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Israeli Americans

Steven J. Gold

Israelis in the United States earn incomes that approach those of native-born whites, learn English easily, frequently marry U.S. citizens, and exhibit high rates of naturalization. Generally white, they encounter little racial discrimination. Moreover, they have easy access to the American Jewish community, within which they often live and work (Gold and Phillips 1996).

Despite these attainments, however, after residing in the United States for decades, Israelis almost never describe themselves as Americans, socialize almost exclusively with other Israelis, keep in touch with and visit Israel often, and frequently refer to their plans to return home (Shokeid 1988). Studies have shown that even the second generation continue to call themselves "Israelis" rather than Americans by a wide margin (Uriely 1995). Consequently, Israeli Americans are characterized by numerous opportunities to join the host society—especially the American Jewish community—yet retain strong feelings of attachment to and identification with their country of origin. This chapter discusses the experience of Israeli Americans and pays special attention to the ways they retain a home country-based identity while actively participating in the host society.

Methods

To understand the experience of Israeli migrants, three researchers (an American man, an American woman, and an Israeli woman) collected several forms of data between June 1991 and April 1996. A major source was 97 in-depth interviews (conducted in both Hebrew and English) with a socially diverse sample of Israeli immigrants and others knowledgeable about their community (44 women and 53 men, including both the wife and husband of nine couples). In addition to in-depth interviews, we also conducted participant observation research at a variety of religious and secular community activities and other Israeli settings (Gold 1992, 1994a, 1997).

I trace my personal interest in Israeli immigration to two issues. First, in contrast to many migrant groups who are driven to leave their homelands by political or economic tumult and crisis, Israelis make a conscious choice to emigrate and have the freedom to return. Having completed several years of research on refugee groups who were forced to go abroad to survive, I found the set of issues associated with a voluntary immigrant group—such as motives for exit, patterns of adjustment, and plans for returning

home—intriguing (Gold 1992, 1995a). Second, as an American Jew, I am fascinated by the tension between my group's mixed and sometimes contradictory feelings of connection to the United States—home to the largest Jewish population in the world, albeit as a religious minority—and their emotions toward Israel, which came into existence as a homeland for all Jews.

The particulars of the relationship between American Jews and Israel are unique. However, because the United States is a nation of immigrants, most Americans have the potential to experience conflicting feelings of identification between the United States and the countries of their ancestors or co-religionists, be they China, Mexico, Holland, or Ghana.

Sources of Identity

Israelis in the United States have a complex ethnic identity. Although all are Jews, they vary greatly in their degree of religious involvement and the ways in which they practice their religion, which diverges considerably according to their denominational affiliation and philosophy of life. A small fraction of Israelis are devoutly orthodox and painstakingly conform to an extensive code of ritual requirements. The vast majority, however, are secular and follow a pattern of life typical of Western industrialized nations. As a nation of immigrants, Israel encompasses persons with various national origins, ranging from eastern and western Europe, to the Americas, North Africa, and the Middle East. All of these nationality groups are represented within the Israeli American population. Since its founding half a century ago in 1948, the nation of Israel has worked to develop a common culture, emphasizing the shared experiences as Israelis rather than as Jews, per se. Nevertheless, many of its citizens remain attached to the habits of their countries of origin—be they Morocco, Poland, Yemen, or Russia.

During the 1970s and 1980s, and in the 1990s to a lesser degree, Israeli immigrants have been viewed by American Jews and Israelis alike as violators of Zionist ideology and a potential threat to the survival of the Jewish state. As a consequence, they have been referred to as *Yordim*—a stigmatizing Hebrew term that describes those who "descend" from the "higher" place of Israel to the Diaspora, as opposed to immigrants, the *Olim*, who "ascend" from the Diaspora to Israel. However, in recent years, both Israel and the American Jewish community have taken a more conciliatory approach toward Israeli expatriates. American Jews provide Israelis with communal assistance, and Israel offers its overseas citizens a package of services and benefits, including outreach in the United States, and services and financial incentives to encourage their return home (Rosen 1993). Hence, the policies and actions of Israel and the American Jewish community have served both to facilitate and limit Israelis' merger into American Jewish life.

