After the Indian press publicized the issue, other international media affiliates began to report on it. Opponents of Israel loved the story and began to pick up the issue, bringing it momentarily into the international spotlight. Egypt quickly acknowledged the issue, and the Egyptian government offered asylum to the Bene Israel,[28] announcing that the Bene Israel were welcome to live in Egypt to escape their persecution in Israel.[29] No member of the Bene Israel community took this invitation seriously. Although the press and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were aware of the issue, the Israeli government made no real effort to intervene on behalf of the Bene Israel. For the Bene Israel, it was another heavy blow to their dream of Zionism and the ideals of Israel.

In response to the government's inaction, the Action Committee implicated the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency in the affair. In an article in the community organ, *Truth, the Voice of the Bene Israel Action Committee*, they wrote, "We accuse the Jewish Agency. The question we ask now is, why did the Jewish Agency

uproot hundreds of families and bring them to the Holy Land to face religious discrimination by the so called "pure Jews"? Does it think that this small and politically unimportant eastern community can be suppressed and repressed?"[30] In the absence of any government effort to intervene on their behalf, the community decided, under Samson's leadership, that it was under no obligation to cooperate with the government.[31]

The Action Committee was then meeting regularly, and the government wanted a representative of its own to attend the meetings but was refused entry. By the end of 1961, the issue was receiving growing attention among the press and the international Jewish community, and the Bene Israel began receiving support from all corners of the Jewish world. Nahum Goldman, president of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), (an international organization whose mission is to address the interests and needs of Jews and Jewish communities throughout the world)[32] sent a telegram to Arieh Tartakower, chairman of the Israel Executive of the WJC, urging that something be done about all the bad publicity.[33] Tartakower duly arranged a meeting[34] with Nissim and Zerach Warhaftig, minister of religious affairs (the ministry responsible for all matters related to the provision of religious services, including the allocation of funding for *yeshivas* and all Torah study institutions).[35] The WJC was able to apply this pressure as an international body because of credentials and recognition it received at the UN. Unique among worldwide organizations, it enjoyed (and still enjoys) a seat on many UN institutions, commissions, and subbodies.[36]

Subsequently, a meeting was arranged between Tartakower, Samson, and Kollette in an attempt to resolve the issue. According to Samson, at the meeting Tartakower told them that Nissim complicated the issue by giving an explanation that had no bearing on what the community understood the problem to be. Nissim had explained to Tartakower that the problem was that the Bene Israel in Bombay had Reform rabbis. If these were replaced with Orthodox rabbis, he would endorse the community in Israel and not stand in the way of marriage outside of their own community.[37] Samson and Kollette were shocked. Their community had been ostracized by the rabbis in Israel, and now a power struggle in India was being recommended to redeem it. Nissim's words seemed to add insult to injury. But at the meeting, despite no intention of agreeing to the proposal, Samson told Tartakower, "If we agree we need written confirmation from

you."[38] Tartakower then made Kollette and Samson swear secrecy and promise to say nothing about what had transpired in the meeting or any propositions he had made.[39] Samson asked him to put his request in writing. To Samson's great surprise, he agreed. Samson duly promised to remain silent himself, knowing full well that the Jewish communities in India would make the document public. When Tartakower sent the letter to the Action Committee, which duly sent it on to India, the community there was outraged, and the issue became public knowledge. To Tartakower's accusation that he had broken his promise, Samson replied, "I did remain quiet but I can't keep an entire community quiet."[40] It seemed that this incident cemented a relationship of mistrust between the two men who would have to deal with each other frequently in the following years.

The Action Committee was against imposing Orthodox rabbis from Israel on India and wrote to the Bene Israel community in India to object,

> Rabbi Nissim stated that he wanted Dr Tartakower to inform the Bene Israel representatives in Israel to contact the parent body in India and to tell them to terminate the contract with the young, "incompetent Reform" Rabbi there and to accept an Orthodox rabbi from Israel. The Chairman and the Secretary refused to be a party to such an unreasonable demand as they felt that they have no jurisdiction on the parent body in India. The Action Committee feels that the Chief Rabbi's proposal to install an Orthodox rabbi in India is not only illogical but also tantamount to downright blackmail of a minority community which is unfortunately at his mercy in Israel. Further, the conception that the Bene Israel community which chief Rabbi Nissim now considers illegitimate turns legitimate once an Orthodox Rabbi is appointed and accepted in India, is not only absurd but devoid of any rational thinking. From this it is obvious, that religion and observance of *halacha* have nothing to do with the refusal to grant marriage licenses and all the arguments put forward for such refusals were but lame excuses to blackmail our community which is being used as a pawn in his deep political game.[41]

The Bene Israel community in India asked the World Jewish Congress if they could bring over an Orthodox rabbi from America, wanting someone from outside Nissim's domain. After discussing the mat-

ter with Nissim and Goldman, Tartakower contacted B.B. Benjamin, a Bene Israel community leader in India, saying,

> The solution intended by you by inviting a young rabbi to come over to India from the United States cannot be considered as satisfactory. Only a strictly Orthodox rabbi possibly from Israel could do the job. Should you agree to have a rabbi of this caliber come to India to take care of religious education of the Bene Israel, the Chief Rabbinate may perhaps then consider the possibility of publishing special regulations by which the present marriage disabilities of the Bene Israel would be abolished throughout the world. I promised the Chief Rabbi to communicate with you and with leaders of the Bene Israel and to find out what your attitude was with regard to the suggested solution to the problem.[42]

The Bene Israel community in India, upon receiving this news, decided to support the Action Committee and refuse the demands of the rabbinate.

When Nissim's request became public, the *Jerusalem Post* published the following condemnation: "According to the spokesman of the rabbinate, even if an Orthodox rabbi were appointed for the community in India, it would not affect the members already in Israel. At the same time, so long as no ruling is made in regards to the community now here, Bene Israel immigrants arriving even after an Orthodox rabbi is appointed would be in the same position as those already here."[43] If this were truly the case, then even adherence to Nissim's suggestion would have accomplished nothing.

As a result, no change was made to the rabbinical structure in India. No Reform rabbi was asked to leave his post and no Orthodox rabbis were brought in, nor were any positions created for them. On the ground in Israel, nothing had changed, and Rabbi Nissim did not grant endorsement to the community. The only change was the public awareness of the meeting and its outcome, casting Nissim in a negative light and providing further support for the Bene Israel community among sectors of the Israeli and international public.

THE GOVERNMENT BECOMES INVOLVED

The failed attempt by Religious Affairs Minister Warhaftig to resolve the issue and the ensuing bad press received by the rabbinate now

brought the issue to the attention of the highest offices in Israel. The entire Action Committee was asked to meet with Prime Minister Ben Gurion on 2 July 1961.[44] Ben Gurion immediately put them at ease. He was, in Samson's words, "the quintessential politician. He made us feel comfortable and said that the situation was a shame, and that it was shameful for the entire Yishuv that the rabbinate behaved as they did."[45] Ben Gurion inquired about the history of the Bene Israel, and they recommended he read Samuel Kehimkar's book.[46] Despite the prime minister's charm, however, the Action Committee sensed that the meeting was very much business as usual and straight-up politics. According to Samson, the prime minister made all kinds of promises, assuring the group that all would be resolved in the near future. Samson felt Ben Gurion was delivering the empty promises of a master politician.[47] For the entire time that Ben Gurion spoke, the copy of Tartakower's controversial letter, placed in front of him by the Action Committee, lay untouched and unacknowledged. By the end of the meeting, however, Samson noticed that the prime minister, whom he referred to as the "cunning old fox," had slipped the letter into the desk.[48] Although Samson had other copies, he suspected that the prime minister, hoping it was the only copy, sought to silence the uproar through sleight of hand.

Nothing came of this meeting, and further meetings were arranged. Samson and the community were becoming increasingly frustrated, as they felt they were getting nowhere. Dealing with this had become a full-time job for Samson on top of his full-time job in the library at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The next important meeting between Nissim and Samson was arranged by Moshe Sharett for 17 September 1961. Samson said he would appear without a *kippah*, to reciprocate the rabbi's show of disrespect, but Sharett asked Samson to soft peddle it, in other words, to be respectful and civil. Sharett's exact words were, "C'mon, play cricket,"[49] reflecting his awareness of India's passion for the sport, and he reassured Samson that Nissim considered the Bene Israel to be pure Jews and was keen to solve the problem.[50] In the end Samson wore a *kippah* to the meeting.

When Samson arrived for the meeting, Nissim was alone and waiting for him. According to Samson, Nissim quickly launched into an argument. He demanded to know why the Baghdadi Jews in India refused to marry the Bene Israel. Samson, however, maintained that it was in fact the Bene Israel who refused to marry the Baghdadis.

This confrontation went on for some time. At the end of the meeting, Nissim acquiesced saying, "You are one hundred per cent Jewish."[51]

Why Nissim changed his stance at this point is unclear. Did he come to this conclusion on his own or in response to pressure from politicians such as Ben Gurion and Sharett? Or could he no longer face Samson's opposition, since it was by now obvious that Samson would not be intimidated or bullied? When discussing the meeting years later, Samson described Nissim as a "lovable bastard" who seemed "more like a merchant than a religious man." Others had this impression, too, and the Action Committee referred to Nissim behind his back as the "*Soheir Rashi*," the chief merchant.[52]

On 4 October 1961, Nissim suggested that Samson meet the Rabbinical Council. The following day, the five members of the Action Committee met with the council, which was comprised of Rabbis Y.M. Aaronberg, A. Goldshmidt, S. Tana, and A. Koshlovsky.[53] These rabbis examined the concerns regarding the origins and customs of the Bene Israel community. After considering all aspects of the issue, they concluded that marriage with the Bene Israel was permissible. They came to this conclusion in accordance with the decisions, responsa, and historical sources that had been presented to them. Rabbi Nissim and the Rabbinical Council promised to authorize marriages and to send the directive to do so to rabbis all over the country. Rabbi Aaronberg ended the meeting saying, "May it be that we will merit the good fortune to witness in the near future those scattered among the nations, those far flung about the earth, gathered into the bosom of the Lord. And may Israel dwell in quiet response, with none to make her afraid."[54]

The directives to be sent to rabbis throughout the country were,

1 There are no doubts concerning the Judaism of the Bene Israel, from the earliest period they were bound closely to and maintained relationships with the seed of Israel. But because they were cut off for an extended period from the centres of Torah, there arose *halachic* concern over the manner and laws of their marriage and divorce practices that prevail among them.
2 The council had before it the response of the Chief Rabbis Ben Zion Meir Chai Uziel, z"l, and Itzhak Herzog, z"l, dealing with several specific cases of marriage among the community, and they permitted marriage in those cases.

3 On the basis of those responsa and as a result of basic and extensive *halachic* research recently conducted, the Council has decided that there is no basis for forbidding marriages of the Bene Israel, and therefore marriage with them is permitted. It is the responsibility of the rabbis registering the marriages to conduct proper investigations in each case in accordance with the instructions of the chief rabbinate. In each case where doubts arise they are to present the case to the district *beit din*, as it is customary in all cases concerning the registration of marriages.
4 Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim will circulate the decision of the Chief Rabbinical Council to the rabbis registering marriages and will enclose the attached explanations.
5 This decision of the Chief Rabbinical Council has no connection with the problems of the marriage of the Karaites, for that decision is totally different and is clearly explained in the *Shulcan Aruch*, "Even Ha-ezer," section 4.[55]

On 18 October, these directives were allegedly issued to rabbis across the country, and the matter was thought to be over. The Bene Israel community had been deemed *halachically* sound and its members could marry any other Jew in Israel. The Action Committee was pleased and brought the news back to their community. It seemed like a time of victory. On 19 October, Samson met with Nissim again to make sure everything was in order, and the atmosphere was jovial. Nissim allegedly joked with Samson, saying, "The Bene Israel are like all other Jews except that the Bene Israel attacked me, which makes them different from all other Jews."[56] It was said in a darkly humorous way. It seemed that the two men had ended their dealings in a cordial manner and were unlikely to have any further contact.

On 24 October 1961, however, the newspaper *Ma'ariv* sent the reporter Raphael Bashan to meet the Action Committee for a follow-up story. He informed them that he had just had word that the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party had publicly rejected the Rabbinical Council's decision to recognize the Bene Israel as legitimate Jews for marriage with other Israelis.

While this came as a surprise to the Action Committee members, who thought the matter had been closed, they were mobilized and ready to continue the struggle. On 4 November 1961, a new organization, the Bene Israel Association, was formed in Lod to address this as well as all other social issues.[57] Before the marriage prohibition, the

Bene Israel had been without political representation or leadership. It was felt that the Action Committee had been so successful that they should continue to fight for better housing, employment, and education opportunities until the end of 1962[58] when the Bene Israel Association assumed those roles. Upon its creation, the Association assumed that the marriage problem had been resolved, even if the Agudat Yisrael would not recognize the directives of the Rabbinical Council.

