

view, comprise the rational principle that stands behind all movement. In both of these theories, the human soul frequently was pictured as the body's ruler, the source of perception and the principle of life. And yet, following the Talmudic picture and comprehending the soul as immortal and perfect, derived from God and destined to survive the death of the body, the medieval Jewish thinkers also understood the soul to be a stranger on earth, longing to return to its place of divine origin.

Following a mixture of Platonic and Aristotelian thought, Saadiah Gaon (882-942) understood the soul to be created by God from nothing at the moment of the completion of the body. Body and soul formed an inseparable unit during life and, again, in the coming world. The soul provided the body with the faculties of reason and sensation, even as the body, through its moral acts, allowed the immaterial substance of the soul to fulfill its purpose. Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021-1058) and others who followed Plato generally viewed the soul as a distinct entity that was joined to the body. Others, for instance, Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180), who followed Aristotle, argued that the soul was an aspect of the body and not separable from it. This view stands in contrast to the earlier Talmudic perspective.

In keeping with the earlier Rabbinic view, medieval Jewish philosophers in general rejected belief in the transmigration of souls, a view that they deemed incompatible with the doctrine of resurrection. For if a soul could, over time, animate more than one body, then bodily resurrection would not appear to be possible, there being fewer souls than bodies. Kabbalistic mystics, however, disagreed on this point, making the transmigration of souls a central doctrine of their system of Judaism.

The Zohar, for its part, understood the three Hebrew terms that refer to soul each to designate a different human faculty.<sup>4</sup> Access to the world of intellect is provided through the *neshamah*, which the Zohar identified as the rational faculty and understood to emanate from the sphere called the "Crown" (*keter*). *Ruah* is the moral faculty, emanating from the sphere called "Beauty" (*tiferet*) and

giving people knowledge of the world of creativity. Emanating from the sphere called "Foundation" (*yesod*), the vital faculty, *nefesh*, is related to the world of practical action.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Literally, "body," the name of the storehouse of souls in heaven (Rashi). See Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi . . .* (New York, reprint, 1971), p. 225, s.v., *gwp*.

<sup>2</sup> See also JUDAISM, PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY OF, IN MEDIEVAL TIMES.

<sup>3</sup> On the following see Alfred Ivry, "Soul" in *EJ*, vol. 15, cols. 172-174.

<sup>4</sup> On the following see Gershom Scholem, "Soul, Immortality of . . . , In Kabbalah" in *EJ*, vol. 15, cols. 180-181.

ALAN J. AVERY-PECK

**SOUTH AFRICA, PRACTICE OF JUDAISM IN:** "South African Judaism" refers to the religious beliefs and practices of the approximately 70,000-80,000 Jews living in South Africa today. For a number of reasons, this local Jewish community is unique. First, it exists in the only country in the world in which a substantial Jewish community lives within a black majority, a fact made more significant by the unique transition from apartheid to democracy that has occurred in the past decade. Second, South African Jewry is English-speaking, so that—especially in light of the periodic return of many emigrants—the community has knowledge of and, theoretically, should be open to at least some of the trends and innovations currently taking place in other English-speaking Jewish communities, such as the United States and England.

Yet South African Jews are deeply insular. Some scholars attribute this conservatism to the Anglo-Lithuanian origins of the community, a spirit that is still very much evident and provides the conceptual basis for the power of an Orthodox rabbinate. Others have focused on the legacy of apartheid in conditioning the community, and yet others note as a contributing factor the historical existence in South Africa of only two denominations, Orthodoxy and, more recently, Reform. Conservative Judaism and other contemporary movements—including Reconstructionism, Jewish Renewal, Havurot, and Jewish

Humanism—that have developed in the United States and elsewhere are for the most part completely absent from and virtually unknown in South Africa.

**The Litvak “invasion:”** The earliest Jews to build communities in South Africa were British, arriving when the British first settled the Cape around 1820. But since their numbers remained small, the character of South African Jewry was significantly changed beginning in 1880, when the first of the some 70,000 Eastern European, primarily Lithuanian, Jews who would arrive prior to 1948 came to the country.

Although many of the Lithuanian immigrants settled in urban areas, many other “pioneers” sought their fortunes in less developed areas, such as Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State. Many became peddlers on the veld (the great southern African plains), eventually opening prosperous country stores. Particularly successful and well known were the Lithuanian Jews in the town of Oudshorn in the Karoo province area, who were pioneers in the ostrich feather trade and developed an important import-export business. Although these early Jewish settlers could not legally hold public office or be in the civil service, many of them became respected leaders in their communities.