Motives for Migration

When asked why they came to the United States, most Israelis offered one of three overlapping responses—economic opportunities (including education), family factors, and a need for broader horizons (Gold 1997; Rosen 1993; Sobel 1986; Herman 1988). For example, Yossi, who now works as a building contractor, alludes to both "broadening his horizons" and increasing economic opportunities as he describes his desire to come to the United States.

> I came here in February '78 as a student. Back in Israel, I see and hear so much about America and I figure America is somehow the final place in the progression of the world. Whatever happens in the world, somehow, America has a good hand in

it. And so I decide that maybe it is the main source and I want to learn about America and open up my mind. And also, back home, there was not adequate opportunities.

A fairly large number, generally women and children, came to accompany their husbands and fathers who sought economic betterment and educational opportunity (Kimhi 1990; Lipner 1987). For example, in 1986, marriage to an American citizen accounted for a third of all Israelis who received immigrant status to the United States (Herman 1994:92). Furthermore, in fieldwork interviews, Israelis often mentioned coming to the United States to join relatives. Reflecting the other side of the same process, émigrés in the United States described bringing Israeli relatives and friends to join them.

Israelis who were self-employed prior to migration and who retain their entrepreneurial pursuits in the United States assert that the United States is a better location for capitalistic endeavors than Israel (Uriely 1994; Gold 1994b). This is reflected in the following exchange with an émigré in the garment business in Los Angeles:

For the people who were in business in Israel, you don't even have to ask why they came here. We just know that they came to do business. America is a better country for business. Less regulations, taxes and controls. They want you to do some business. Israel, it's too much socialism.

Like various groups in both previous and current migrant flows, Israelis are involved in chain migration. The presence of established coethnics in the host society is a valuable resource for later migrants. It lowers the social and economic costs associated with migration and plays a major role in organizing receiving communities. Israelis also ease their resettlement in the United States by residing in the Jewish neighborhoods in major cities (Herman and LaFontaine 1983).

Although most Israelis enter the United States with the specific goals of education, economic and career advancement, or family unification, another group arrives as part of a "Secular Pilgrimage" of world travel that is a common rite of passage among Israelis following their military service, which is compulsory for men and women alike (Ben-Ami 1992).

Israelis interviewed in Los Angeles and New York described how they had come to the United States as part of their travels, picked up a job to earn some cash, and then had "gotten stuck"—because of economic opportunities, relationships, or other factors—for a period longer than they had initially planned. Isaac described this:

Israel is a country that is not easy to live in. Everybody finishes the army after three or four years. After the army, you understand life differently. So you are ready to try something else. I came to Los Angeles, and then I met my wife and that's how I started. I got into the clothing business and I stayed. We had kids.

An additional explanation for Israeli emigration is the desire to be outside of the confines of the Jewish state. For supporters of Israel, direct criticism of the Jewish state by those living beyond its borders is seen as disloyal and, as such, is relatively infrequent among émigrés. However, in explaining why they left Israel, certain migrants described feelings of disillusionment or a general attitude of not being able to fit into the social order. Israelis who are from stigmatized ethnic backgrounds sometimes claim they left because of discrimination. Finally, Israelis occasionally describe their exit as an effort to escape military duty and the ever-present violence associated with life in the Middle East (Sobel 1986). According to an Israeli government estimate, about five percent of all permanent emigrants exit because of ideological reasons (Yisrael Shelanu 1995).

Demographic and Economic Characteristics

The number of Israelis in the United States has been a subject of intense controversy. In fact, given their broad array of national origins and their ongoing links to various nations and cultural forms, the very definition of an Israeli is problematic, making their enumeration difficult. However, estimates based on the 1990 U.S. census, the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, and Israeli census data suggest that approximately 100,000 to 190,000 Jewish Israelis live in the United States, with about 30,000 in the greater New York area and approximately half that number living in Los Angeles (Gold and Phillips 1996).