THE STRUGGLE INTENSIFIES

Shortly after the creation of the Bene Israel Association, Samson received a phone call from a Rabbi Goldman who worked in the office of the chief rabbinate. Goldman said he had been upset that Nissim raised the marriage problem and that he was on the side of the Bene Israel. He went on to explain that a positive report on the Bene Israel received by the council six years earlier had been suppressed and that Nissim had not sought the signatures of the Rabbinical Council for his new directive regarding the Bene Israel. News of the suppressed report, coupled with the fact that Nissim had not sought council endorsement, suggested to Samson that the matter might not be resolved. He wondered if the Agudat Yisrael stance was an indication of more going on and was grateful for Goldman's inside information.[59]

Sure enough, when Rabbi Nissim's new directives were published on 18 February 1962 the wording was changed and additional text had been added. Previously, the concern had only been with those Bene Israel who seemed to have problematic backgrounds in that, when questioned, they could not prove Jewish ancestry. Now the wording made it clear that the entire Bene Israel community was suspect. In addition to what had been agreed upon by the Action Committee and the Rabbinical Council, the directives now read,

> When a request is advanced to register a marriage between a member of the Bene Israel community and a person not belonging to that community, it is incumbent upon the registering rabbi:
>
> 1 To search and investigate whether the mother or grandmother, and as far back as it is possible to trace the lineage, of the perspective bride or groom of the Bene Israel community was a Jew-

ess and whether or not she came from a family into which intermingling with non-Jews or proselytes had occurred.

2 To search and investigate whether the parents or the grandparents, as far back as it is possible to trace the lineage, of the person seeking marriage, were married after a divorce or whether there was in the family a kinship marriage such as is forbidden by Jewish law.

The rabbi registering marriages being certain that there are no doubts concerning the cautions listed above, he shall marry the couple.

There being an area of doubt from among the cautions listed above, the rabbi registering marriages is to refer the matter to the district *beit din*. The *beit din* will judge the case and determine whether the marriage is permitted or not and if permitted, if proselytization or immersions are required or not.[60]

At the publication of these additional directives alongside the others, the Bene Israel community was furious. They felt Rabbi Nissim had deceived them. Having come from India there was a tendency to interpret things as having caste-like patterns, and according to these directives, the Bene Israel had been outcast and set as a people apart. The entire community would now be unable to marry their children to other Israeli families without encountering huge problems from the rabbinate. The new directives had made things worse than they were before. The community began to make accusations about the rabbinate and the government, shouting slogans that included the words "discrimination," "apartheid," and "Nuremberg laws."[61] They shouted these slogans, reported them to the media, and wrote letters to government offices.

It was unclear why Nissim had issued this new directive after going through the motions and agreeing with the Action Committee to end the problem. There was considerable speculation, and many thought it due to racism or bigotry. One of the most interesting speculations came from Dr Zvi Werblowski, a lecturer in comparative religion at Hebrew University. He wrote in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 16 March 1962,

A number of self-appointed watchmen over Israel have taken matters into their own hands. Active rabbinic busybodies in Israel, England, and the USA began to organize a campaign against the

> Chief Rabbinate's ruling, casting aspersions on its legitimacy and mobilizing the whole extremist "right wing" against Chief Rabbi Nissim. A kind of whispering campaign was initiated and subtle (and less subtle) pressure exerted on the Israeli rabbis, who were given to understand that they would lose their unblemished Orthodox reputations if they acted in accordance with the instructions of the Chief Rabbinate. Pressure was so effective that some of the rabbis who had originally written positive responsa retracted [without giving reasons]. One of the leading Talmudic scholars from Eastern Europe, now in the USA, was sent to Israel to prevail upon the Chief Rabbi Nissim to change his mind.[62]

It is unclear whether this was indeed the reason for the new directives, but Nissim did later admit to pressure from extremist elements in the Orthodox community.[63]

At this point, the vast majority of the Israeli population seemed to be on the side of the Bene Israel and opposed to the directives.[64] The public became concerned that doubt might be cast on their own ethnicity and religious backgrounds. As one *oleh* put it, the case of the Bene Israel was "everyone's problem." By calling into question religious identity, the national identity was also, by implication, called into question. As an immigrant, if one is not Jewish what is one's relationship to Israel?

There are conservative Zionists who believe that Judaism and Israel are so intertwined that one cannot separate them. The Zionist novelist A.B. Yehoshua went as far as to say, "Israeli is the authentic, complete, and consummate word for the concept 'Jewish.' Israeliness is the total, perfect, and original Judaism, one that should provide answers in all areas of life."[65] If the rabbinate was able to bring into question a community's religious identity, it could as easily bring into question the national identity, which was an alarming notion for all Jews. Chaim Ben Avraham, an *oleh* from England who was not a Bene Israel, wrote a piercing criticism of the rabbinate, indicating why the matter was becoming a concern for the non-Bene Israel. This criticism makes reference to treatment the Jews were subject to as a minority in Europe and the Islamic world, and reflects upon the tragedy of the continued minority treatment under the rabbinical institution in Israel. The criticism suggests that instead of finally being free in their own state, the Jewish people were about to be further persecuted and that the Bene Israel community was the test case for the rabbinate. If

not stopped, he said, the rabbis would soon call into question any type of Judaism that did not strictly conform to their "true Judaism." He wrote,

> What is tragic in this case is that the Rabbinate have quit the climate of oppression and have attained not only religious freedom but political power and instead of welcoming this and using their power wisely, they have created another ghetto. In fact everyone says the Rabbinate can have religious freedom provided they are free in exactly the same way as we. So instead of a body of scholars and thinkers that can assist us to re-interpret the law to these new and challenging circumstances, we have a narrow minded and ill-tempered robot pacing an anachronistic sentry – go in front of an empty house. The problem of the Bene Israel is everyone's problem. The Bene Israel are in the position of being the test case, the thin edge of the wedge, which will put out the first few bricks from the crumbling house of the Rabbinate's true Judaism.[66]

Samson's official response to the media was that the government was at fault. He said, "A government that cannot protect its citizens is to blame."[67] He further stated that Rabbi Nissim was also to blame and described the issue as a matter of anti-Semitism. After receiving the open letter to the government and the articles that were emerging in the press, Warhaftig requested a meeting with the Action Committee. At the meeting, a furious Samson cornered him and demanded an explanation. He held nothing back, declaring, "Why didn't you tell us before making *aliyah*? We wouldn't have come!"[68] It was a very legitimate question from the representative of a population that had never been persecuted in India. Warhaftig had no response or at least none that was satisfactory to the committee. His only explanation was the same as the official government line, which was to repeat and assure the Bene Israel community that there was no problem. "You are the minister and you are encouraging racism,"[69] Samson told him. The meeting, like so many others, accomplished little.

The problem had come to dominate almost all of Samson's time and took a heavy toll on his life. He was travelling around to different Bene Israel communities all over the country, holding meetings to help them understand the struggle that was under way and to try to make them realize that the Action Committee was indeed fighting on

their behalf. He was also spending large amounts of time dealing with the press and government offices. The Action Committee was meeting regularly to plan the next move, and all of this kept him away from his family. Although he was no politician and had never wanted to enter public service, he felt obliged to keep up the struggle, but the longer the struggle continued the more responsibility fell to him.

While trying to remain optimistic, 1962 proved to be a very difficult year for the Bene Israel community. Many marriage requests were denied by rabbis throughout the country. When a rabbi in Ashkelon refused to grant a marriage license to a young Bene Israel woman from Kiryat Gat that January, Samson made sure that the decision received plenty of publicity. This resulted in harassment of the rabbi by the press and the Bene Israel community after which a license was issued but was granted with a clause stating that she was only able to marry a member of the Bene Israel community.[70] On 15 February, a rabbi in Herzliya refused to officiate at a Bene Israel wedding on the grounds that he had not received instructions from the chief rabbinate permitting "mixed marriages."[71] On 16 March, a rabbi in Jerusalem refused to grant a marriage license to Mordecai Yehezkiel and S. Sassoon on the grounds that he had not received any instructions from the chief rabbi.[72] In September, Rabbi Zalman Diskin refused to marry Aharon Sharpurkar of the Bene Israel community to Ruhama Sassoon of the Indian Baghdadi community.[73] By mid-March, the marriage certificates for the Bene Israel in Israel were actually being changed. Marriage licenses in Israel normally specified the category Levi, Cohen, or Israel. In the case of the Bene Israel, these words were being replaced with "Bene Israel, Indians."[74] The entire community, both in Israel and India, became increasingly outraged. The official statement from the Action Committee to the press reflected this anger and frustration.

> The policy pursued by the Rabbinate of Israel smacks of South Africa's apartheid. There have always been three groups of Jews, viz. Cohen, Levi, and Israel. Is it now necessary to make a fourth group, known as the "Bene Israel Indian?" And why is it necessary to mention the individual's nationality before immigration, when this is not done for other immigrants? Are the Bene Israel not Israelis by nationality? The only answer is intentional discrimination of the most absolute kind. Like the South African govern-

> ment, which does not bother about a negro marrying a negro, the Rabbinate could not care less when a Bene Israel marries another Bene Israel. The only difference between the two is that South Africa practices apartheid openly, whereas Israel practices it under the cloak of religion.[75]

At a community meeting in March 1962, several Bene Israel teens about to come of age for military service suggested that the Bene Israel should refuse to serve in the army. They passed a motion that until they were given written certificates by the state indicating that they were Jews in every sense and equal to all other Jews in the country, they should not serve in the Jewish army. Samson immediately quelled the motion saying, "This issue should never interfere with duty. All those who are supposed to serve in the army need to fulfill their duty and serve."[76] All in the community continued to serve in the military, and for the time being the issue of military service in exchange for religious equality was laid to rest.

Samson's ability to stop these young men is indicative of the influence he had in the community. It is clear that he had become a well-regarded leader and an important spokesperson and that the community looked to him for guidance. The Action Committee and many other community members worked diligently and tirelessly with him, though, and he rejects any suggestion that he fought this struggle alone.

On 4 April 1962, India's Prime Minister Nehru publicly declared that Israel's treatment of the Bene Israel meant Israel could not expect relations with India.[77] At that time, India did not officially recognize the State of Israel. Israel was viewed as a colonial entity in the Middle East, and India held this stance in relation to internal Indian politics and its Hindu–Muslim divide. The treatment of the Bene Israel probably had less impact than the Indian government let on, yet the fact that India's government made such a statement to the media brought the situation back to where it had been before Nissim's new directives. The Israeli government became agitated and wished to lay the entire matter to rest.

On 21 May 1962, Rabbi Nissim suggested appointing a special marriage registrar for the Bene Israel,[78] which drew an outcry from the community. Samson told the press, "We can no longer rest on the matter which affects our community's honor – and I might add, the honor of Israel and the Jewish people."[79] Tensions increased, and the

implications of the struggle reached further and further into the Jewish community worldwide. On 25 May, the annual meeting of the World Conference of Conservative Judaism publicly offered the Bene Israel its full backing. On 31 May, under the leadership of B.B. Benjamin, the conference passed a resolution in support of the Bene Israel.[80] But Benjamin suggested that the campaign of the Bene Israel be directed against the rabbinate and not the State of Israel. While happy for the support from the conservative movement, Samson rejected this suggestion, however, maintaining that a government that fails to protect its people is at fault.

At the end of May 1962, several Bene Israel representatives from India who were in Jerusalem for the first international convention of synagogue leaders, including Jihrad, Moses, and B.B. Benjamin, arranged meetings with top-ranking authorities.[81] These included Charles Rosengarten, president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism; Dr Simon Greenberg, vice-chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Abraham Joshua Heschel, professor of ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Morris Laub, director, and Adele Gilead, executive secretary and convention director, of the World Jewish Congress; as well as Arieh Tartakower. After the meetings, the members agreed that a suitable resolution should be drafted and presented to the convention. On 31 May 1962, the following resolution was passed unanimously to the convention amid loud applause. It stated, "We note with pride that the Bene Israel, throughout centuries of their separation from the mainstream of Jewish life, have nevertheless maintained their loyalty to the Jewish tradition, so that today they are in all respects members of the world Jewish community. We affirm that as Jews they are our brethren in all respects, and are entitled to the same rights, privileges, and treatment as all Jews in all countries of the world."[82]

The community received further assistance from the World Jewish Congress. Tartakower, eager to help, had a lengthy meeting with Rabbi Nissim and described the proceedings in a letter to the Action Committee, "We had a long conversation during which he (Nissim) most emphatically denied the accusations raised against him."[83] Rabbi Nissim stated the following,

> a) It is absolutely not correct that inquiries are being made in cases of marriage between members of the Bene Israel and other

communities only. According to instructions issued by the late chief Rabbi Herzog, in all cases of marriage of people born outside of Israel a questionnaire containing 21 questions is to be answered by the applicants and supported by witnesses before a marriage certificate is to be granted. Even people born in Israel are being submitted to the same procedure if they are not sufficiently known to the rabbi performing the ceremony. In the case of the Bene Israel the chief rabbi ordered that the questionnaire be reduced to four questions only so that actually it is a case of discrimination in favor of the Bene Israel and not against them.

b) It is equally not correct that inquires are being conducted only in cases of mixed marriages. Exactly the same procedure takes place in the cases of marriages within the Bene Israel community. He mentioned in his instructions only marriages between Bene Israel and members of other communities so as to avoid the impression that he would wish to interfere with the affairs of the Bene Israel community in India to which he is not entitled.[84]