The Jewish immigrants quickly began building their own communities. Previously the synagogues had performed most of the educational, financial, and social functions in addition to religious ones. Now separate institutions were formed to facilitate life in the community. Jewish day schools were first established in the 1880s. A number of social welfare institutions were founded in the 1890s, in particular in Cape Town and Johannesburg. These included traditional *chevras* for Torah and Talmud study and a Jewish hospital with a kosher kitchen and Yiddish-speaking staff. The pressure to provide even more services was intensified during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), when some ten thousand Jews fled the Transvaal and took refuge in Cape Town. After the war, federations of existing organizations were modeled on the Anglo-Jewish pattern. Jewish Boards of Deputies were established for

Transvaal and Natal in 1903 and the Cape Colony in 1904.

**Immigration in the twentieth century:** Jews were allowed to immigrate to South Africa fairly freely until immigration was severely curtailed by the Quota Act of 1930 and effectively stopped by the Aliens Act of 1937. As a result, from the 1930s until the early 1970s there was no significant immigration to the Jewish community of South Africa, a circumstance that led to the creation of a native-born Jewish population even more homogenous than the existing immigrant community, comprised primarily of Jews from Lithuania who had adopted certain British institutional models. Now that homogeneous background was reinforced and exaggerated, creating a highly cohesive and unified Jewish community that sees its origins in very definitive terms. The majority of South African Jews feel that they share similar roots and values. No influx of newcomers has created a need for pluralistic models that would integrate different types of Jews into the Jewish community.

**The synthesis of Anglo-Jewish religions and institutional forms:** The so-called “British” Jews<sup>1</sup> were the founders and leaders of all of the institutions of South African Jewry in the early years. As Lithuanian Jews arrived in greater numbers, they joined these institutions and, as in other British colonies, such as Australia, New Zealand, and even the United States, they initially looked to Britain as a religious model.

This English influence was evident—and to some extent still is—in a number of important areas. First is the institution of Chief Rabbi. For a long time, the Chief Rabbi of Britain was looked to as the ultimate spiritual and religious head of the local community; even since that time, all Chief Rabbis have come from Great Britain. Aspects of South African Jewish liturgical ritual also parallel the British model. Services contain a prayer, in the vernacular, for the government and generally used the Singer, and later, the Adler prayer books. Only very recently were these books replaced by the Birnbaum edition and, finally, after 1980, by the Art Scroll prayer book. Until 1945, when they

were banned by Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz, there was a tradition of mixed choirs in many Orthodox synagogues, and, until recently, rabbis and cantors wore robes and caps.<sup>2</sup> Further, most synagogues use the Hertz Pentateuch, a product of English-style modern Orthodoxy that has been overwhelmingly used in English-speaking countries for over half a century, though today it is regarded as outmoded and somewhat apologetic. Finally, there is a preference for large, ornate synagogues and a more elaborate worship service than is found in the Litvak tradition, for example, with much pomp and ceremony surrounding the Torah procession prior to the Sabbath Torah reading.

These criticisms, however, have always been matched by a strong Lithuanian influence on the beliefs and practices of South African Jews. South African Jews, for example, have a cerebral attitude toward religion and are not given to passionate outpourings of spirit in prayer and worship. Many specifically Lithuanian-influenced synagogues therefore are modest places of worship, and South African Jewry may be characterized overall by what Shimoni describes as its “non-Hassidic religious Orthodoxy.” Although South African Jews typically congregate around religious activity, they are not, as a whole, devoutly religious. They tend, rather, towards what has been called “conservative traditionalism” or “non-observant Orthodoxy.” The more expressive Hasidic movement did not come on the scene until the 1970s, with the arrival of Lubavitch, which is very much of an American import.

**The role of the day schools:** Following World War II, South Africa’s day school system increased dramatically in importance, even as the system of afternoon schools declined. This new commitment to day school education was made possible by the development of a traditional-national orientation that became the hallmark of the day schools.

The traditional-national orientation to Jewish education stresses that Jews are a distinct national group, bound together by a connection to classical Judaism. Nevertheless, there is the recognition that different students will take the tradition more or less seriously as

something they actually practice and totally believe in. Despite these differences, the consensus among South African Jews is that traditional Judaism is the cornerstone of their national identity. In practice, the schools have taught this tradition not so much to emphasize the religion but as a means of instilling a distinct Jewish identity.

The day school system began with the establishment of the King David School in Johannesburg in 1948 and, by the late 1960s, had grown to seventeen day schools, some linked together in school systems such as King David and Herzelia. It has become increasingly common for Jewish parents to send their children to a day school, so that, by the late 1970s and certainly the 1980s, it became more the rule than the exception. Especially as more and more Jews began to emigrate, many of the government schools, which once boasted considerable numbers of Jewish children, contained fewer and fewer of them. This, in turn, increased Jewish parents’ feeling that their children would feel more comfortable in a Jewish day school. Currently, between seventy-five and eighty-five percent of Jewish students attend a day school, primarily in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Notably, this shift has had a catastrophic impact on the Progressive movement, since most parents who send their children to a day school—where a traditional Jewish perspective is presented—do not see the need also to bring the child to an afternoon Hebrew School—where the child might learn about Progressive Judaism. The move to day school education accordingly has severely weakened parents’ ability to commit to Reform temples and Progressive Judaism.