Israelis in the United States tend to be young. For example, in 1990, 79 percent of Israel-born persons in New York and 70 percent of Israelis in Los Angeles were below age 44. In both communities, there were more males than females. The marriage rate of Israelis living in New York is quite high—about 80 percent in 1980. At the same time, New York-based Israelis' divorce rate—of between two percent and five percent—is lower than for other New York Jews, whose rate of divorce is 10 percent. Israelis also tend to have more children per family than American-born Jews.

According to the 1990 census, Israelis in the United States are relatively well educated. Fifty-four percent in New York and 58 percent in Los Angeles have at least some college, and less than 15 percent in either city are not high school graduates. In both New York and Los Angeles, almost half the population aged 24 to 65 are employed as managers, administrators, professionals, or technical specialists. Another quarter in both cities are employed in sales. According to the 1990 census, their rate of self-employment—22 percent—is the second-highest of all nationality groups in the United States, exceeded only by Koreans. This high rate of self-employment is achieved by extensive economic cooperation—involving coethnic hiring and subcontracting—and by the concentration of Israelis in a number of areas of economic specialization. Entrepreneurship long has been a viable economic strategy for Jewish immigrants to the United States who, as a group, are party to an extensive tradition of self-employment prior to their arrival in this country. Israelis are notably active in the real estate, construction, jewelry and diamond, retail sales, security, garment, engineering, and media industries (Gold and Phillips 1996).

As their generally lucrative occupations might indicate, the earnings of Israelis in the United States are considerable. In fact, persons tracing their ancestry to Israel rank fifth in family income out of 99 ancestry groups tabulated in the 1990 census (Yoon 1997). Employed Israeli men residing in New York City were making, on average, approximately $35,000 annually in 1989, and their counterparts in Los Angeles were making an average of almost $49,000. These figures exceed those of all foreign-born men in either city, and best the earnings of even native-born whites in Los Angeles. The greater earnings of Los Angeles Israeli men versus New Yorkers can be accounted for by their higher rates of self-employment and their concentration in construction, which was a lucrative occupation during much of the 1970s and 1980s in Southern California.

Employed Israeli women in New York and Los Angeles also earn more than the average for all foreign-born women but make less annually than native-born white women in these cities. As native speakers of Hebrew who are often trained as educators, Israeli women frequently find employment as instructors in American Jewish synagogues and schools. Others work as professionals, managers, and administrators and in clerical jobs.

Although men have very high rates of labor force participation, a surprisingly large fraction of Israeli women are not in the labor market. This can be considered an indicator

of Israelis' economic advancement over their status in Israel because in the country of origin, a single income could not support the family, whereas it can in the United States. A survey of naturalized Israelis in New York found that only 4 percent of the women indicated "housewife" as their occupation in Israel, whereas 36 percent did so in the United States. This makes Israelis distinct from many other contemporary immigrant groups, which maintain higher labor force participation rates for women in the United States than in their countries of origin (Gold 1995b).

Communal Patterns

Most Jews who have entered the United States during the last 300 years have been de jure or de facto refugees, with few opportunities for returning to their countries of origin. By contrast, Israelis retain the real possibility of going back to Israel; indeed, American Jews, the Jewish state, and even the immigrants themselves generally agree that they should return. Consequently, this distinguishes Israelis from most other Jewish entrants in U.S. history.

Although most Jews immigrating to the United States have become staunchly nationalistic soon after their arrival, Israelis in the United States often discuss their desire to return home, and many make frequent trips back to the Jewish state, sometimes culminating in permanent repatriation, as seen in the words of a community leader in Los Angeles:

> Israelis would always suffer a certain touch of nostalgia because they are missing the things that they grew up with. Psychologically, most Israelis did not come here to be Americans. They did not come here to swear to the flag, to sing the national anthem and to go to Dodgers games. They came here to have the house and the swimming pool and the two cars and the job and the money.