Tartakower asserted that, "The chief rabbi told me at the same time that he agreed to explain the situation to me only as a courtesy with regard to my person. He will not be ready to discuss such questions in the future with anyone since he considers the attacks of the Bene Israel against him as proof of lack of gratitude on their part for his efforts to have the affair settled in a dignified way."[85] While Nissim denied any wrongdoing on his part, the conversation with Tartakower had revealed the divisions within the Orthodox community and the significant political pressure that Nissim was under. Nissim let it slip to Tartakower that he would do his best, "despite the violent opposition on the part of Neturei Karta and several extremist groups within the Agudat Yisrael."[86] And in response to the conservative movement's support for the Bene Israel, Nissim made a veiled threat to the Bene Israel community that if the Bene Israel decided to join the World Movement of Conservative Judaism, Orthodox rabbis in Israel may refuse to officiate in any ceremonies involving them.[87]

In that same year, Nissim published a book entitled *Bnei Yisrael: Piskei Halakkah* [Bene Israel: Halachic Decisions and the Sources for the Investigation of Their Laws and the Question of Their Origins] in

an attempt to clarify his decision. It was published by the government of Israel, which suggests that the rabbi may have been under pressure to explain his decision not to accept the Bene Israel as suitable for marriage to other Jews without restriction. In the book, many of the responsa or inquiries by rabbis over the centuries were included. While most of the responsa are fascinating, one of them, written by Rabbi Herzog is particularly interesting. It states,

> I have determined that the Bene Israel of India are of Jewish descent without a doubt. It is only our Babylonian brothers who resided in India who abstained from them due to a response that they received from a rabbi in Bagdad from before 100 years ago who was of the opinion that the Bene Israel are *safek mamzer*. This opinion was based on the information furnished by those people in India who originally came from Bagdad that they, the Bene Israel did two things 1) there are those among them who require yibbum and get married to the street without chalitza and 2) they do not have the bill of divorce.
>
> I responded that it is only a minority opinion that the child of a woman married to the street is a mamzer by rabbinic nature and in the case of a doubt it is not necessary to be stringent ... In this specific case, we have the credible testimony of Rabbi Yaakov Sapir. In his book Sapir, the great scholar and god fearing man who was prominent in the eyes of giants [Scholars] in Jerusalem, and he researched the Bene Israel group very thoroughly and writes clearly that by them, a woman who is sent away from her husband returns to her father's house and remains a "living widow" for the rest of her life [she does not re marry].
>
> Those that are questioning the status of the Bene Israel aren't discussing specific cases and aren't saying they know of a specific case where a woman married another man without first obtaining a kosher divorce and I reviewed all the responsa and there is no contradiction.
>
> For sure, Rabbi Sapir is believed even though he is only a single witness. Since this is a matter that was an obvious one and that there was no evidence of wrongdoing there is no need to be stringent in this matter.[88]

Thus, by the admission of Nissim's own work, rabbinical authorities in the past had clearly felt the Bene Israel were not a problematic

community. This further suggests that Nissim was under pressure from right wing Orthodox groups to create problems where none specifically existed.

By June 1962, unofficial reports began to surface in the media that the Bene Israel were opposed to the religious establishment. While Samson steadfastly maintained that this was not the case, these reports were indicative of an emerging split within the Bene Israel community. People other than Samson had begun to make statements to the media, claiming to represent the community. Other community members began to organize. The Haifa branch of the Bene Israel Association was created and included H.D. Daniel as chairperson, H. Reuben as secretary, David Joseph as treasurer, and Emanuel Aarons and David Songaokar as members.[89] Another organization was created in Kfar Yerukham, with David Davidson as chairman, Joseph Jittehkar as assistant secretary, Romiel Shalome as secretary, Menashe Ashtamkar as treasurer, and Saul Shapurkar as assistant treasurer.[90] By July, the other voices in the community had organized one hundred boys in Be'er Sheva to return their military cards to Ben Gurion's office as a sign of protest. On hearing of this, Samson beseeched them not to follow through and persuaded them to drop the protest. Despite the beginning of divisions within the community, Samson still held significant sway. Minister of Religious Affairs Warhaftig attempted to capitalize on community division by contacting these other bodies to gain ground where he had failed with Samson.[91]

On 16 July, Samson met with Menachem Begin, leader of the Herut Party, who had given the Bene Israel his full support by saying that the community was a hundred per cent Jewish.[92] He made it clear that most of the government including the Liberal, Mapam, and Communist Parties in the Knesset all supported the Bene Israel community and opposed the rabbinate's directives.[93] Despite all this support, however, at the end of July Nissim said that, instead of withdrawing the directives, the government was going to adopt the device of institutional regional registrars to whom local registrars could refer if they had scruples against performing a marriage.[94] The Bene Israel were horrified: if the registrars were to operate only in the case of the Bene Israel it constituted yet another measure of discrimination. To confront this issue, 800 members of the Bene Israel gathered in Be'er Sheva on 21 July to express their anger.[95] The following resolutions were unanimously adopted,

1 The community strongly denounces the stand in parliament by the government in dealing with the Bene Israel problem. It demands the immediate cancellation of Rabbi Nissim's infamous directives, which are an insult to the whole community and to India itself.

2 The community rejects the appointment of regional registrars and consider the arrangement a move to evade the issue.

3 The underhanded attempt made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in trying to meet those who did not represent the community with a view to causing a split in its ranks is very strongly condemned.

4 The community is deeply grateful to the Liberal, Herut, Mapam, and Communist Parties for their bold stand in supporting its struggle against tyranny and injustice when the question was taken up by the Knesset. It also conveys thanks to members of the Ahdut Ha Avoda who abstained on the vote in favour of regional rabbis.

5 It asks for the punishment of those rabbis refusing to grant marriage licenses to members of the community.

6 Secretaries of all centres are requested to prepare lists of persons willing to join in strikes and passive resistance demonstrations.

7 The Action Committee is requested to continue its struggle against the directives and regional registrars and is promised the wholehearted support of the community.[96]

In November 1962, the Bene Israel Purity Justification Committee of Bombay was established.[97] It consisted mainly of young zealots who undertook a campaign of militant agitation in support of the Action Committee.[98] With the emergence of this committee, Rabbi Nissim proposed sending three rabbis to India to research the community – two of the three rabbis being Iraqis. The Action Committee and the Purity Justification Committee were furious at the suggestion.[99] Samson vehemently opposed the idea of sending rabbis to India.[100] He addressed a letter to Golda Meir, the minister of foreign affairs, pointing out the political implications and strongly objecting to the inclusion of Iraqi rabbis in the delegation.[101] As a result, the two Iraqi rabbis were dropped, and it was decided to send only two, both of whom were Ashkenazi.[102] The Action Committee then appealed to the gov-

ernment of India, and it is rumoured that the Indian government refused entry visas to the rabbis.[103] Eventually only one of them, Rabbi Zev Gothold, the director of overseas relations in the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, arrived via a devious route through London and carrying an American passport.[104]

The sending of a rabbi to India represented a reversal of the Zionist discourse, by seeking answers from the very context that the *olim* are asked to give up. The Zionist discourse normalizes the move towards the Jewish nation state and gives symbolic meaning to immigration. *Aliyah* means to ascend, which suggests a commitment to the Israeli state and to leaving the *galut* behind. As discussed in the previous chapter, the educational process, which seeks to separate the immigrants from their past and place of origin, is a deliberate attempt to have them pursue the answers to life's struggles only in Israel. It was one thing for the rabbinate to examine documents and inquiries from India but quite another to send someone there to create a new history. The Bene Israel community in Israel, having undertaken both a commitment to the state and the educational process to separate them from their Indian past, was united in its opposition to sending Gothold to India and fought the endeavour.

On 9 May 1963, Samson sent the following telegram from the Action Committee to the Bene Israel community in India, "Rabbinate and Religious ministry ignore Indian and local community's protest. Rabbinical delegation coming to India. Gothold leaving Monday thirteenth. Request complete boycott until cancellation of directives."[105] B.J. Israel, who received the telegram, wrote immediately to one of Bombay's leading newspapers, the *Indian Express*, and on 17 May the newspaper published his article. It said, among other things,

> The so-called religious authorities in Israel have, of course, no jurisdiction outside of Israel, within Israel itself they have managed to intimidate the government into virtual impotence. It is no secret that the religious ministry is anti Bene Israel to the core. It has been instrumental in humiliating our brethren in Israel and in pursuing discriminatory attitude towards them in matters of marriage with Jews of other countries. This move to send rabbis to India cannot therefore be considered an act of goodwill. It has evil designs which will have far reaching effects, if not checked immediately.[106]

Everywhere Gothold tried to make a public appearance he was met with vigorous protests. Protesters waved black flags and yelled the word "apartheid."[107] Gothold was reportedly shocked and admitted in a discussion, held on his initiative on 26 June, that the directive of the chief rabbinate was, in effect, discriminatory and inconsistent with the ruling of October 1961.[108] Furious at Gothold's statement, Nissim felt he had been made to look like a fool. Rabbi Gothold made no particular findings that were helpful to anyone, and the rabbinate in Israel made no change to its directives.

By this time, the community was becoming impatient and feeling paralyzed. Their children were unable to marry in Israel and were not sure they would ever be allowed to. A number of Bene Israel in Israel were giving serious thought to converting to Christianity for the practical reason of having their children accepted within a community. *Truth* published an article stating, "A number of Bene Israel families in Israel are on the verge of converting to Christianity, what a fate! That those who kept their religion for 2000 years without any outside guidance and help should even think of converting themselves to Christianity after coming to Israel is a tragedy of tragedies. We have stated and re-stated that conversion is no solution to our problem and that we must continue to fight to its bitter end."[109] Time was running out for the community, and the pressure on the Action Committee to resolve the issue was now overwhelming.

Without the ability to marry other Jews in the state of Israel, the community felt there could be no future there. This was a very painful issue as so many of the community members had made tremendous sacrifices to become Israeli. Samson himself had spent many months in the Sha'ar ha-Aliyah camp and Ma'abarot Talpiot with his family. Most of the other community members had also given up their lives in a country that was not a place of persecution and had gone through difficult ordeals to come to Israel. They were proud of that. To be robbed of their future hopes and dreams was extremely painful.

A movement for returning to India once again began to gain momentum, something that the Action Committee did not support. On 26 July 1963, forty members of the community who had organized outside of the Action Committee protested in front of the Jewish Agency offices. The Jewish Agency approached Samson to call off the protest or, at least, to publicly distance the Action Committee from the strike. Samson, although he had not organized the protest, responded that as long as the protest was against the direc-

tives alone, the committee supported it.[110] He made it clear, however, that if the protest included other issues, the Action Committee would not support the strike. He didn't want the issue of the directives to spill over into other more general concerns, such as housing and education, which would take attention away from the more immediate problem.

On 1 August, Samson called a meeting of community representatives to discuss the strike. As they debated how to react to it, the protest continued until 22 August.[111] The protest put further pressure on the government to act. Some protesters felt that if Samson had championed them he could have rallied the entire community. As he had neither organized the strike to begin with nor was he interested in supporting the idea of leaving Israel to return to India, Samson was not interested in championing the protest simply because it had emerged from his community.

As more people became involved and the issue received greater attention, new community representatives used the limelight to deal with other problems including housing, jobs, and education. Addressing these concerns further enlarged the Action Committee's mandate, keeping them busier than ever.

The first six months of 1964 brought all these things to a head, leading to a meeting between Samson and Gabriel Doron, the Israeli consul in India, on 24 June. Doron suggested the president meet the Action Committee and he arranged a meeting for 15 July. On that day the Action Committee met with President Shazar and Minister Warhaftig to discuss the directives as well as the protests.[112]

On 21 July, another group of protesters rallied outside the Jewish Agency, and this time many participants embarked on a hunger strike. Ashtamkar and Samson went to meet the strikers (who once again were not acting in coordination with the Action Committee), and Samson confirmed that the Action Committee would endorse the protest if it were limited to the rabbinical directives and not a "back-to-India" movement.[113] By the third day of the strike, Samson saw that the government was indifferent to the issue. The Action Committee was under pressure from many in the community to appeal to foreign governments for help. By this point, however, the Action Committee felt they had the support of the Israeli public and contact with a foreign government would undermine that support. On 29 July, the protesters were famished, but there was no action on the side of the government or the rabbinate.