**South African Orthodoxy:** The Orthodox community constitutes the vast majority of the Jewish population of South Africa. In the most recent comprehensive socio-demographic survey, conducted in 1991, Professor Allie Dubb found that almost four-fifths of Jews in South Africa describe their religious orientation as Orthodox. Dubb lists 78.5 percent of all Jews as Orthodox, 12.7 percent as Reform, and the rest as not identified with a specific movement. In Johannesburg, 90.1 percent of all those affiliated with a

synagogue were affiliated with an Orthodox one. The Orthodox affiliation rate for Pretoria was 89.1, for Cape Town, 84, Port Elizabeth, 75.4, and Durban, 73.4. Overall, 86.8 percent of all affiliated Jews were Orthodox by affiliation, an extremely high percentage. The figure today is almost certainly even higher.

The high percentage of Orthodox affiliation does not, however, indicate just how active the Orthodox community is and how much more active it is today than it was twenty years ago. In a 1974 study by Dubb, half of all respondents stated that they had attended 7.6 or more synagogue services in the previous year. While, in 1991, the median frequency was only a slightly higher, other numbers had risen significantly, so that, for instance, the percentage of those who attended services during the week had increased from 2.5 percent to 8.4 percent, and those who attended at least one Sabbath service per week had increased from 14 percent to 21.7 percent.

This trend toward greater involvement is very pronounced among the young. Dubb's two younger age groups, 18 to 29 and 30 to 44, attended synagogue about twice as frequently as their 1974 counterparts. In contrast, the median attendance of the oldest age group, 65 years old plus, had dropped in 1991 to half its 1974 levels.

In Dubb's 1991 socio-demographic study, 14.3 percent of respondents rated themselves highly observant, 74.4 as moderately observant, and 11.3 as being low in observance. Ninety-two point four percent always have a Passover Seder, and another 5.6 sometimes do; 90.8 percent fast on Yom Kippur; 74.3 percent always light Sabbath candles, and another 12.8 sometimes do. These percentages are high and reflect the very traditional nature of South African Jews.

Nevertheless, other observances have lower percentages of participation. The study indicates that only 45.1 percent always light Hanukkah candles, and another 15.4 percent sometimes do; 40.6 percent keep separate meat and dairy utensils strictly, 4.0 do "to some extent;" 37.7 percent purchase kosher meat only, and another 17.9 percent sometimes do. One marker of observance is

whether people handle money on Sabbath. Seventeen point seven percent do not, which is a few percentage points *above* the 14.3 percent who had rated themselves as highly observant. A greater measure of concern with a halakhic lifestyle is fasting on the minor fast days: 8.3 percent report that they do.

South African Jews have been described as adhering to both "non-observant Orthodoxy" and the "national-traditional orientation," both of which are particular to South African Jewry. These terms are different ways of saying that many of the roughly eighty percent of South African Jews who consider themselves Orthodox want to hold to Jewish tradition rather than follow halakhah strictly. Such people find it important that one's primary identity be as a member of the Jewish community, and part of that identity is the emotional connection with traditional Judaism.

For example, most South African Orthodox Jews like to go to synagogue on Friday nights; in fact, many of the big synagogues draw hundreds of people on Friday nights, with lesser numbers attending on Saturday mornings. Once in synagogue, however, people do a lot of talking, which is shocking to anyone raised in the Reform or Christian traditions, where being in a house of worship requires reverential respect. For South African Jews, by contrast, simply being in an Orthodox synagogue seems to fulfill a need for identity with their tradition. Whatever their actual behavior in the synagogue, by attending they reinforce their visceral ethnic identity.

To cite another example of South African Jewry's non-observant Orthodoxy, until the last few decades, South African Jews often celebrated a child's becoming bar mitzvah in an Orthodox synagogue but then hosted a reception that was not kosher. This practice was halted only when the Beit Din—religious court—prohibited it, demanding that such receptions be strictly kosher and under Rabbinic supervision. Interestingly, despite people's personal lack of concern for kashrut, no opposition was expressed to this new policy. They apparently saw this observance as the right thing to do, despite the added cost and possible inconvenience

and even if they continued otherwise not to follow the dietary restrictions.