Despite their ambivalence about being here, Israelis have been active in building a life for themselves in the United States. In fact, Israeli immigrants in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and other cities have developed many activities and organizations to resolve their misgivings about being in the United States. Community activities include socializing with other Israelis; living near coethnics (and within Jewish communities); consuming Hebrew-language media (produced in both the United States and Israel); frequenting Israeli restaurants and nightclubs; attending coethnic social events and celebrations; joining Israeli associations; working with other Israelis; consuming goods and services provided by Israeli professionals and entrepreneurs; keeping funds in Israeli banks; sending kids to Israeli-oriented religious, language, recreational, day care, and cultural/national activities; raising money for Israeli causes; calling Israel on the phone; and hosting Israeli visitors.

In the course of fieldwork in Los Angeles, one research team identified some 27 Israeli organizations—ranging from synagogues, Hebrew schools, and political groups to scouting programs, sports teams, business associations, and even a recreational flying club (Gold 1994a). This number of organizations exceeds that created by other middle-class immigrant groups in Los Angeles, including Iranians and Soviet Jews. Such a multiplicity of organizations allows émigrés to maintain various Israeli practices and outlooks in the American setting.

Gender and Family Adaptation

In nearly every study of Israelis in the United States, we find that although migration was a "family decision" and the family as a whole enjoys economic benefits as a result of migration, the decision to migrate was made by the men for the expanded educational and occupational opportunities available in the

United States (Gold 1995b; Rosenthal and Auerbach 1992). For example, Irit described her move to the United States and eventual resettlement in Israel, as determined by her husband's attending graduate school:

> For me changes are usually difficult. It affected our life at the beginning. It was kind of a crisis for me. But after a year, we had a good and peaceful life there. So also returning was difficult for me. I was stressed when we went there and when we returned. I was forced to leave, and to return.

Once in the United States, men often enjoy the benefits of such expanded opportunities and, accordingly, feel more comfortable with the new nation. Women, however, especially those with children and established careers, have more negative views of migration. Survey research revealed that Israeli women are less satisfied with America and retain a stronger sense of Israeli and Jewish identity than do men, who increasingly see themselves as American. Even when Israeli women work in the United States, they have less of a professional identity than men and would prefer to return home (Kimhi 1990:95).

Our own interviews as well as the literature indicate that a large fraction of Israeli women come to the United States not of their own volition but only to accompany their husbands, who seek economic and educational improvement, as seen in the words of Rachael:

> For most of the people that came here, the men came and the women came after them. Like when I came, my husband came for a job. I had to leave my job and I had to find a new job and it was very painful. I think more and more now there are women coming on their own, but if you look at most cases, it is the men coming after jobs and it means that the women are the ones that have to take care of finding apartment, finding schools for kids and they get depressed, very badly depressed.

Once in the United States, through their immersion in education and work, men develop a social network and a positive sense of self. Women, however, often remain isolated in the home—saddled with the task of caring for children in a strange new country and lacking access to social networks. Furthermore, because they are responsible for child rearing and many of the family's domestic and social activities, Israeli women are the family members who most directly confront alien American social norms and cultural practices. Separated from the resources and knowledge to which they had access at home, Israeli immigrant women find their domestic and communal tasks—such as building social networks, finding appropriate schools and recreational activities, dealing with teachers and doctors, obtaining day care, and the like—to be quite difficult in the United States. This increase in difficulty in women's tasks is contrasted to the various advantages U.S. presence yields for husbands involved in the economic sphere, as described by Michal:

> I am convinced from all my friends that the quality of life in Israel is better than the quality here and the problem for Israeli women, whether they have a career or they don't have a career, they have to tend to the children also and those worries here are tremendous. Where do you send your kids to school? You deal with the public system if you cannot afford to send to private school, all those things, and they fall on the woman. They don't fall on the man. And the man comes home and he hopefully brings the bread, that's all he does.

It is important to note that although many of the economic advantages of the U.S. stay can benefit Israeli women as well as men, due to the gender-based division of labor, they most commonly go to men alone. Lipner's (1987) research indicates that an Israeli woman's family status and involvement has much to do with her opinion of the United States. Younger women who had few social attachments prior to migration (i.e., no chil-

dren or established careers) looked forward to migrating and enjoyed being in the States. However, women who had children and who were forced to give up good positions in Israel to come to the United States had a much harder time, experiencing their exit as "devastating" (Lipner 1987:144–45).