On 31 July, Samson was unexpectedly called to Gabriel Doron's office. When he arrived, Doron informed him that he was to meet President Shazar, Chief Rabbi Nissim, Minister Warhaftig, and Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman, who would be joining the meeting over the telephone. Samson was told the meeting would be held later that day. This gave him the impression that they did not want him to have time to prepare for it. He was glad to have enough time to go home and change his clothes. He described the hours between leaving Doron's office and returning as hours of tremendous anxiety, saying that he was shaking like a leaf.[114] This meeting would not be between the Action Committee and the officials but with him alone. He would be made to stand as sole representative of the Bene Israel community. He recounted that he, "felt unequipped in a way to stand up to these combined forces."[115] He was frightened that they would apply pressure on him to act or agree to something that he would later regret. Samson had, and still has, tremendous respect for the office of the president, and the meeting caught him so seriously off guard that his knees were shaking as he returned to Doron's office.[116]

As the meeting began, Nissim confronted Samson about the Bene Israel practices in India, implying that there were *mamzerim* in the community. Samson strongly refuted the attack and added that if the rabbi was concerned with *mamzerim* he needn't look to the Bene Israel; every community had plenty of them. Samson then focused on the directives, saying, "It has been two years since the directives were issued and no cases have been found against the Bene Israel. Stop the directives." Allegedly, Nissim retorted with, "Stop the strike!" to which Samson reiterated the need to stop the directives, and Nissim allegedly paused and quietly asked, "What do you want?" This is what Samson had been afraid of. He was without the support of the Action Committee and was being led down a road where he would become the fall guy for a government that could claim that he had made an agreement. He told them that he would have to ask the people. The president, who had barely spoken until then, said firmly, "But what do YOU want?"[117] Clearly Nissim and the government believed he was in complete control of his community and the hunger strike, neither of which was true. It appeared that the government wanted to cut a deal with him to put an end to the protests, strikes, contacting of foreign governments, and media coverage. To their displeasure, Samson insisted that he could not act alone.

On 2 August, because of the continued protests, hunger strikes, and failure to resolve the marriage issue, a press conference was called. Cynowitz (the delegate who had become the chairman of the Bombay Zionist Association) actually came from India to take part. When the press conference finished, an emergency meeting of Bene Israel members from across the country was held. Samson suggested they organize their own protest sanctioned by the Action Committee. The community unanimously supported the idea and began to make arrangements for 5 August. Immediately, members of the community began to complain that three days was not enough time to prepare, but Samson insisted. He estimated that between one hundred and 300 people would show up for the protest and that they would all be from the Bene Israel community. On 4 August, however, a police van arrived at the strikers' camp and requested that Samson come to the station to discuss aspects of the demonstration. The strikers did not want Samson to go; they feared for his safety and felt he should be accompanied by members from his community. He told them not to worry and that he would be safe.

The meeting at the station was cordial, and it was apparent that the police had information about the number of people that were planning to attend the demonstration. The police felt children should not be brought to the demonstration and requested that they be left at home. The insinuation was that the protesters would be met with violence and the police wanted to minimize the amount of suffering. Samson responded to the demand by saying, "We are demonstrating for the sake of the children, and I will not do what you have asked of me."[118] He then received a lift back to the camp, much to the relief of his community members. On 5 August, between 2,000 and 3,000 people from across the spectrum of Israel's population showed up to protest.[119] They arrived with huge placards, and a few of them had images and stuffed dolls of Nissim that they wanted to burn in effigy. Samson discouraged them from doing this, and in most cases he was successful. In one case, Samson saw men urinating on Nissim's effigy, which, although he did not condone, he did find slightly amusing.[120] The demonstration went extremely well. Women, including some who were not from the Indian community, were dressed in blue, green, and red saris. Celebrities such as Yigael Yadin, the famous archaeologist and war hero, and Emma Talmi, an elected member of the Knesset from the Mapam party, attended as well as official representatives of the Be'er Sheva Municipality and the chairman of the

League for the Abolition of Religious Coercion.[121] The demonstration marched to the headquarters of the chief rabbinate on King George Street. Many speeches were made, with Samson giving the concluding one. When he finished his speech, he called for the Israeli national anthem, "Hatikva," and everyone stood and sang in unison. Benjamin Israel, a scholar from the Bene Israel community, wrote, "The procession was one of the most impressive demonstrations held in Jerusalem since the birth of the State of Israel, and for the first time, Mapai, the largest party in Israel and the backbone of the government, came out in favour of the Bene Israel cause, as did the *Histadrut*, isolating the National Religious Party as the only supporter of the chief rabbinate."[122] The members of the Bene Israel were quite pleased and felt they had the support of the Israeli people.

Eleven days later on 16 August, Samson presented himself for *miluim* (army reserve service) but was sent home. Prime Minister Eshkol wanted him free because a special Knesset meeting was about to take place. Despite a recess of the Knesset, Eshkol called an emergency session to deal specifically with the Bene Israel matter.[123]

The prime minister addressed the Knesset stating, "The government repeatedly declares that it sees the Bene Israel community of India as Jews in all respects without qualification, not differing from all other Jews and having equal rights, including those of personal status."[124] He went on to say,

> The complaint made by the representatives of the community, based on the closing phrases of the decisions, refers to the marriage directives issued by the Chief Rabbinate. It has been shown that the Bene Israel community and large segments of the Jewish population of Israel are opposed to the continued existence of the directives. A feeling of discrimination has made the matter a question of acute public interest deserving our attention. After decisions in two cabinet meetings, the government expresses the opinion that it is imperative that the rabbinate bow to public opinion and find a way to remove the factors causing a feeling of under privilege and discrimination.[125]

After clarifying the specific issues and the government demands, Eshkol moved on to the broader subject of the Israeli people. He made it clear that he feared persecuting any single community as it

could mean the eventual destruction of the entire Jewish people. He asserted,

> There is one people of Israel in the world. There are Jews who returned to their homeland and all are equals, and dear to us. Members of the Knesset, for our generation the most important contemporary historical condition is the rebirth of Israel and the ingathering of exiles. We look forward, and justly so, to a solution based on the love of Israel, a solution which, will enable us, to gather the exiled unconditionally without obstacles. For reasons pertaining to Judaism as a whole, our laws have placed matters of personal status, in relations to the Jews, in the hands of the rabbis. But this grant has its conditions: The rabbinate must fulfil the greatest commandment of our generation, to enable the nation to live its life and gather all its exiles. The rabbis must take the burden of this commandment upon themselves, to foresee the future and avoid a conflict with serious consequences, between rabbinic law and the needs of a nation reborn, a conflict which may undermine their unique position and their authority, which we have appointed, to organise matters of the personal status of Jews.[126]

The prime minister asserted the authority of the state over the authority of the rabbis. By maintaining that the power of the rabbinate is conditional, he implied that its authority could be taken away, just as it had been granted, by the government. This veiled threat put pressure on the rabbis to adhere to the government's decision that the Bene Israel were equal and Jewish in every respect. Couching the threat in the context of the creation of the State of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles gave it particular weight. Having clearly asserted the government's desire for the abolition of the directives and the possible consequences to the authority of the rabbinate if those wishes were not met, he spoke directly to the Bene Israel community. He stated, "And now a few words from the podium of this house to the Bene Israel themselves. You are our brethren; to us you are the people of Israel. It is the strong desire of all of us to see you among the builders of our homeland, among all Jewry. Everything possible shall be done in order that every public body and every individual in the nation shall acknowledge such recognition. The Israeli public shall stand with you in this matter."[127]

When Samson heard the speech he was moved to ask the hunger strikers and protesters to return home, which they did.[128] Between the prime minister's speech and the thousands of people who had shown up to the protest, the political pressure on the rabbinate was overwhelming. On 31 August, the rabbinate made an official statement conceding that marriages to the Bene Israel should not be prohibited. The rabbinate did not go as far as the Bene Israel had hoped, but they did make some movement. The Chief Rabbinical Council issued an official statement to the press, which read, "The Chief Rabbinical Council of Israel at its meeting on Monday, August 31, 1964, concluded its deliberations in connection with the directives which had been sent to all marriage registrars in accordance with the decision of the Chief Rabbinical Council of October 18, 1961. It was decided that instead of the words 'Bene Israel' in the above directives, the following would now be written, viz, "Anyone concerning the ritual purity of whose family status any suspicion or doubt arises.'"[129]

To the Bene Israel the wording was not strong enough, but it was still seen as a victory. The community had taken on one of the most powerful institutions in the country and through nonviolent resistance had emerged victorious.

That same day, Samson issued this statement to the press on behalf of the Action Committee,

> The Bene Israel community both here and abroad receives with great satisfaction the practical abolition, of, the special directives for the Bene Israel, according to the announcement by "Kol Israel" (7 p.m. news). After receiving the official version of the decision of the rabbinate, I shall convene a meeting of the committee and the council of the community in order to wind up the affair. However, even at this stage, I permit myself to express the hope that today's decision of the rabbinate will bring to a final conclusion the affair of the special directives and we shall, God forbid, not be surprised again, as we were in the past after the decision of the chief rabbinate in October 1961 which stated that there was absolutely no doubt to the Jewishness of the Bene Israel, only to see later that Directives which negated the decision were issued to marriage registrars.
>
> We do not wish to talk in terms of victory. The honour of the rabbinate is dear to us also, after all is said and done, and we are convinced that the practical abolition of the directives will be an

> important contribution towards the spiritual and social absorption of the Bene Israel with their brethren in their homeland. Permit me to take this opportunity to thank all individuals, parties and institutions that helped us in bringing our struggle to a happy end.[130]

Looking back more than forty years, Samson discussed the victory, noting that although the wording was not strong enough for anyone in the community, it was probably much further than the rabbinate ever thought it would be forced to go.[131]

As of 2009, the Bene Israel community has intermarried with most communities in Israel and is Israeli and Jewish in every sense of the word. The chief rabbi, however, does not have jurisdiction over all the rabbis in the country, and they did not all follow the rabbinate when the directives were changed on 31 August 1964. On 31 January 1982, however, almost two decades after Prime Minister Eshkol's speech, the chief rabbi of Israel issued another statement to all the marriage registrars in Israel concerning the Bene Israel. By 1982, the community had already been living in Israel for several generations and the statement reflected this.

> Based upon the learned opinions and *halachic* decisions of our esteemed rabbis who proceeded us, his eminence Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog of blessed memory, and his eminence Ben Zion Meir Chai Uziel of blessed memory, who accepted the "Bene Israel" immediately upon their arrival in Israel and permitted their marriage with all Jews, and further to the decision of the Chief Rabbinical Council of the 8th of Heshwan 5726 (3rd November 1965). Obviously now, when the issue at hand is the second generation of immigrants from India, and the generation that was born and raised in the holy land, they are to be considered as Jews in every respect. If the mother of the groom or of the bride had not been divorced in India prior to her present marriage, her children are permitted to wed with anyone of the Jewish faith according to the laws of Moses and Israel, without a ritual bath for conversion and without the need for further inquiries and investigation beyond those required for every other couple.[132]

These are the words that the community had hoped to receive in 1964. Even though they were not stated at the time, however,

after 1964 the obstacles blocking the way to the *chuppah* were removed.

Still, not all local rabbis adhere to the new directives even today. As these words are being written, more than forty years after the struggle for religious equality was supposed to be over, the chief rabbi of Petah Tikva, Rav Baruch Shimon Solomon, still refuses to perform marriages for the Bene Israel.[133]

Conclusion

After the struggle for religious equality ended in 1964, Samson did not step down from public service as he had planned but, with the help of many others in the community, went on to create the Federation of Indian Jews. This organization sought to work with the Cochin community, the Bagdadi community, and all Jews in India to grapple with issues that life in Israel presented. Once organized, the federation focused on immigrants and their absorption, along with housing, education, women's activities, youth activities, and sports. Eventually, it published its own journal, *Shofar: The Voice of the Federation of Indian Jews*, which appeared first in 1971 and was published in Hebrew, English, and Marathi.

The federation's central committee members were drawn from the Bene Israel population across Israel. In addition to Samson Samson, who served as general secretary and treasurer, they included Nissim Aron, as president, and Mazal Daniels, Mary Shapurkar, Flora Samuel, David Jacob, Issac Divekar, Yakov Zabloon, Isaac Jihrad, and Sam Ellis. Early on, the federation began sending delegates to the airport to welcome Indians making *aliyah*. This way their initial encounter with Israel was softened in contrast to the early years when they were usually taken straight to a reception camp such as Sha'ar ha-Aliyah or the *ma'abarot*. The community took this step in response to the "stepmother" approach of the Ministry of Immigration, which, they felt, did not care about Indian Jews and made the Bene Israel feel like underprivileged, second-class citizens. [1]

The federation sought to cushion the culture shock of young boys and girls coming to Israel, who were shy and exhibited the Indian cultural norms, as described in the chapter "Arrival." They found, howev-

er, that the initial shock of these youths was soon overcome by their term in the army. Army service transformed newcomers from all over the world into Israelis by equalizing everyone's behaviour. Soldiers entered the army as foreigners in a new land and emerged from service feeling at home in their new country.