Similarly, for many decades, most South African Jews have driven to synagogue on Sabbath and made little effort to hide that fact. But, as South African Orthodoxy has become more strict, Orthodox synagogues have been locking their parking lots. Again, there is little complaint, but also no change in people's personal observance; they still drive and simply park as near to the synagogue as they can. This willingness to accept the Orthodox approach is especially surprising in light of the high crime rate in Johannesburg, which makes walking even a block potentially dangerous. Still, there has been virtually no opposition to the policy; people accept the tradition because they recognize it as authentic and legitimate, even if they do not personally follow it.

Even Orthodox leaders, who might be highly critical of the apparent hypocrisy of South African Jewish practice, understand the social pressures that created this non-observant Orthodoxy. Indeed, in some regards, they view this synthesis positively, as evidence that South African Jews consider the Orthodox tradition alone to represent true Judaism. While it would be better if more South African Jews were truly observant, these leaders understand the social realities that created this unusual synthesis and consider it the best possible outcome, far preferable to the trends that have emerged in the United States, where Jews are moving toward Conservative and Reform Judaism, total assimilation, and a high degree of intermarriage.

Notably, just as most South African Jews continue to see Orthodox Judaism as the only legitimate expression of historical Judaism, they maintain the traditional rabbinate as the only rightful source of religious authority. Accordingly, the Orthodox rabbinate, in particular the Orthodox Chief Rabbi and the Beit Din, continues to exercise power over a wide range of issues, such as conversion, kashrut, and synagogue standards. Until about two decades ago, this rabbinate was divided into separate hierarchical structures for Johannesburg and Cape Town. Shortly

before Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris (fig. 126) and the current Beit Din, these two structures were unified, so that a single Orthodox policy can be applied throughout the country.

**The Progressive movement:** In England, as in the United States, the Reform and Conservative movements developed during the course of the nineteenth century. In England, the Reform movement was separate from the Liberal movement. In Australia, Liberal, Reform, and Progressive were all synonymous terms. In South Africa, the term Reform was the preferred term in the early years. Liberal Judaism was used occasionally and then disappeared from usage entirely as liberalism became a negative concept. Over the past fifteen years, Progressive has become the preferred term, with Reform continuing to be used some of the time.

Reform movements developed around the same time in Australia and South Africa and in countries nearby, that is, New Zealand and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), respectively. These early Reform movements were encouraged by the World Union for Progressive Judaism, which was established in 1926 and headquartered in London. The support of the World Union allowed Reform movements to establish themselves on turf that until that time had been completely Orthodox.

The World Union had much reason to believe that Reform Judaism could attract a substantial number of South African Jews. Although before the advent of Reform all affiliated Jews were nominally Orthodox, many were completely non-observant. Thus, in 1932, the World Union agreed to provide a small stipend for a limited period to Moses Cyrus Weiler, a Latvia-born Palestinian national who was about to receive ordination at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. In South Africa, however, Weiler confronted a campaign of hostility from the Orthodox rabbinate, which charged that Reform was an illegitimate form of Judaism that would undermine both authentic Judaism and Zionism. Indeed, since no Jewish organization allowed his congregation to hire a room for prayers, Weiler initially had to use a Freemasons' hall.

Weiler's approach to building his community reflected a certain sense of decorum and

equality among his growing community. He requested that services be more than a fashion parade, that members of the congregation respect the synagogue as a place of worship, and that seats be neither sold nor assigned. He also introduced children's services and helped organize a choir. Under Weiler, despite Orthodox opposition, the Progressive movement developed rapidly, establishing temples in Johannesburg, and later Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria, Springs, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, East London, and elsewhere. At its zenith in the 1950s, this large and vibrant movement had as much as eighteen percent of South African Jews. Only Kimberley and Pietermaritzburg remained as medium- or large-sized cities without reform congregations.

But in the late 1950s, after Weiler emigrated to Israel, the movement began to decline. This decline, which paralleled that of the South African Jewish community in general, was the direct result of the political turmoil in the country. Thus, by 1993, it had become very apparent that a number of Reform congregations in some of the smaller cities would close. As of 1998, there were officially only ten Reform congregations: one in Cape Town, three in Johannesburg, and one each in Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, and East London. However, Bloemfontein is defunct in all but name, and East London is nearly so. Port Elizabeth's congregation is quite small and unable even to consider supporting a rabbi. Some of these smaller congregations will undoubtedly close in the coming years.

**The Conservative Movement:** A form of Conservative Judaism began in Johannesburg in 1985, when Temple Shalom on Louis Botha Avenue, one of four congregations forming the United Progressive Congregation of Johannesburg, invited Rabbi Aby Assabi to officiate at High Holy Day services. Assabi previously had led an Orthodox-style congregation in Germany and a Reform congregation in Netanya, Israel, where he simultaneously served for eight years as Executive Director of the Israeli Progressive Movement.