In reflecting on their experience in the United States, Israelis contrast the nation's positive economic and occupational environment to its communal and cultural liabilities: Immigrants almost universally regard Israel as a better place for kids. It is safer, has fewer social problems, and does not impose the manifold generational conflicts Israelis confront when raising children in the United States. Furthermore, in Israel, Jews are the culturally and religiously dominant group. The institutions of the larger society teach children Hebrew and instruct them in basic national, ethnic, and religious identity as well as in Jewish history. However, in coming to the United States, Israelis become a minority group and lose communal networks based on family, friendship, and neighborhood that provided a social life and assistance in raising children.

The presence of young or school-age children in Israeli immigrant families often heightens their ambivalence about being in the United States. Role changes sometimes occur between parents and children, with the younger generation gaining in power versus the older. This is because children generally become Americanized and learn English much faster than do their parents. For example, respondent Carmella reported that her teenage son would react to her advice by saying "What do you know about it? You're from Israel."

Another source of family conflict occurs when various family members disagree regarding their chosen country of residence. These problems are most dramatic when one spouse is American-born or has many American relatives, and the other's family resides in Israel. Similarly, children who have spent much of their lives in the United States often prefer to remain, whereas their parents wish to return to Israel. Finally, parents may wish to remain in the United States for career opportunities, whereas children wish to return to Israel.

In general, we found that Israeli families were relatively resilient in the United States and provided valuable assistance and support to their members. At the same time, Israeli families suffered from financial problems, separation from relatives, and generational conflicts in communication and identity. The presence of children appears to be a major incentive that motivates immigrant families to reevaluate their collective identity in the United States and often to take steps so that children will experience some form of Jewish and/or Israeli training.

Jewish Identity and Involvement in Jewish Life

Israeli and American Jewish notions of group membership contrast because the basic group identities associated with being Israeli, on the one hand, and American Jewish, on the other, are rooted in particular cultural and national contexts. For many Israelis, ethnic identity is secular and nationalistic. Although Israelis are knowledgeable about Jewish holidays and speak Hebrew, they connect these behaviors to "Israeliness" rather than Jewishness. The majority do not actively participate in organized religious activities—as is the case among many American Jews—and Israelis depend on the larger society and public institutions to socialize their children. The Western denominations of Reform and Conservative Judaism, with which the great majority of American Jews affiliate (denominations that permit American Jews to maintain their religious outlooks while incurring few conflicts with the larger Christian society), are all but unknown in the Jewish state—marriages performed by Reform rab-

bis in Israel have no legal standing. Finally, although American Jews are accustomed to life as a subcommunity in a religiously pluralistic society, Israelis grew up in an environment where religion and nationality were one and the same.

Because of Israelis' lack of familiarity with American forms of Jewish involvement, some pundits decry their assimilation into non-Jewish cultural patterns. They assert that Israelis' very exit from the Holy Land signifies a move away from the Jewish ideal and that their participation in and contribution to Jewish activities is limited and oriented toward secular pursuits with little religious content—meals, parties, Israeli folk dancing, and sports (Shokeid 1988).

In contrast, other observers argue that Israelis actively participate in American Jewish life and simultaneously maintain their links to Israel by noting that the Israelis speak Hebrew, live in Jewish neighborhoods, are involved in a variety of Jewish institutions, and visit Israel frequently. Although survey data on Israelis' Jewish behaviors are relatively scarce, those that exist indicate that established immigrants engage in many Jewish behaviors at higher rates than is the case among native-born Jews. For example, Israeli migrants' synagogue membership, at 27 percent, is above that of Americans. Furthermore, 80 percent of Israeli parents provide their children with some form of Jewish education—50 percent of Israeli children in Los Angeles and 35 percent in New York attend Jewish day schools. Their rate of intermarriage to non-Jews, at only 8 percent, is 40 percent less than the recent average for American Jews.