For the parents of those children, however, who were too old for military service, the transition was more difficult. Most of these newcomers were guided into full-time, three-month *ulpans* (intensive Hebrew language programs), with family accommodation supplied, to learn Hebrew. To facilitate their transition, a Marathi/Hebrew dictionary was created by Menashe Shimshon from Kibbutz Ofakim in the early 1970s. The federation also petitioned the Ministry of Absorption to hire an Indian Jew to help *olim* from India in their transition, but this request fell on deaf ears. Where possible, the federation would organize meetings for large groups of new Indian *olim* to meet leaders such as Samson who would welcome them to Israel and encourage them, "not [to] be disappointed in the beginning and to face all problems with determination and a will to integrate."[2]

Eventually the federation arranged for Shapir of the Immigration Department to address one hundred members of the Israeli Indian Jewish community at Beit Berl on 4 September 1971, so that the community could articulate their frustrations. Shapir gave a broad outline of the workings of his department and how it assisted a network of immigration offices all over the world from the time the immigrants filled in their first forms until they landed in Israel. He told them that, where possible, the ministry prearranged *ulpan* courses and in some cases even suitable employment for the "highly qualified immigrant." The Indian Jews understood this to mean white Jews and remained disappointed, feeling that the policy was biased against immigrants from India. They asked the minister to select the intelligent, ambitious young men and women from their community and provide them with better assistance on arrival, rather than dispatching them to the Negev and development towns, as was usually the case by 1971. The minister asked for patience, but no changes were made to the ministry's system for absorbing Indian *olim* following this meeting.[3]

As absorption and education were felt to go hand in hand, the federation established an education fund based on the one created in India in 1917 by Dr Joseph Benjamin Bamnolker, president of the first Bene Israel conference. The federation proposed different levels of

contribution to the education fund: each federation member would give six shekels per year, patron members one hundred shekels, vice patrons 500 shekels, and life members 1,000 shekels. The federation also created an apparatus through which very wealthy and generous members could sponsor an individual student directly by paying either a monthly donation or a lump sum into the bank account of the needy student. This educational fund was started in Lod but was soon given exposure in *Shofar*, drawing a wider support base. By 1970, there were Bene Israel students in every university in Israel.[4]

The university authorities were largely regarded as the opposite of the Ministry of Immigration and even referred to in *Shofar* as "an oasis in the desert of difficulties."[5] Israel's university system was set up to help new immigrants and even offered a preparation year for those not fully equipped for the rigorous academic program, either because the academic level of the course work was beyond them or because they needed time to strengthen their Hebrew, in which all courses were presented. This attitude represented a reversal from the situation described by the community a decade earlier when university was financially out of reach for many Bene Israel.[6]

The change may have been due to advancements in employment. While there were still employment challenges in the early 1970s, there were also breakthroughs, the most significant, perhaps, being the Israeli aircraft industry in Lod. By the mid 1950s, Israel was sourcing much of its aircraft engineering from the United States. Then it became aware of a disproportionate number of Jewish engineers in India working in this industry. Ben Gurion and Shimon Peres travelled to India and requested them to make *aliyah* and help build the Israeli aircraft industry.[7] Many responded, including David Reuben who was so enthused that he came home one day and announced to his wife, "We're moving to Israel!"[8] The Israeli aircraft industry grew, and by the early 1970s it employed many Bene Israel, including Nissim Joseph Aaron.[9]

Aaron had been in the import–export business before making *aliyah* with his wife and five children in 1963. He worked in the purchasing department of the Israeli Aircraft Industry and was active in absorbing new Bene Israel into the industry. In 1968, Nissim was elected president of the Federation of Indian Jews, and by 1969 the industry that employed the largest number of Indian Jews was Israeli Aerospace Industries. Aaron worked with J. Ribo, the personnel manager of IAI, who was responsible for much of the hiring which he did

after prospective applicants had been interviewed in Lod, Petah Tikva, and Rosh Haayin. While Nissim was instrumental in helping Indian Jews find employment in IAI, he was also a strong advocate of education. He spoke candidly of the situation. "Our students are the future hopes and leaders in the making. It is up to us to ensure that their studies are not interrupted for want of funds. If every earning Indian Jew in Israel contributed only fifty *agarot* per month towards this most deserving cause, our students could well be assured to finish their studies without any worries. In this country, without necessary academic qualifications, the future is dim for our boys and girls."[10] To encourage education, the Federation of Indian Jews created an organization of Indian Jewish students, which brought together students studying in various faculties across the country. The first of these get-togethers was held in Netanya in May 1971. At the meeting, the students elected their own central governing body from which to organize and address future concerns under the auspices of the federation.[11]

At that meeting, known as the Indian Students' Conference, a committee and chairman were elected. The committee comprised representatives from every major university in Israel and included Haim Avraham, Michael Moses, Nachum Moses, Shoshana Yitzhak, Michael Kolett, Shlomo Eliyah, and Morris Joseph. Under the auspices of the federation, the student cell worked in two primary fields – culture and education. At the conference, they established a network that enabled the students to assist one another in the study of Hebrew and English. They appealed to the government to create an *ulpan* where students from India would be taught Hebrew by an Indian who had been living for some time in Israel. They also decided to petition the government to fund the education of Indian students and for special grants to high school students to encourage them to go on to university.

In the field of culture, the student conference decided to petition the government and the Jewish Agency to have religious relics and other cultural objects brought from India to Israel. They also petitioned the government to make the Israeli public aware of ancient Indian-Jewish traditions and to form a student dance group and an orchestra that would perform in classical Indian style.[12] In addition, the conference decided that the Indian representative to the World Zionist Conference should be a Jew born in India rather than a non-Indian representative like Cynowitz, whose presence they saw as an "unjustified and sorry state of affairs."[13]

On 14 and 15 May 1971, the Federation of Indian Jews conducted a weekend meeting at Kibbutz Malon in Netanya during which an affiliated Indian women's organization was created. During the meeting several resolutions were passed regarding the concerns and priorities of this new group including ways to support employment, absorption, childcare, and international political events. Shortly thereafter, another Indian women's organization was created in Haifa, then another for Dimona, Lod, and Beer Sheva. All three were operational subunits of the federation by 18 July 1971. By 1972, M.D. Ezekial, president of the women's organization, was making public declarations about the importance of education.

> The women of the house play an important part, particularly in education and cultural upbringing of the children. It would not be out of place to say there is no charity like education. In Marathi there is a saying, *Vidya Dana Sarke Doorse Punya Nahi* (educate your children and help others educate theirs). In Israel one finds so many young people working as well as studying. If married, either both study and work or one works while the other studies sharing all the responsibilities of the house including the children. This displays their determination to face the challenge of life jointly, their will to improve their standard of living and above all to ensure a carefree and cultured upbringing of their children. Follow their noble example.[14]

By 1972, the women's organizations had made significant contributions to the education fund and began to emphasize the organization of educational programs for the economically less-fortunate members of the community, especially in development towns like Ramle and Lod, where sectors of the community lagged behind in child welfare and education. In addition to educational issues, the women's organizations arranged social gatherings and cross-country trips. Sophie Benjamin, acting secretary of the Ramle–Lod organization in 1972, organized a number of group activities including trips to Eilat, Petah Tikva, and Netanya among others. With each trip the number of participants increased, indicating the need and desire for such events. Shortly thereafter, further outings to Jerusalem, Hebron, and Rachel's tomb were organized. Cooking, sewing, and knitting classes were also established. On 15 July 1972, in Kfar Yeruham, at a meeting attended by forty-four women, a fourth Indian women's

organization was created by Flora Samuel. The federation began to encourage all development towns with an Indian community to establish women's organizations.[15]

Remaining employed in the fields in which they had been trained and having little trouble finding work, some were able to make a smooth transition from India to Israel. However, for the most part, this was only the case after 1953 when the economic and food crisis had somewhat abated in Israel.

Some of the Bene Israel working at Air India were offered work in Israel by the Jewish Agency. One, who came to Israel in 1953, was offered not only work but also the promise of housing. Over time, he was asked by Bedek (Israel Aerospace Industries) to approach other Indian Jews still living in India (who worked in the same field) with job offers in Israel. Many of them accepted. For those individuals, not knowing Hebrew was not a professional setback since they were skilled labour in a field that badly needed them.[16] Upon arrival, in the evenings, on the weekends, or simply over time through living and interacting with other Israelis, they learned Hebrew.

By the mid to late 1960s, Bene Israel members could be found in a wide range of professions and positions including entrepreneurs with their own independent businesses, in white-collar managerial positions, and serving as less well-paid office workers (both clerical and secretarial). On the lower end of the economic spectrum, there existed a wide range of skilled and unskilled workers doing a plethora of jobs and services throughout the country. Many Bene Israel worked not only in the Israeli aircraft industry but also for El Al, the national airline. Others found their way into tourist industries, working in hotels and holiday resorts. In both cases, with the tourist and the El Al jobs, the knowledge of English gave the Bene Israel an advantage over many other immigrant groups who did not have the same linguistic skills.[17]

In these and other instances, the knowledge of English set the Bene Israel apart and gave them a distinct advantage. By the mid 1960s, companies with international dealings needed secretaries, especially women, who could read and type English. Indians with strong language skills were hired by companies, banks, and, even more so as has already been noted, in the hospitality services. By this time, workers with both English and office skills were desperately needed in the country.

MINORITY TREATMENT

The treatment of minorities reveals a tremendous amount about the hegemonic civilization or culture of a country, and the treatment of the Bene Israel by the religious authorities in India varied greatly from the treatment they received in Israel. In India, into the modern period, the Bene Israel went unmolested and perhaps even unnoticed by the host Hindu and Muslim majorities. In India, there were a multitude of minorities and the Jews were only one of many and certainly not one of the larger or more problematic ones. Hindu norms permitted the presence of minorities without negative religious implications. In fact, in many ways being a non-Hindu may have even helped the Bene Israel. Until the modern period, the diverse religious make up of India saw internal religious strife between coreligionists as a much more contentious issue than interreligious strife. Hinduism was much more concerned with maintaining a strict social order amongst Hindus, and most religious reformers unsuccessfully rallied against that order. From Gautama Buddha in the ancient period to Gandhi in the modern period to many great reformers in between, we see a preoccupation with the socioeconomic divide between Hindus. This is especially true in regards to the low class Sudras and what in the modern period became known as the untouchables or *dalits*.

Reformers, much more concerned with their own religious challenges than with the minorities in their midst, have gone to great lengths to try to eradicate prejudice against lower class Hindus. The constitution of the Republic of India, written by the reformer Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and enacted in 1949, prohibits discrimination based on caste, stating, "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth … 'Untouchability' is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability rising out of 'Untouchability' shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law."[18] Ambedkar, a lower class Hindu himself, had gone to great lengths to combat the Hindu structure. He dedicated his life to the rights of the lower class Hindu to the point where he converted thousands to Buddhism, explaining to them that their dilemma was a Hindu dilemma and that if they could escape Hinduism they would escape their persecution. Unfortunately, law is often slow to counter cultural norms which are centuries old, and, to the present day, dis-

crimination based on gender and caste is very much alive in India, if perhaps, not on a state, official level.

Thus in India, being a Jew, Zoroastrian, a Buddhist, a Jain or any one of the many other small minorities did not bring with it many of the problems that were common to minorities in other places. The Hindus, and the Muslims after them, were much more concerned with their own internal religious struggles. As long as the Bene Israel kept their class distinction, they did not encounter difficulties from the host culture.

The Bene Israel adopted the pattern of the hegemonic cultures of India, which were too preoccupied with their own internal religious divisions to be overly concerned about minority cultures or religions. Traditionally in India, the Bene Israel seemed to have no real problem with any of the religions they lived amongst and, as noted, by the modern period, had strong personal and business relationships with all the surrounding religious communities. The Bene Israel did, however, have their own internal divisions. They had divided their own community between the Gora Bene Israel and the Kala Bene Israel, with the Kala being kept apart from the majority Gora Bene Israel (as discussed in chapter one, "The Modern Period").

But would it have been so difficult for the hegemonic cultures of India to have internal religious strife while also persecuting non-Hindu minorities? Persecution against the minorities could have been used (as it was in other parts of the world) to unite the majority, to tear down difference between Hindus. This could easily have been the rallying cry: despite our differences, we are all Hindu and, therefore, not Jewish, Buddhist, Jain, etc. Until the modern period though, as it is so often seen elsewhere, this phenomenon was rarely seen in India. This suggests that, in fact, the Hindus were happy to have diversity and minorities in their midst and were celebrating religious diversity from an early stage as long as all parties adhered to the strict social order.

In Israel we see almost the opposite attitude. The ingathering of exiles seems to have presented much larger social problems. The ethnic strife between diverse Jewish populations cemented a culture of antagonism, which is still evident. In Israel, however, there is also social, political, and military strife with non-Jews, along with religious strife within the diversity of Judaism. If while in India the Bene Israel lived well under Hindu hegemony but in Israel struggled against a religious authority, what does this suggest about the hegemonic religious culture of Israel? Certainly it can be understood as less tolerant

than the Hindu hegemonic religious culture of India. In Israel it seems that, again, despite legislation outlawing discrimination based on religious and ethnic differences, no one was able to escape forms of prejudice – not the ethnically different Jews, not the non-Jews, and not the religiously diverse Jews.

THE PREDICAMENT OF HOMECOMING

Among the Bene Israel community there is a feeling of gratitude towards Prime Minister Levi Eshkol for finally putting enough pressure on the rabbinical authority to change the marriage laws, and many in the Bene Israel community were deeply moved by his words from the podium of the Knesset. Many, however, still feel the sting of the years of nongovernment action. The Bene Israel waited for many years for their government to enter the struggle on their side and to resolve the issue – they were, after all, a peaceful community that had broken no laws. Because of the long inaction of the government or the empty promises that came from it, as exemplified by Ben Gurion on 2 July 1961, there was a certain feeling of mistrust for the government.