Assabi became Temple Shalom's full-time rabbi and soon presided over the congre-

gation's merger with Temple Emanuel, of Houghton, Johannesburg. The newly formed alliance, Imanu-Shalom, began in 1986 as a Progressive congregation with two temples under the rubric of one congregation. According to the congregation's newsletter, it numbered 1350 families, including a number of wealthy and influential business people and Jewish lay leaders. Rabbi Assabi served as Senior Rabbi, rotating on alternating Sabbaths between Shalom and Emanuel. By 1991, his leadership had resulted in a dramatic transition from a reform-style service to a traditional, Conservative one. A new prayer book was being used in place of the Reform Gates of Prayer, and other Conservative ritual innovations were in place.

In 1995, Imanu-Shalom broke completely with the South African Union for Progressive Judaism, citing its refusal to adapt a more traditional approach to Judaism. But a disagreement with some members of the former Temple Emanuel regarding religious ideology soon led the two congregations again to be separated. Temple Shalom remained until 1998 under the religious leadership of Rabbi Assabi, and, since 1994, it has been loosely affiliated with the Conservative/Masorati Movement. But, in recent years, the congregation's membership has dropped precipitously, from fourteen hundred families to around three hundred fifty, the apparent result of a vacuum in leadership.

It appears, then, that building a Conservative congregation in isolation from a broadly based Conservative movement is very difficult. In addition, Conservative Judaism in South Africa faces all of the same problems that Reform Judaism faced and faces in terms of being seen as illegitimate and inauthentic. As long as Orthodox affiliation imparts a higher social status, non-Orthodox Judaism will remain a fringe phenomenon. This is the case especially as conservatism's strict standards on conversion close off a main potential source of new members, intermarrieds and potential Jews-by-choice who find no place within the Orthodox community.

**The German Orthodox in Johannesburg:** The perception in South Africa, as in other English-speaking communities that

received German Jewish immigrants prior to World War II, was that the German Jews tended to be Reform or at the very least to be highly assimilated. There is in fact no evidence that German Jews joined Reform in any disproportionate numbers. To the contrary, some of the German Jews who arrived in South Africa had been followers of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who had built a modern Orthodox movement in Germany. In September, 1936, this group established the Adath Jeshurun Shul on Fortesque Road in Yeoville, Johannesburg. Beginning with no more than about a score of committed members, at its height Adath Jeshurun probably numbered around one hundred twenty or thirty families.

When Rabbi Yaakov Salzer came in 1953, he attempted to establish independent religious standards. For example, in 1954 he set up procedures to produce milk products under rabbinical supervision and, rejecting the broader Orthodox community's standards, also established an independent facility for slaughtering animals for meat. In response, the *Federation Chronicle*, which represented the more mainstream Orthodox in South Africa, launched a biting attack on Adath Jeshurun's alleged exclusivity. The newspaper accused its members of causing a rift in the unity of the Jewish people. Although both the Chief Rabbi and Beit Din immediately disassociated themselves from the articles, many people developed an image of Adath Jeshurun as a bastion of intolerant fanaticism.

Still, over the years, the Adath Jeshurun community was responsible for innovations that brought the standards of Orthodox observance to higher levels. Along with more stringent kashrut standards, it established an ultra-Orthodox Talmud Torah and a women's *tahara* service at the burial society, initiated informal training of *gabboim* (ritual directors) who began serving at various Orthodox synagogues throughout Johannesburg, and set up a laboratory for checking for *shatnes* (the prohibited mixture of wool and linen in a single cloth).

Adath Jeshurun was not the only synagogue that catered to German Jews. In the 1930s, Etz Chayim was the most popular

congregation for German Jews arriving in Johannesburg. Whereas Adath Jeshurun catered almost exclusively to those who were disciples of Samson Raphael Hirsch and who were ultra-Orthodox in their religious perspective, Etz Chayim catered to the vast majority of German Jews. Some of the immigrants who had been Reform in Germany may have joined one of the Progressive synagogues, which were English-speaking. However, even though Etz Chayim was Orthodox, being in fellowship with other German Jews and hearing the sermon in German was probably much more important than theological principles or specific ritual practices. The congregation remained strong until the end of the 1950s, by which time it was half German and half Lithuanian. In the 1960s and 1970s, though, it declined as Jews moved out of the neighborhood, and, around 1993, it closed, although a *minyan* was maintained until 1997, when the remaining congregants joined with the remaining congregants of the Wolmarans Street Shul.