When comparing patterns in Israel with Israeli immigrants' observance of Jewish religious practices—lighting candles on Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) and Chanukah, attending Synagogue on the High Holy Days and Shabbat and fasting on Yom Kippur—we find that among naturalized Israelis in New York and Los Angeles, ritual behaviors have actually increased. Increased rates of ritual practice probably reflect the efforts of these Jewish migrants to retain their religious identity within a predominantly non-Jewish country (Gold and Phillips 1996).

Finally, a growing number of Israeli American parents are acting to reestablish connections with Israeli and/or Jewish behaviors through special family activities of their own creation or involvement in various Israeli American programs, such as after-school Israeli Hebrew courses and Hebrew language scouting activities.[1]

Transnational Israelis

Transnationalism, a new approach in the field of migration studies, has been created precisely to understand a growing number of international migrant communities, who, like Israeli Americans, maintain social, cultural, and economic links to multiple nation-states on a more or less permanent basis (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992).

A central point of transnationalism is its view of migration as a multilevel process that involves various links between two or more settings rather than a discrete event constituted by a permanent move from one nation to another. The concept of transnationalism suggests that by retaining social, cultural, and economic ties with two or more countries, people can avoid the impediments traditionally associated with long distances and international boarders. At the same time, transnationalism reminds us that people often remain intensely involved in the life of their country of origin even though they no longer permanently reside there.

A whole series of factors surrounding Israelis makes their movement from the Jewish state to the United States relatively easy. They are well educated and often in the possession of occupational and cultural skills that are useful in both nation-states. They generally have access to networks in both countries

that can provide a broad variety of resources, ranging from pretravel information to job opportunities, child care, housing, and a social life. Although some Israelis in the United States lack legal resident status, as a group, they are very likely to become naturalized and are among a select few allowed to have dual citizenship (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990). Even prior to migration, Israelis often feel extremely familiar with American society from their exposure to popular culture, American visitors as and intergovernment relations. As Israeli social scientist Zvi Sobel (1986) put it, "America, it might be posited, has become the alter ego of Israel in political, economic and cultural terms" (pp. 192–93).

A great proportion of the Israeli population have resided within the Jewish state for fewer than two or perhaps three generations. Accordingly, their family lore and cultural baggage is rich with stories of—and techniques for coping with—life in other settings. Many émigrés we interviewed had lived in other nations, ranging from Japan and Hong Kong to Switzerland, England, South Africa, Italy, and Latin America, prior to their settlement in the United States. Although professionals and high-level entrepreneurs had lived overseas, so have less-skilled and less-educated migrants, such as carpenters and restaurant workers. Hence, many Israelis possessed a cultural orientation and life experience compatible with an existence beyond the borders of the Jewish state. William Petersen's classic migration typology accounts for the unique tendency of such groups to move:

> The principal cause of migration may be prior migration. . . . In a framework where migration has been set as a social pattern, the individual motivations may be relatively trivial and the family and community structure more salient in mobility decision making. (As quoted in DeJong and Fawcett 1981:16)

Further facilitating Israel American transnationalism are the good political relations and extensive links shared by the United States and Israel. The U.S. government and American Jewish agencies have developed an active presence in the Jewish state. American firms have branches there, and American companies sometimes hire professional and skilled workers directly from Israel. At the same time, Israeli government agencies, banks, and industrial enterprises have offices in New York, Los Angeles, and other American cities. These not only give an Israeli flavor to the American environment but also provide employment for migrants (Sobel 1986). At the same time, we noted a variety of Israeli-oriented activities that allow migrants to maintain a semblance of the Israeli life in the United States.

Travel between the two nations is easily arranged. Israeli immigrants often report making frequent trips from the United States to Israel, and it is not uncommon for children to return to Israel to spend summer vacations with relatives. A Los Angeles obstetrician describes the great value he places on his trips back to Israel:

> I was talking to my accountant two days ago—he is also an Israeli—he says "What is going on?" And I said "What can I tell you, we are in a concentration camp." Okay—this is the way you describe it, and it is so true. We are in a concentration camp and we get a relief once a year when we go to Israel for a vacation. This is the bottom line.