Could the Bene Israel, coming from India, have known that they may have had to face discriminatory attitudes? There would have been no way of knowing that Israel would have these types of attitudes, and certainly the rosy propaganda given to the Bene Israel by emissaries trying to get them to immigrate spoke of a land of equality. A closer look, however, at the Bene Israel understanding of the creation of the State of Israel, while they were in India, shows that in fact there was a voice which suspected these types of attitudes might be present in the new state. In chapter two, "Zionism comes to the Bene Israel," the community debated the idea of supporting the encouragement of immigration, and Dr Abraham Erulkar clearly suggests that the Zionist state would provide an excellent breeding ground for racial hatred based on colour prejudice and that the bond of religion would be a mockery. His brother, David Erulkar, cautioned that Western Jews were not free of colour prejudice, even towards their fellow Jews, and then noted specifically that the Bene Israel had been denied their rights as Jews in Baghdadi synagogues in India. The fact that these voices were documented suggests that this discourse was not only present but that it may have been more dominant than the records indicate. Thus we see some in the community clearly aware of attitudes they may have had to face upon moving to Israel, and it would have

come as no surprise that those attitudes, when voiced in Israel, emerged from the Iraqi community with pressure being applied by ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazim.

What was certainly a surprise, as made clear by Samson, was the support the Bene Israel received from the Israeli public. That so many people from across the spectrum showed up to the protest rally on 5 August 1964 came as a delightful surprise to the Bene Israel. This type of support helped to renew the community's feeling of being part and parcel of Israeli society. In dozens of interviews for this book complaints made about treatment were almost always directed at sections of the government apparatus and the religious authorities. The Bene Israel in every case felt and feel, and rightly so, that they are pure Israelis, and that sense of being part of the state came from the same places that non-Bene Israel members acquired it – military service, school, employment, and growing up in the country. Most Bene Israel, as most other Jewish communities in Israel, have intermarried with other Israelis, and this, too, adds to their feeling of being part Israel's greater social fabric. Thus, what emerges from the community can almost be understood as two distinct aspects of Israel. On the one hand, there was the government and religious authority by which many community members did and do not feel represented. On the other hand, was the Israeli public which community members did and do feel part of. They felt as much a part of the Israeli public as they had felt part of the Indian public when living in India. There is, therefore, a complex situation in which the Bene Israel are and feel as though they are Israeli and Jewish in every respect but also feel they have been slighted by their government and religious authority. Israel is a divided nation. The Bene Israel, although they have unique reasons for their feelings, are not alone in feeling a certain distain for Israel's religious authority and government.

Perhaps the ingathering of exiles presented overwhelming challenges to the new state, and perhaps a tiny ethnic minority simply slipped through the cracks and was able to be targeted while the country struggled to survive. On the other hand, perhaps there is a real intolerance of the "other," common to all the Abrahamic faiths. While it has already been noted there are only two religions which maintain that the only way to salvation is through them, Islam and Christianity, and that Judaism does not subscribe to the idea that non-Jews cannot find their own salvation (nor does Buddhism, Sikhism, Shinto, or Hinduism), certainly Judaism, or at least Rabbinic Judaism,

is exclusive and does not encourage the "other" to become a Jew. This suggests certain attitudes towards the "other." Historically this had much to do with the fact that Jews were living within Christian and Muslim dominant cultures where proselyting to the followers of either of those faiths would have had severe repercussions. While the biblical kingdom of Israel stood, there was a certain amount of proselyting done along the Mediterranean basin. But Christianity and Islam, by their own admission, gained a lot from the Jews. Christianity adopted the Jewish bible, and Islam, while having its own revealed scriptures, certainly admits to being what it deems a more perfect revelation of what it perceives as the out-of-date revelation of the Jews. Perhaps they adopted more. Perhaps they adopted a type of intolerance from the Jews.

Many will claim that the tiny Bene Israel community can be disregarded as inconsequential and that an argument about intolerance, based on the situation they faced in Israel, is to overstate the situation. The religious authorities, however, in this case, were not able to get away with the type of prejudice that they sought to enforce. The people of Israel, frightened that if the religious authorities were able to get away with their treatment of the Bene Israel they might just as easily turn on other communities and legislate anti-Jewish laws against them as well, legitimately felt that the problem faced by the Bene Israel was everyone's problem. In this case, we see that popular support and the apparatus of a secular government were able to stop this from happening. Thus, a struggle between a Jewish state or a state for Jews, something with which Israel is still wrestling, saw secular forces unite the people against a relatively intolerant religious hegemon. But throughout Israel's history the question of Jewish authenticity would emerge again and again. For example, the Ethiopian and Russian communities faced discrimination similar to that faced by the Bene Israel. In 1964, the secular government was strong enough to force their opinion on the religious authority. Perhaps in the future it will not be as strong.

FORMS OF PROTEST

It may have been due to a certain distain for the government or simply because they had lived through the Indian independence *satyagraha* movement but the style of protest that the Bene Israel used was distinctly Indian or distinctly non-Israeli. In Israel there are a number

of ways to protest a situation and to bring an issue to the attention of the government. Theoretically, even if the religious authorities had issued a ruling there would still have been the right to appeal that ruling through twenty-three magisterial courts, six municipal courts, five district courts, and, ultimately, the chance to have the issue brought before the Supreme Court. This structure, borrowed primarily from British Common Law, was the foundation upon which Israel's legal system stood. The courts and the press were supposed to ensure the growth of civil rights. Although this was the theory, the reality was that the rabbinical courts had extensive authority over matters of personal status.

Yet, the coalition government system in Israel should have forced the government to take action much sooner than it did. In 1959, twenty-six parties ran for seats in the Knesset. The working class membership was spread across the board, which meant that politicians hoping to gain a large base of support from across the Israeli spectrum in order to get reelected should have taken note of what was going on and advocated for the Bene Israel sooner. But again, this was purely theoretical. The reality was that the larger parties, most notably Ben Gurion's ruling Mapai party, were able to exert influence on the smaller parties and often dictated what those parties were able and unable to do. If, when a coalition was needed, the smaller parties refused to adhere to the Mapai's platform, Mapai would simply threaten to not include the small party in the coalition by gaining the support of one of the many other small parties also looking to have a part in the Knesset. If his demands were not met, Ben Gurion is quoted as saying that he simply went to another party to form a coalition. Thus, even if the smaller parties in the government wanted to officially come to the aid of the Bene Israel it was not necessarily possible. Knesset members were forced to look for guidance from their central committee, and failure to do so would mean immediate eviction from the party roster in the next election.

If the Bene Israel had appealed to the government directly, Israel's bureaucratic red tape, which was and is still a nightmare, would have brought their appeal to a halt. The Israeli civil service was born in the chaos of British departure and Arab invasion, and it never fully recovered. The availability of trained personnel for civil service was rapidly exhausted, leaving the bureaucracy of the nation to people largely incapable or, at the very least, incredibly inefficient at getting anything brought to the attention of the people in government who were

able to accomplish change. Only the smallest minority of new immigrants to the country had acquired public training in their countries of origin, and fewer yet had received higher academic education. There were also difficult physical challenges limiting government services. In the early years of the state, two thirds of the ministries were located in ancient, ramshackle buildings or barracks, and office accommodations were constricted.

Thus, the way to bring issues to the attention of the government was not through the official channels created by the state, which only worked theoretically, but by causing as loud and aggressive a scene as possible, something which was foreign to the Indians. An example (if somewhat extreme but good for proving the point) of this type of protest could be found in Menachem Begin's opposition to Ben Gurion's acceptance of reparation money from the German government. In 1952, the Knesset was summoned to approve large-scale negotiations with the Germans, and there was, understandably, considerable debate about these negotiations. Menachem Begin felt that German money was blood money, and in protest he spoke against taking money from the Germans before a group of 15,000 in Jerusalem's Zion Square. In anticipation of disorder, the Knesset surrounded the parliament building with barbed wire, and 500 police were placed in front of the barbed wire to deal with any acts of violence. This proved to be an inadequate number of police. Lines of demonstrators began marching around the Knesset, forcing their way through the police cordon, setting fire to automobiles, and hurling rocks at the building. Inside, Begin launched into a verbal attack on Ben Gurion referring to him as a fascist and hooligan. The crowd outside surged forward, and the army was called in to restore order.

The Bene Israel, on the other hand, used an Indian or Gandhian style of protest – one that seemed alien for the Israeli environment yet was clearly effective. Even before the issue of religious equality erupted, throughout the 1950s the Bene Israel had been actively protesting to improve their situation. By 1952 the community was already engaged in peaceful sit-ins on their kibbutzim and in front of the Jewish agency's offices. On 21 November 1951, 150 members of the community engaged in a hunger strike and in March 1952 did the same thing to demand repatriation to India. These types of protests reoccurred in 1954 when the Bene Israel hoped to encourage the government to address their concerns about repatriation, housing, education, and employment, and, despite the peaceful nature of their

protests, they were met with violence from the state. By 1956 the police responded to these protests by battering the crowd.

Despite being met with violence, the strike continued, as did these types of protests even though the community was quite intimidated and frightened. When the struggle for religious equality under the leadership of the Action Committee began, nonviolent protests were the course that was taken, but the Action Committee was slow to use hunger strikes as a form of protest, perhaps frightened that those would lead to a violent confrontation with the police just as they had in 1956. In fact, the Action Committee only began to organize full-blown public protests, rallies, and marches after the community split and other factions within it began to organize the same style of hunger strike sit-ins. When Samson Samson was brought in to discuss the issue with the government in 1964, they wanted him to stop a hunger strike that he hadn't started. This was indicative of both the government's lack of options when dealing with peaceful protests in Israel and of how effective peaceful Gandhian style protests could be.

What is also telling about the Bene Israel protests and the Israeli response is the interaction Samson had with the police before he staged his official protest march in August 1964. The police had him brought into the station and told him not to bring children to the protest, insinuating that there would be violence that the children should not be subjected to (as they had been in 1956). When Samson refused to be intimidated by the police and made it quite clear that children would be present, again, the police seemed at a loss for how to respond. In the end, the peaceful protest of August 1964 was completely free of violence, with all the protesters even singing *hatikvah* at the end. This protest was the straw that broke the camel's back, and, shortly afterward, Prime Minster Eshkol called an emergency session of the Knesset and pressure was put on the chief Sephardic rabbi to remove the Bene Israel marriage obstacles. When that was achieved, the Bene Israel were victorious, having triumphed over one of the most powerful institutions in Israel, that of the religious authorities, through completely peaceful means. At no time did the Bene Israel resort to violence, call for violence, or even suggest it amongst themselves.

It should never be inferred that Samson was a Gandhi figure or that he sought to emulate Gandhi. Although, while on his honeymoon in India many years before, he met Gandhi very briefly, Samson did not

look to him as some type of hero and never sought to emulate him. When discussing this issue with others, some have been quick to assert a type of Gandhian attribute to Samson, which is false. The Bene Israel community was, however, greatly influenced by the India they emerged from, and that India was involved in a deeply nonviolent struggle for freedom from the British. As discussed in chapter five "Arrival," many years of this type of protest in India, coupled with the natural Indian disposition not to be overly loud and disruptive, inspired a type of protest that the community felt comfortable with, one that was ultimately the antithesis of normal Israeli behaviour, and which was an approach that succeeded in gaining the Bene Israel wide public support and eventually full religious rights in the state.

NOTIONS OF WHY THE BENE ISRAEL LEFT INDIA

While discussing this work recently I was asked why the Bene Israel left India for Israel. I tried to explain that the answer was complex but was pushed for a single definitive reason. Unfortunately there is no single reason, and to maintain that there is would be to misrepresent a diverse community living throughout India. The reality is that people left India for many reasons. Some elected to leave, but many others – wives and children – had the decision made for them. To summarize, however, the push and pull factors that influenced the migration included Zionism, relationships with the British, and uncertainty surrounding the independence and partition of India.

As a nationalist movement, Zionism was a very powerful force, and as the Bene Israel self-identified as Jews, Zionism had a tremendous impact on the community. Many understood Zionism as both a moral force and a form of religious identity. Many Bene Israel were observant religious Jews living in a country where piety was, and remains, a powerful force. India is a nation that gave birth to many of the great religions of the world including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Religious communities abound, and religious identity is central to one's understanding of the world. For the observant Jew, Zionism was not necessarily understood as a secular idea but as a liberal, modern, religious idea. It is important to understand that the hegemonic culture of Hinduism in India accepts many forms of religious expression (as discussed in the introduction). Therefore the Bene Israel, as a product of the Indian environment, would have

understood Zionism as a modern, liberal expression of a religious identity and would have, largely, understood the idea of Israel as that of a liberal modern society where pluralism is accepted. Through visits by emissaries and the propaganda of the Indian Zionist Associations, Zionism was seen by many as a powerful, exciting, opportunity to reunite with the Jewish nation. Gandhi had couched his Indian nationalism on moral grounds as the fight of light against darkness; Zionism, too, was viewed as a moral force. After encounters with European refugees bringing news of the Holocaust in Europe and coupled with what little news they received about it in the newspapers, the creation of a Jewish state took on elements of a fight between good and evil. Therefore, the impact that Zionism had on the community cannot be underestimated, despite the debate about dual loyalty and a great love of India. Many of those who immigrated did so out of love and dedication to the dream of Israel.