**Sephardic Jews:** When, after years of colonial status, the countries in which they were living became independent, many Sephardic Jews moved to South Africa. The majority came from Zaire and settled in Cape Town, although a number from Zimbabwe settled in Johannesburg. In Cape Town today there is a two hundred-family Sephardic Orthodox congregation. Increasing numbers of Israelis are now joining this congregation, creating conflicts regarding ritual policy and other issues between the relatively newly arrived Sephardic Israelis and the founders, who are Sephardic central Africans originally from Rhodes.

The Sephardim from Rhodes have also had to face the recent increased stringency of Orthodox standards in South Africa. While the Rhodes Jews, like the Jews of Italy, were Orthodox, their traditionalism was very liberal and accepting of all levels of observance and manners of theological belief. Now, with the increasing control of the Beit Din over all religious questions, their congregations are being pushed into adopting more stringent halakhic requirements, ranging from the demand for a higher barrier to separate men

and women at prayer to the application of additional kashrut standards that apply to food brought into the synagogue.

**The growth of ultra-Orthodoxy: The Baal Teshuva movement:** One very noticeable trend in recent times, primarily in Johannesburg, has been the growth of institutions promoting a return of young, assimilated Jews to an observant Jewish lifestyle. One such institution, Ohr Somayach, began in Johannesburg in February, 1986, with the work of Rabbi Shmuel Mofson, who was the official campus rabbi at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he played a direct and active role in the programs run by the South Africa Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS). In February, 1987, the beginning of the academic year in South Africa, Ohr Somayach, together with Yeshiva College, established an own institution in the suburb of Glenhazel. Together these would form the nucleus of what became known as a “new Yeoville,” or the new Orthodox center, Yeoville having been the center of Orthodox Jewish life in Johannesburg prior to the dismantling of apartheid and the movement of Jews to the suburbs.

Ohr Somayach initially catered to young adults by creating a learning center that met three times a week, at first in the home of one of the rabbis. The group quickly outgrew the space, its popularity stemming from its ability to establish a trend by which it became not only acceptable but socially advantageous to attend Ohr Somayach lectures. These lectures were delivered by guest speakers from abroad and usually focused on the immediate emotional concerns of the audiences, in particular, on psychological issues such as interpersonal skills, relationships, and how to deal with the stresses of modern life.

Such programs began to attract an average of at least two hundred fifty people. In addition, Ohr Somayach sponsored daily worship services and classes that drew between fifty and sixty mostly young people who had not previously been observant. In 1989, a separate study program was instituted for women and, shortly thereafter, a Jewish marriage education program. This was considered an important innovation in South

African Jewish educational programming, especially in light of the very high divorce rate in the country in general and among the Jewish population in particular. After this program was established, the Beit Din, which had no specific link to the Ohr Somayach organization, began insisting that all prospective marriage couples attend this four-week course.

Ohr Somayach also tried to avoid conflicts with various subgroups within the Orthodox community. So, for example, when the Lubavitcher Rebbe passed away in 1995, the Lubavitchers were deeply in mourning. The Adath Jeshurun group, totally opposed to the Lubavitchers, ignored this milestone. In contrast, the Ohr Somayach organization held lectures to mark the passing of the Rebbe. In general, Ohr Somayach tried to do things to appeal to as broad a spectrum of Orthodox people as possible.

In 1992, the organization established a yeshiva program with a full morning study session. The program quickly grew to include twenty-five full-day students and a large number who studied half day. The yeshiva had four separate morning prayer services, two afternoon prayer services, and two evening prayer services. Also in 1992, a separate branch was established in Gallo Manor (in Sandton, a suburb of Johannesburg) and, in 1993, another branch opened in Savoy. In 1995, the group established a kollel—a yeshiva for married men—with eight South African families, augmented with five more brought from Ohr Somayach in Israel. The group’s first rabbinical ordination took place in 1997.

Ohr Somayach has thus created a tight religious community that, by the late 1990s, had become a highly influential element of Johannesburg Jewish life, duplicating what Aish Hatorah—another center encouraging return to Judaism—was doing overseas and, indeed, leading Aish Hatorah in 1996 to open its own branch in Johannesburg. There, as elsewhere, Aish Hatorah specializes in reaching out to the uninitiated and combating assimilation by “injecting understanding in Jewish practice and by increasing Jewish pride.” By mid-1997, after only a year in existence, over



thirty-five hundred people had attended at least one Aish Hatorah seminar.

The development of the Baal Teshuva movement is connected with a related phenomenon, the growth of the *shtibl*. While South African Orthodoxy has always been characterized by large formal synagogues typical of the British Commonwealth (fig. 127), the new trend is toward small, traditionalist houses of prayer. Such *shtibl*-style communities in Johannesburg include Kolllel Yad Shaul, Keter Torah, Yeshivah Gedolah, Yeshivah MaHarShA, and the various Lubavitch *shtibls*. In this model, worship services lack the elaborate ritual and ceremony of the large Orthodox shuls. Without choirs and professional cantors, the services involve the lay membership in ways that do not occur in the traditional synagogues, in which there is a barrier between the officiants and the congregants, who play a passive role.