Sobel (1986), in his 1981–1982 pretravel survey of 117 Israel emigrants (most of whom planned to enter the United States), found clear evidence of a transnational outlook. About one half denied "that leaving Israel and moving to the United States was an act of emigration." Instead, they defined the travel as "temporary" or "commuting." Moreover, "almost all interviewees denied that their leaving meant a cessation of contributing to the development of Israel. . . . Almost all saw their departure as . . . to Israel's good" (Sobel 1986:196).

In all these ways, the Israeli context, history, and culture have prepared members of this group for transnationalism. It would appear that the whole notion of being an Israeli versus an American is not nearly as clear-cut a distinction as the literature on international migration would generally suggest. Instead, factors such as flexible notions of ethnic and national identity, access to and participation in social and occupational networks, and the ability of people to sustain cultural competence and legal status in more than a single society allow Israelis to maintain meaningful forms of involvement in multiple national settings at one time.

Despite these many factors that permit Israelis to maintain a transnational existence, many remain troubled by the distance—physical as well as cultural—between the two nations. As suggested in the following quotations, even those Israelis who have accomplished a great deal in the United States contrast America's favorable economic and career-related environment to its communal and cultural liabilities:

> An Israeli is torn apart the minute he is leaving Israel [to come to the United States for an extended period]. It's not like people from other countries who come here and settle down, hoping for better life. An Israeli is torn apart the minute he leaves Israel and that's when he begins to wonder where is it better—here or there.

> I think that the reason so many Israelis are here is the illusion of materialistic comfort they can find here, period. It has nothing to do with spiritual, cultural or emotional values they are looking for. The issue is materialism. And it doesn't fulfill all the needs a human being has. A person needs culture and some ideals to believe in. We Israelis continue to keep a close contact with Israel as if we left for a short time only. We come here and organize our lives as if we are going to stay for a short period and our life here is a make-believe. The reality is that we live here and at the same time we don't live here. We are torn apart and that leaves the question for which I don't have an answer—what will happen and where are we?

Hence, for many Israelis, transnationalism is a reality. This does not mean, however, that it is an easy way of life. Although these migrants build communities and networks that help them cope with the social and cultural dimensions of ties to two nations, and although they enjoy economic benefits from migration, most are not quite comfortable with this status. In the words of a Los Angeles accountant, "Israel is my mother and America is my wife, so you can imagine the way I must feel."

Conclusions

Jews have been migrating to the United States since the 1600s, under a variety of circumstances and with different outlooks and resources. Israelis are among the most recent of these groups. American Jews' support of the state of Israel, along with Israel's own anti-emigration outlook, has sometimes resulted in a less-than-welcoming reception for these new arrivals. Furthermore, because Israelis and American Jews have distinct cultural and linguistic traditions and express their identities in different ways, Israelis have encountered some difficulties in joining the religious and communal activities of their American co-religionists. However, in terms of skills, education, and Jewish knowledge, Israelis have much to offer both to American society in general and the American Jewish community in particular. In recent years, the potential benefits provided by Israeli immigrants have become more apparent to American Jewish organizations, and efforts to facilitate either their merger into the American Jewish community or their return home have been undertaken with some success.

For many Israeli Americans, the best way to address their conflicting commitments to both the United States and Israel is by main-

taining a transnational existence, which emphasizes the use of Hebrew and interaction within the Israeli immigrant community, coupled with frequent visits to the country of origin. Consequently, Israelis enjoy economic benefits from migration and build communities and networks to cope with the social and cultural contingencies of being attached to two homelands.

Note

1. Modern Israeli Hebrew is very different from the religious language typically studied as a part of an American Jewish education.

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Gold:

1. Discuss how the policies and actions of Israel and the American Jewish community have served both to facilitate and limit Israeli immigration to the United States.
2. What does Gold mean when he discusses "chain migration"? Discuss the benefits of such a type of migration.