Their relationship with the British was another factor that played a powerful role in the decision to leave India for Israel. The Bene Israel had done well under the British and depended on them for employment in the civil service and the military and for their status as a preferred minority. Many of the positions the community members held were a result of British mistrust of the Hindus and Muslims after 1857. Through their relationship with the British they had become exposed to Western ideologies and standards and had experienced a Jewish revival and economic prosperity. Before the British arrived in India, the Bene Israel lived primarily in villages in a traditional setting and style. Under British rule, many of them moved to the cities and enjoyed a lifestyle that would not have been easy to give up. If the British were leaving India, the safety net enjoyed by the Bene Israel would be gone, leaving the tiny minority in a precarious situation in India. While they were not necessarily concerned about persecution, they would have been very concerned about losing their jobs, status, and lifestyle under a new regime. Would they be able to keep their civil administration jobs? Would they still be employed as engineers on India's railway?

As well, the Bene Israel's exposure to Western ideas and standards meant they believed, to some extent, in British superiority due to that nation's control of a vast empire. After the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre in 1919, the British may not have been seen as a moral authority, but they were still viewed as a powerful empire that could main-

tain order. It was not clear that India would be able to maintain the same order, especially as partition drew near and violence erupted between Hindus and Muslims throughout the country. The partition of India came nine months before the partition of British Mandate Palestine, and just as Israel was born into chaos and bloodshed, so too were India and Pakistan. The partition of India involved one of the largest and bloodiest migrations in human history. An estimated ten to twelve million people left their homes and migrated to the newly formed countries, resulting in the deaths of approximately one to two million people during the transition. Muslims left what was to become India and moved to Pakistan, and Hindus left what was to become Pakistan and moved to India. Thus, when India finally became a sovereign nation in 1947 it was born into great violence, and it was not known if the violence would cease.

The importance of the relationship between the Bene Israel and the British, fostered over several hundred years, cannot be underestimated when trying to understand the emigration of the Bene Israel, nor can that of the violence that accompanied independence and partition. That violence shocked the world, and for the tiny Jewish minority in India, even if they were not living in the Punjab, it would have been unsettling. If members of the Bene Israel community had not considered leaving the country before partition, the violence brought forth in its wake would certainly have raised the notion of migration in their minds. This does not mean that the entire community became frightened and fled. Many Bene Israel did not leave for Israel in 1948, some left years later, and some members never left India at all. But the violence reflected the potential instability that the new India faced. Certainly almost all the Bene Israel living in what became Pakistan left for India and many later moved on to Israel, the United States, or Canada.

Not all the Bene Israel left India and immigrated to Israel. Many stayed on, contributing in many ways to the new India. Nissim Ezekial was one of the most notable members of the community who stayed behind. He has been hailed as the father of modern Indian English poetry and eulogized as a trendsetter who not only gave direction to poetry but also taught others how to write poetry in English. He was awarded the central Sahitya Akademi Award for his book of verse and had the Padma Shri Award (one of the highest awards a civilian can be given from the government of India) conferred on him

in 1988. Born in 1924, his father was a professor and his mother a teacher and founder of the Marathi Language Primary School. He attended Catholic School in Bombay and then went on to Wilson College. After graduating from college, he spent three years in England, but he had a difficult time supporting himself there. With poetry and poverty as his constant companions, he ended up working as a dishwasher. Upon his return to India, he began writing, and his work was met with acclaim. In 1972, he became a professor of English literature at Bombay University where he worked until his retirement in 1982. He wrote nine books of poetry, as well as a number of plays and many essays. Nonetheless, he was not the only Bene Israel to be awarded high honours by the Indian government.

Dr Jerusha Jhirad was the first Indian woman to be awarded a scholarship by the government of India. Her scholarship was to study medicine and qualify as medical doctor in London. Serving as the medical officer (from 1927–48) in charge of Cama and Albless Hospitals in Bombay, she was instrumental in the development of medical education in India. She was also the founder of the Obstetrics and Gynaecological Society in India. In 1966, she was awarded the Padma Shri Award for her contribution to the development of medical science in India.

Rebecca Reuben Navgaonkar was the first woman to top the Bombay matriculation exam in 1905. From 1922–50, she served as the principal of the Israelite School (later renamed the Elie Kadourie School). She served on several government education boards and was appointed justice of the peace in 1947 and honourable magistrate in 1953.

Dr Segula (Rosy) Aptekar became an MD in 1935 and, in the 1950s, an honorary fellow of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. She moved to Israel in the 1970s where she worked at Poriya Hospital in Tiberius from 1970–72. From there she went on to work at Holy Family Hospital in Nazareth until her retirement in 1983.

Dr Esther Abraham Kasukar, a distinguished Sanskrit scholar, was awarded the Padma Shri Award in 1992. Other women of note (from the community) awarded prestigious honours include Ruth Joseph Abraham and Sophie David Moses, both of whom worked as schoolteachers at the Saint Agnes Covenant High School and were awarded the Pope's Gold Medal for Excellence in Teaching during the Pope's visit to India in the early 1950s.

The fact that these Bene Israel, along with many others, did very well in postcolonial Indian is indicative of the fact that the community was not in danger and that those who went to Israel chose to do so of their own accord and for a multitude of reasons.

THE BENE ISRAEL IN ISRAEL TODAY

If this study has portrayed the experience of the Bene Israel merely as an endless struggle, then it has failed to articulate the full experience of the community and its relationship with Israel. The reality is that the Bene Israel have joined in marriage with almost every community in Israel, become part of almost every industry, and established fifty-four synagogues for their community across the country.[19] Community members live in almost every locale and have become as Israeli as any other group in the country. After living for several generations in Israel, the identity of the third generation of Israeli Bene Israel has little to do with India. While interviewing many community members who had relocated from India to Israel, I had the great fortune to meet some of their grandchildren, third generation Bene Israel under the age of ten.

On asking these children what they knew of India, I discovered that most knew very little beyond the fact that their grandparents (often only one set) came from there. To them, India is a distant land. I learned that India was rarely discussed in their homes. Why would it be? Their parents were either born in Israel or had been there for decades, and these children attended Israeli schools and led active lives with their own circles of friends. The interviewees often acknowledged that they had not spoken of their lives in India for many years.

Some homes, such as that of Abraham Asher Raymond, had three generations present at the time of the interview. His grandchildren were very young and would not even have understood what we were talking about, but Asher's son, who was in his mid thirties, listened to the interview and was surprised by some of his father's answers. For example, he was unaware that his father had wrapped *tefillin* as a child in India. That the Israeli-born son, despite clearly being close to his father, was unaware of much of his father's existence in India indicates how successfully integrated the Bene Israel have become in a thriving Israel that has engaged the community fully. Nevertheless, the homes

of almost all the Bene Israel have some Indian art on the wall, and when I was offered a meal, it was almost always Indian food. Although India may not be discussed frequently, many cultural remnants are present.

If the Bene Israel have indeed been fully and completely incorporated into the state, their story becomes the story of Israel and its struggle to absorb diversity on a scale rarely seen in the modern period. While their experience has included strife and struggle, the struggles they experienced reflect the struggles of Israel to create a modern state based on an ancient nation long dispersed across the globe.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 Recently, a fourth community, the Bene Menashe, have been added to this list. Since they did not become known to the Jewish Agency or Israel until the twentieth century, and, therefore were not part of the mosaic that made up the early State of Israel, they have been omitted from this study. This is not to say that these Jews are any less significant to the study of India's Jewish heritage but only that they fall outside of the time parameters of this study.

2 Nissim Moses, "Bene Israel Genealogy Program," (private archives of Nissim Moses, Petah Tikva, Israel, 2009).

3 Isenberg, "Collating data," 57.

4 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 49.

5 Kehimkar, *History*, 14.

6 I use the term "to this day" as during my months in India all the Jews I spoke with had nothing but good things to say about their Hindu neighbors and friends, and there is no history of animosity between the Hindu and Jewish people.

7 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 13.

8 Ibid. 6.

9 Samuel, *Origin and Early History*, 108. Quoted in Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 8.

10 Israel, *Bene Israel of India*, 15.

11 Ibid.

12 Parfitt, "Descended," 9–19.

13 Ibid. Parfitt notes that, specifically among the Cohanim, it was found that more than 50 per cent of the sample had one specific haplotype [the specif-

ic set of markers in each cell that are passed on from sperm to sperm, which became known as the Cohen Modal Haplotype]. The Cohen Modal Haplotype is, then, that combination of genetic markers on the Y chromosome in the sperm of Cohanim that distinguishes them from other sperm producers.

14 Kehimkar, *History*, 37.
15 Ibid., 40.
16 Nissim Moses, interview by author, Petah Tikva, Israel, 23 June 2008.
17 Kehimkar, *History*, 41.
18 Israel, *Jews of India*, 41.
19 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 45.
20 Ibid., 40.
21 Ibid., 43.
22 From "a letter of 1768" written by Rav Ezekial Rahabi in Cochin, addressed to Tuvia Boaz in the Hague. This letter was published and discussed in Hebrew in the 1790 issue of *Ha-Me'asef*, section for the Hebrew months of Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, called "3rd period," 257–76. This quotation about the Bene Israel appears on page 262. Quoted in Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 44.
23 Strizower, *Bene Israel of Bombay*, 36. Quoted in Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 44.
24 Israel, *Jews of India*, 27.
25 Blady, *Exotic Places* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000), 221.
26 Michaels, *Past and Present*, 4.
27 Ibid., 5.
28 Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 7.
29 Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, 8, 15.
30 Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 7.
31 Ibid.
32 Sen, *Hinduism*, 28.
33 Ibid., 13–37.
34 Sadu Baba, interviewed by author, Varanasi, India, 13 May 2008.
35 Fowler, *Beliefs and Practices*, 23.
36 Strizower, *Bene Israel of Bombay*, 21.
37 Strizower, who devotes an entire section of her book to this discussion, notes that J.H. Hutton, author of *Caste in India*, wrote, "The caste system has afforded a place in society into which any community, be it racial, social, occupational or religious, can be fitted as a cooperating part of the social whole, while retaining its own distinctive character and its separate individual life."
38 Ben Tzvi Archives, File 3161, an official government of India form dated 13 March 1983, which specifically says, "Jew Caste."

39 Attwood, *Society in Maharashtra*, 3.
40 Ibid., 4.
41 Lederle, *Modern Maharashtra*, 11.
42 Kulkarni, *Society and Culture*, 319.
43 Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, 187.
44 Roland, *British India*, 16.
45 Silliman, *Jewish Portraits*, 3.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.

CHAPTER ONE

1 Ray, *Journey Through the Ages*, 49
2 Fischer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 160.
3 Ray, *Journey Through the Ages*, 51.
4 Fischer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 205.
5 Chandra, *Struggle*, 28.
6 Ibid., 30.
7 Nath, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, 43.
8 Chandra, *Struggle*, 32.
9 Ibid., 33.
10 Pati, *1857 Rebellion*, 7.
11 Ibid.
12 Chandra, *Struggle*, 35.
13 Pati, *1857*, 7.
14 Ibid., 313.
15 Ibid., 344.
16 Roland, *British India*, 24.
17 Ibid., 26.
18 Ibid., 22.
19 Those who achieved elevated positions include Samuel and Isaac Ezekial Divekar, who enlisted in 1760 and became Subedar Commandants in the 13th Battalion. Solomon Hassaji Divekar attained the rank of Subedar in the 6th battalion in 1775 and subsequently that of Native Commandant. Elijah Divekar attained the rank of Subedar in 1781, as did Essoobjee Jhiratkar and Bappuji Warghartkar. Hassan Dawoodjee Divekar became a Subedar Major in 1795, and Bhowjee Tulkar of the Bombay Native Infantry became a Subedar in 1808 and a Subedar Major sometime afterwards. Samuel Ezekial Khurrilkar was appointed Subedar in May 1802 and Daniel Khurrilkar in December 1827. Others who attained the rank of Subedar

Major were Sirdar Bahadur Moosajee Ballajee Oomerdekar sometime after 1829, Sirdar Bahadur Waskar in 1837, Bahadur Samajee Bapujee Bhorupkar in 1839, and Sirdar Bahadur Solomaon Ballajee Jahiratkar in 1856. Solomon Daniel Ghosalkar attained a first class star of the Order of British India as well as the rank of Subedar Major for his role during the Revolt of 1857. Tannajee Abraham Gadkar achieved the rank of Subedar in 1858. Haskel Bapujee Malekar attained the rank of Subedar Major in 1861 and won a first class of the Order of British India in 1868. Reuben Ezekial Mhussilkar attained the rank of Subedar in 1870, and Ellojee Aaron Penkar did as well in 1871. Solomon Elijah Wakrulkar was raised to the rank of Subedar Major in 1872, and Shalom Moses Penkar attained the same in 1878. This list represents only a fraction of the high appointments attained by the Bene Israel community, and it is added here to underline how immersed and loyal the community was to the British, both at the time of the revolt and afterwards. For a more comprehensive list of all the Bene Israel officers who served under the British, see Samuel H.S. Kehimkar, *A History of the Bene Israel* (Tel Aviv: Dayag Press, 1937) in which an entire chapter is dedicated to the detailing of the Bene Israel military service. All references above are taken from this chapter. Many more were not included.