The Baal Teshuva organizations have tremendous potential in South Africa. On the one hand, the community is already strongly sympathetic to Orthodoxy; on the other, most of the children have been raised in homes in which there was more sympathy for Orthodoxy than knowledge of it. Many of these young adults are candidates for a more intense version of Orthodox Jewish belief and practice. Further, South African parents typically encourage and are proud of their children's greater involvement in and allegiance to Orthodoxy. Even those South African parents who practice virtually none of Jewish law nonetheless generally accept the legitimacy and authenticity of Orthodox belief and practice. This makes them much more willing to accept their children's decision to embrace Orthodoxy.

**Prospects for the future:** For South African Jews, South Africa's social transformation of the past years has been quite traumatic. As in white homes in general, the recent dramatic increases in crime, including hijacking and break-in murders in affluent white suburbs, have produced renewed paranoia and sometimes hysteria. One of the consequences of this climate of instability and fear has been the increasing Jewish emigration. In the years before the 1994 elections, tens of thousands

of Jews left South Africa. Though just how many Jews left is subject to speculation, one of the most widely quoted—though often debated—sources, the 1991 Dubb Report, holds that, between 1970 and 1991, 39,000 Jews emigrated from South Africa.

In this period, the largest number of those who left moved to Israel. However, by 1991, this trend shifted, and the largest proportion of émigrés from South Africa were to be found in the United States. The country with the next largest proportion remained Israel, followed by Australia, where the number of South African emigrants was growing. The other two countries with significant populations of South African émigrés were the U.K. and Canada.

Just as there are no reliable statistics on the exact number of Jewish emigrants, there are no statistics on who is emigrating. Still, the South African Jewish community feels it has lost "the cream of the community," that is, a high percentage of younger couples with children as well as a high percentage of those who are professionals and well educated. Indeed, according to the 1991 Dubb report, the émigrés are predominantly young couples and singles aged 18 to 44, and they are more likely to be engaged in professional occupations than the average South African Jew.

In the past twenty years there has also been migration within the country, from small towns and medium-sized cities—Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein, East London, Pretoria, and even Durban. Because very few Jews remain in these towns, dozens of small synagogues have closed or function only on high holidays. Thus, not only is South African Jewry smaller than it was twenty years ago, it is also much more concentrated, with the vast majority of Jews in just two cities, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Durban, for example, had a Jewish community of some six to seven thousand in 1980; today there are only about three thousand to thirty-five hundred.

Largely as a result of the increasing crime rate in Johannesburg, Jewish religious and social life there has shifted out of the city center and to the northern suburbs. This migration from traditional Jewish neighborhoods,

such as Hillbrow, has left those once-vibrant centers of Jewish life and culture deteriorating and crime-ridden. A striking symbol of the Jewish desertion of the city is the Wolmarans Street Shul in Hillbrow, until recently Johannesburg's central synagogue, which now is deserted and up for sale.

Parallel with the decline of the Wolmarans Street Shul and another result of the northward flight of Jews into the suburbs is that Yeoville, once the nerve center of Orthodox Jewish life, is now in the final stages of disintegrating. In the recent past, three Jewish bookstores, two bakeries, two kosher delis, and a Jewish restaurant have all either closed or moved out. In addition, nonprofit Jewish organizations are leaving; the Beit Din itself has sold its building and moved. These changes are significant since Yeoville was South Africa's first truly ultra-Orthodox community. Today most of its founders and their children are living outside of South Africa.

Hillbrow, site of the Wolmarans Street shul, had become one of the most densely populated square miles in the world and was particularly attractive to young, single Jewish professionals enjoying urban lifestyles. But today the only Jews who remain—and there are still Jews in many of the apartment buildings in the neighborhood—are elderly and poverty stricken. Many are religiously devout, but they fear walking on the streets of Hillbrow, even on Sabbath morning when it is light outside.

Besides the enormous negative impact of this circumstance on the Jewish elderly who remain in these neighborhoods, it appears that the rising violence again is causing many Jews, in particular younger ones, to contemplate emigration. This, in conjunction with the fact that many who previously had received visas valid for a limited number of years must now use or lose them, has meant a renewal of what has derogatorily been referred to as "the chicken run." While the same forces pressure all whites to leave the country, Jews, who are more likely to own their own businesses or have professional training, find it easier to relocate. It bears noting that this exodus of Jews and other whites is of great concern to the government,

such that, for example, in 1995, speaking to an audience of two thousand people, including prominent members of the Jewish community, at Temple Emanuel, a large Reform Congregation in Parktown, Johannesburg, President Nelson Mandela said, "Don't leave, don't let us down." He assured whites, including Jews, that they were "marked for leadership in the new multiparty, multiracial South Africa." Their skills were desperately needed, and they should not abandon the country in its time of rebuilding.