20 Ibid., 32.

21 Read, *Proudest Day*, 38.

22 Ibid.

23 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 65.

24 Strizower, *Bene Israel of Bombay*, 17.

25 Nissim Moses, interview by author, Petah Tikva, Israel, 23 June 2008.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 77.

29 Roland, *British India*, 35.

30 Kehimkar, *History*, 66.

31 Ibid., 67.

32 Isenberg, *India's Bene Israel*, 60.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 59.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 He was the son of a fruit merchant, born 10 October 1860 in London in St Mary Axe, then a predominantly Jewish quarter, but soon moved to the Orthodox quarter in Finsbury Square. A few years later, now with nine chil-

dren, the family moved again, this time to an area where Orthodox and more secular Jews could interact freely with non-Jews.

Rufus Isaacs went on to become one of the most decorated Jews in British history, holding the titles of Marquess of Reading, Earl of Reading, Viscount Erleigh, Viscount Reading, Baron Reading, Privy Councilor, Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, Knights Grand Commander of the Star of India, Knights Grand Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Viceroy and Governor General of India, High Commissioner and Special Ambassador to the United States of America, Lord Chief Justice of England, Attorney General, Solicitor General, and Member of Parliament. The fact that he was a Jewish Viceroy was not lost on the Bene Israel. In fact, Ran Raviv, a Bene Israel who currently lives in Ness Tsiyona but was born in India, was named Rufus Isaac after the viceroy and changed his name only upon moving to Israel.

38 Read, *Proudest Day*, 128.
39 Numerous Bene Israel, interviews by author, Israel, June–August 2008.
40 Hertzberg, *Zionist Idea*, 43.
41 Ibid., 47.
42 Ibid., 16.
43 Ibid., 17.
44 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 42.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Roland, *British India*, 80.
48 Ibid.
49 Kehimkar, *History*, 225
50 Roland, *British India*, 80.
51 Zionism and Immanuel Olsvanger are discussed in the chapter, "Zionism Comes to the Bene Israel."
52 Brick, *Gandhi and the Middle East*, 34.
53 Ibid.
54 Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews*, 4.
55 Ibid., 5.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 6.
58 Ibid., 35.
59 Ibid., 34.
60 Read, *Proudest Day*, 16.
61 Ibid.

62 Chandra, *Struggle*, 14.
63 Ibid., 16.
64 Fischer, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 219.
65 Gandhi, *Gandhi the Man*, 577.
66 Ibid.
67 Fischer, *Mahatma Gandhi,* 7.
68 Ibid.
69 Brown, *Israeli-American Connection*, 200.
70 Katz, *Who Are the Jews of India*, 33.
71 Israel, *Jews of India*, 36.
72 McCrindle, *Ancient India*, 82.
73 Sachau, *Alburuni's India*, 17–26.
74 Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, 301–2.
75 Ibid., 314.
76 English translation of Dionysius as quoted in Majumdar, *Classical Accounts of India*, 424.
77 Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 149.
78 As quoted in Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism*, 111.
79 Said, *Conceptions of the Orient,* 162.
80 Chaterjee, *Representations of India*, 9.
81 Ibid., 88.
82 Ibid., 146.
83 Adiswarananda, *Vivekananda,* 1.
84 The Vedanta system is a reference to Hindu philosophy. The Advedavedanta philosophy is found at the end of the Hindu holy scripture the Upanisads. When used in this context, however, it refers to all Hindu philosophy.
85 Adiswarananda, *Vivekananda,* 189.
86 Chaterjee, *Representations of India*, 164.
87 Said, interview "On Orientalism," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4cnvt8_OHU&feature=endscreen&NR=1.
88 Mushleah, *On the Banks of the Ganga*, 47.
89 Brook and Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes*, 3.
90 Roland, *British India*, 65.
91 Ibid., 66
92 Nissim, *Bnei Yisrael*, 90.
93 Ibid.
94 Letter from Gaster to Benjamin Sargon, 12 May 1936, quoted in Joan Roland, *British India*, 76.
95 Nissim, *Bnei Yisrael*, 91.
96 Roland, *British India*, 73.

97 Mukherjee, *India After Independence*, 10.
98 Ibid., 11.
99 Brown, *Modern India*, 124.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 110.
102 Bumiller, *May You Be*, 10.
103 Ibid., 11.
104 Ibid., 20.
105 Mazal Ellis, interview by author, Petah Tikva, June 2008. Also, Nissim Moses, interview by author, Petah Tikvah, July 2008.

CHAPTER TWO

1 *On Hindu–Zionist Relations*, memorandum to the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, 8 April 1947, Central Zionist Archives, File S25/9029.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Wigoder, *New Encyclopedia*, 860.
5 Member of the Bene Israel (name withheld by request), interview by author, Petah Tikvah, Israel, 9 June 2008.
6 Roland, *British India*, 192.
7 Members of the Bene Israel community, interviews by author, Israel, June-August 2008. Interviewees included Nissim Moses and Samson, J. Samson.
8 Roland, *British India*, 141.
9 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6001.
10 Roland, *British India*, 231.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 232.
13 Olsvanger's diary, Central Zionist Archives, File S25/3583.
14 Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews*, 12.
15 Zakaria, *Study of Nehru*, 102.
16 Ibid., 106.
17 Ibid., 191.
18 Olsvanger's diary, Central Zionist Archives, File S25/3583.
19 Stillman, *Arab Lands*, 210.
20 Central Zionist Archives, File S25/3583.
21 Roland, *British India*, 56.
22 Ibid., 82.
23 Ibid., 147.
24 Ibid., 148.

25 Ibid.
26 Central Zionist Archives, File S5/10609.
27 Roland, *British India*, 152.
28 Ibid.
29 Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country*, 58.
30 Ibid.
31 Kimche, *The Secret Roads*, 61.
32 Roland, *British India*, 140.
33 Central Zionist Archives, File S5/10609.
34 Jacobsohn, "Hindu Nationalism," 35.
35 Central Zionist Archives, File S5/10609.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6391.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15.
43 Ibid., 16.
44 Roland, *British India*, 141.
45 Bhatti, *Jewish Exile*, 29.
46 Ibid.
47 Stillman, *Arab Lands*, 367.
48 Bhatti, *Jewish Exile*, 29.
49 Ibid., 36.
50 Israel, *Bene Israel of India*, 49.
51 Bhatti, *Jewish Exile*, 42.
52 Kumar, "India and Israel," 86.
53 Gussin, "The Bene Israel," 106.
54 Central Zionist Archives, File S5/10607.
55 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6147.
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57 Member of the Bene Israel community (name withheld by request), interview by author, Ramat Aviv, Israel, 10 June 2008.

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1 1 Rabinovich and Reinharz, *Israel*, quoted Giora Josepthal, "23rd Zionist Congress, August 1951," 48.
2 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 395.

3 Labour Party Archives, File 386098
4 Stock, *Chosen Instrument*, 75.
5 Ibid.
6 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 396.
7 Hacohen, *Turmoil*, 134.
8 Multiple Bene Israel members, interviews by author, Israel, June–Aug 2008.
9 Stock, *Chosen Instrument*, 84.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Hacohen, *Turmoil*, 130.
13 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 411.
14 Segev, *1949*, 119.
15 Stock, *Chosen Instrument*, 91.
16 Segev, *1949*, 124.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Hacohen, *Turmoil*, 137.
20 Ibid, 143.
21 Rozen, "Food Identity," 36
22 Stock, *Chosen Instrument*, 91.
23 Sachar, *Ends of the Earth*, 404.
24 Ibid.
25 Stock, *Chosen Instrument*, 97.
26 Shabi, *Like the Enemy*, 47.
27 Shama and Iris, *Immigration*, 79.
28 Sachar, *Ends of the Earth*, 78.
29 Stock, *Chosen Instrument*, 98.
30 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 406.
31 Ibid., 407.
32 Ibid.
33 Rozen, "Food Identity," 38.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Segev, *1949*, 173.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 156.
39 Ibid., 157.
40 Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 2.
41 *Ha'aretz*, 22 April 1949, as quoted in Chetrit, *Conflict*, 33.
42 Friedman, *Ha'aretz*, 8 September 1948, as quoted in Chetrit, *Conflict*, 34.

43 Horowitz, *Brief History*, 169, as quoted in Chetrit, *Conflict*, 35.
44 Shabi, *Like the Enemy*, 49.
45 Swirski, *Oriental Majority*, 9.
46 Ibid., 11.
47 Ibid., 12.
48 Lustick, *Arabs*, 91.
49 Historians differ on this point with some alleging the Arabs were forcibly removed while others allege they left of their own accord, and some maintain that both processes were at work.
50 Teveth, *Ben-Gurion*, 43.
51 Ibid., 179.
52 Lustick, *Arabs*, 52.
53 Ibid., 123.
54 Teveth, *Ben-Gurion*, 484.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 147.
57 Ibid.
58 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 326.
59 Rekhess, "Policy Guidelines," 105.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 107.
62 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 354.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Olshan, *Zikhronot*, as quoted in Rabinovich and Reinharz, *Israel*, 50.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 51.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 379.
71 Ibid., 382.
72 Birnbaum, *Compromise*, 181.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 183.
76 Ibid.
77 Sachar, *History of Israel*, 605.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

1 Roland, *British India*, 246.
2 While it was officially stopped, according to Israel's Bureau of Statistics a very small number continued to immigrate.
3 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6150.
4 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6147.
5 Roland, *British India*, 248.
6 Wolins and Gottesman, *Group Care*, 44.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Central Zionist Archives, File S32/1293.
10 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6392.
11 http://hotel.lavi.co.il/HOTEL//2/84/755.aspx.
12 Central Zionist Archives, File S25/10607.
13 Hacohen, *Turmoil*, 140.
14 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6392.
15 Singh, *Being Indian, Being Israeli*, 108.
16 Ibid., 109.
17 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6392.
18 Picard, "Soft Religiosity," 18.
19 Wolins and Gottesman, *Group Care*, 29.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 34.
22 Pincus, *Youth Aliyah*, 322.
23 Ibid., 319.
24 Ibid., 322.
25 Central Zionist Archives, File S4/2227.
26 Bene Israel community members, interviews by author, Israel June–August 2008. Responded to the question, "What difficulties, if any did you encounter upon arrival?"
27 Singh, *Being Indian, Being Israeli*, 110.
28 Central Zionist Archives, File S4/2227.
29 Ibid.
30 Malka, "The Selection," as quoted in Chetrit, *Conflict*, 37.
31 Ibid.
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33 Singh, *Being Indian, Being Israeli*, 12.
34 Sara and Sophie Benjamin, interviews with author, Lod, Israel, 6 June 2008.

35 Member of the Bene Israel (name withheld by request), interview by author, Ramle, Israel, 7 July 2008.
36 Asher Raymond, interview by author, Ashdod, Israel 19 June 2008.
37 Shama and Iris, *Immigration*, 54.
38 Bene Israel community members, interviews by author, Israel, June–August 2008. Many interviewees discussed the problems associated with being labelled Sephardim. These included, Nissim Moses, Mazal Ellis, and Isaac Uptaker.
39 Horowitz, "The Paradox," 127.
40 Weil, "Indian Jews in Lod," 143.
41 David Reuben, interview by author, Lod, Israel, 19 July 2008.
42 Daniels and Johnson, *Ruby of Cochin*, 105.
43 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6149
44 Goldscheider, *Changing Society*, 133
45 Ibid.
46 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6149
47 Weil, "Indian Jews in Lod," 127.
48 Ibid., 137.
49 Ibid.
50 The Falk Project for Economic Research in Israel (1959/1960).
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52 Swirksi, *Oriental Majority*, 25.
53 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6149
54 "The Federation of Indian Jews in Israel" (personal archives of Samson J. Samson, Jerusalem, Israel).
55 Central Zionist Archives, File S4/2227
56 Ibid.
57 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6147.
58 Central Zionist Archives, File S4/2227.
59 Daniels and Johnson, *Ruby of Cochin*, 96.
60 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6391.
61 Weil, "Indian Jews in Lod," 70.
62 Central Zionist Archives, File S4/2227.
63 Ibid.
64 Weil, "Indian Jews in Lod," 70.
65 Roland, *British India*, 248.
66 Weil, "Indian Jews in Lod," 70.
67 Ibid.
68 Central Zionist Archives, File S6/6327.
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73 Ibid.
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75 Weil, "Indian Jews in Lod," 85.

CHAPTER FIVE

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2 Israel, *Bene Israel of India*, 88.
3 Nissim, *Bnei Yisrael.*
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
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13 Patel, *Encyclopedia of Zionism*, 840.
14 Ibid.
15 Shohat, *Taboo*, 334.
16 Asher Kollette, "Report to The Bene Israel Action Committee" (private archives of Samson J. Samson, Jerusalem, Israel).
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34 Ibid.
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40 Ibid.
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49 Ibid.
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51 Ibid.
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98 Ibid.
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CONCLUSION

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