Although the Jewish community is certainly having difficulties and is contracting numerically, some believe that the situation is by no means catastrophic. Before, during, and after the 1994 elections, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies consistently argued that there is a positive future for South African Jewry, and the leadership of the community has been strongly supportive of the movement for democracy. In 1994, the National Director of the Board, Seymour Kopelowitz, said, "A mood of optimism has swept across the Jewish community in South Africa since the last elections. . . . The results have exceeded expectations and are a benefit not only to South African Jewry but to all South Africans. In spite of the gloom and doom which emanated from local sources and from various agencies in Israel, one thing is nevertheless clear: there is a future for Jews in South Africa and there will be a viable Jewish community here."

In a recent report, Russell Gaddin, who holds office in a number of Jewish organizations, argued that although the demographics of the Jewish community in South Africa may be changing, the numbers that have been lost to emigration are, in fact, considerably less than those lost to the simple process of assimilation that naturally occurs throughout the diaspora. Gaddin believes that the community in South Africa is quite stable and has managed to build up a sound infrastructure sufficient for it to flourish. He concedes that this infrastructure demands continued support from the community but that there is no question that facilities for Jews are in any danger of collapsing.

One thing is clear, and this is that many

South African Jews are active in helping to build the new South Africa. As Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, in his testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in November, 1997, noted, they are operating many programs under the broad umbrella of Tikkun, a Hebrew word meaning “repairing” or “trying to put things right.” These include the distribution of food to the hungry, support of homes for the mentally and physically disabled in Alexandra Township and in Johannesburg, and an agricultural project at Rietfontein, based on the principle of empowerment.

Other projects include helping develop solar heating, preserve water, and plant crops. There are educational programs in schools in black neighborhoods, preschool enrichment programs, adult literacy programs, and teacher training programs. Jewish business people are sharing their entrepreneurial and banking skills with young people. Harris concludes saying, “It is our job as religious people to try to apply the antidotes . . . to display the best that human beings can do to fellow human beings. . . . If Apartheid was divisive, the antidote is building bridges and coming together—a togetherness which will spell the great future of our country.” For those Jews who remain, the religious obligation of *tikkun olam*—of repairing the world—is felt alongside the fear of being engulfed by problems so massive that the only solution is individual emigration. The Jews of South Africa are living under unparalleled conditions, and their Judaism is developing in a number of patterns that directly respond to the unique challenges facing the new South Africa.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Notably, these were not in fact all of British origin. Some were Eastern European Jews who passed through Britain on their way to the Cape Colony.

<sup>2</sup> This is extremely rare today, the result of the increasing numbers of Orthodox rabbis who hail from the United States or are locally trained.

DANA EVAN KAPLAN

**STATE OF ISRAEL, THE PRACTICE OF JUDAISM IN:** Formally a secular democratic state, Israel has no established religion nor any provisions in its laws requiring a particular religious affiliation, belief, or commitment—Jewish or other—as a prerequisite for holding office. In this way Israel differs from many other Middle Eastern countries, whose constitutions provide that only Christians or Muslims may hold any, or at least certain, public offices. But despite the absence of such requirements, Israel still manifests a close interconnection between religious communities and the state. This interconnection includes a special status by consensus for the majority Jewish religious community as well as state support for all recognized religions that do not explicitly reject such support. In Israel, any religious community can apply for and receive official recognition and state support. Israel’s *Ministry of Religions*, in the plural, is just that, serving the communities of Jews, Muslims, Druze, and Christian denominations.

The Israeli parliament, the Knesset, grants individual religions authority in matters of personal status (marriage, divorce, etc.) and in other matters pertaining to the governance of their respective communities. Yet as a matter of constitutional principle, no Israeli Knesset could interfere in any systematic way with those prerogatives, since all the religious communities would present a unified front to prevent this. Indeed, members of individual religious communities do not recognize the Knesset as a source of authority in religious matters at all, but only as the regularizer of that authority within the context of the state. For them, the real source of authority is their religion’s divine source, represented, e.g., by the Jewish rabbinate, which obtains its authority through Jewish religious law—*halakhah*—or by the Muslim imams, who obtain theirs through Muslim religious law, the *Sharia*. In this sense religion in Israel is rooted in the constitutional fabric of the state, which no regime can seriously disrupt.

In addition, no less than Islam does for