Formative Years of Jewish Social Welfare
(1842-1869)

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The shift in focus from overall Jewish support for the indigent Jews of Palestine to organized selective emigration to the U.S.A. as well as the shift from an emphasis on charity to the individual in distress, to methodical social planning to avert such a predicament, were the essential features of the struggle within Jewish philanthropy between the 'forties and the 'eighties of the nineteenth century.

The plight of the "Poor of Jerusalem" and the desire to provide a haven for the Jewish refugees fleeing Eastern Europe, were the two issues which dominated the public consciousness of World Jewry, as early as the eighteen forties. Indeed, it was support for the poor Jews of Palestine which was the first supracommunal task undertaken in concert by various Jewish bodies, and by 1833 included the Jewish community of the United States. But since this task also provided the sole avenue for joint action by the different institutional bodies, it also became the object of a struggle, on the one hand, to maintain the continuity of this tradition, and, on the other, to plan more comprehensive aid to the Jewish community in Palestine. As such, this framework served to bring out such differences in approaches by the interacting organizations that common action under a leadership, acceptable to all or most of them, became virtually impossible.

The history of the formative years of support in America for the Jewish community of Palestine highlights the main phases of this process.[1] The first phase is characterized by the *Hebra Terumot Hakodesh* in New York (1833). This is the first supra-communal body bringing together a variety of local congregations for assisting Jerusalem's needy, in accordance with *Halacha*, the traditional pattern of support, which was dominated from afar by Hirsch Lehren's Distribution Committee in Amsterdam. Lehren's approach to charity for the Jerusalem poor became the target of conflicting views intensified both by emissaries sent abroad by Palestinian Jews to collect monies[2], and by leaders of European Jewish Communities. The American Jews, far removed from these sharp differences were content to look to Moses Montefiore in England as the authority on matters pertaining to the needy Jews of Jerusalem.

The rifts concerning the traditional *Halacha*-System gave rise to a second phase in the concept of philanthropy whereby the larger organizational systems shifted from the traditional pattern of helping the poor individually to support of community needs (such as hospitals or housing projects). This development stimulated the creation of national organizations embracing various communities in the United States, and, ultimately, international bodies for financial support of large projects in Palestine. During this phase, the Northern American Relief Society for the Indigent Jews in Jerusalem was established in 1853, an organization spearheading a cooperative relationship with British Jewry.

Although Moses Montefiore remained a leading figure, American Jewish leaders very openly expressed their criticism and their feelings of independence.

> The Israelites are daily increasing in America in numbers and the means of being benevolent: and surely it would redound to their credit that they were the first to restore the poor of Palestine to an honorable feeling of self-dependence and self-support, and to use the proper means to do away with the necessity of constantly appealing for alms to feed starving thousands in our ancient patrimony.[3]

At the time, Isaac Leeser, the "prime builder" of American Jewry,[4] promoted community welfare projects considered very radical on the American scene, as exemplified by Dr. A. Benisch and S. Sequerra's Association for Promoting Jewish Settlement in Palestine[5], and Warder Cresson and Moses Sach's proposals for agricultural settlements[6]. Leeser was encouraged by these ventures to search for new local leaders in Jerusalem, who understood and supported community-oriented programs, and who were likely to cooperate with a new international Jewish leadership.

Furthermore, the new approach was based on the premise that the young Jews who crowded the towns and villages of Poland, Russia, and Turkey were potential immigrants with the resourcefulness and energy to rebuild the community life of Palestinian Jewry.[7]

This notion was completely at odds with the ideas of those who envisaged the emancipation of the European Jews since it smacked of national aspirations and messianic hopes which were hardly acceptable to the extreme Reform wings of Judaism in Western Europe and North America. By the same token the new approach constituted a radical criticism of the traditional patterns of charity. It was seen as taking away the leadership from the rabbinic authorities in Jerusalem, and this view together with its emerging support all over the Jewish world, was hardly acceptable to the extreme orthodox communities in Europe and elsewhere.

This leads us to yet a third phase in Jewish philanthropy which, significantly, had its origin in the polemics leading toward Reform Judaism. This new development carried in it the seeds of division between the traditional elements and the protagonists of the new religious trend. In order to forestall a deep split within Jewry, a more neutral leadership (such as for example in the Alliance Israelite Universelle) emerged which sought to channel Jewish interest into a more unifying effort of improving the lot of less fortunate Jews.[8] This third stage marks the emergence of a universalistic policy, wherein the particular needs of the Jewish community in Palestine became one aspect of an overall social planning approach, taking into account destitute Jewish communities everywhere facing poverty and/or oppression. For American Jewry, the third stage was reached with the formation of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites in 1859. This body was created to deal with a wide range of Jewish communal needs, national and international, of which aid to Palestine Jewry constituted, as mentioned, one facet. The Americans found kindred spirits in the leadership of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, Paris[9], which had sought American support for the project in formal agricultural schooling, promoted by Charles Netter[10], but firmly rejected in England by

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[1] Jacob Kellner, "The Formative Years of American Support for the Jewish Community in Palestine, 1833-1881, *Shalem*, Studies in the History of the Jews in Eretz—Israel, Vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1974, pp. 377-426 (in Hebrew).

[2] S.W. and J.M. Baron, "Palestinian Messengers in America, 1849-1879," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 5 (1943), pp. 116-141.

[3] *Occident* 11:10 (Jan. 1854) pp. 486-7.

[4] J.R. Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews*, Vol. 2, Philadelphia, 1955, p. 58.

[5] *Occident* 11:1 (April 1853) pp. 71-75.

[6] *Occident* 12:7 (Oct. 1854) pp. 351-5.

[7] *Occident* 11:10 (Jan. 1854) pp. 478-9.

[8] An early expression of this approach is S.M. Isaacs' suggestion "not to touch the worship, but to improve the worshippers." *Occident* 7:3 (June 1849) pp. 137-189.

[9] *Jewish Messenger* 26:15 (Sept. 15, 1869). See also: Z. Sjajkowski, "The Alliance Israelite Universelle in the United States, 1860-1949," *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 39, June 1950.

[10] Board of Delegates of American Israelites, *Proceedings at the Session for 5629 held at the City of New York, May 4, 1869*, New York, 1869, pp. 17-22.

Moses Montefiore and his followers (1869). The stand on the part of American Jews favoring the Alliance project gained force with their refusal to support the British Board of Deputies in the matter of financial support to the Montefiore Testimonial Fund (1876).[11] At that time the contribution of American Jewry was directed primarily to developing ways and means of improving community life in Palestine, through more effective programs of education.

Thus the provision of charity for the poor of Jerusalem, which began initially as a uniting factor on the local, national, and universal levels, eventually turned into a divisive phenomenon embodying a variety of contrasting approaches. The institutionalized elements of American Jewry and the leaders of Alliance Israelite Universelle, came out for an approach based on social planning and a clear choice in favor of:

1) rationally planned involvement over spontaneous intervention;
2) long-range planning for the future, instead of dealing with immediate contingencies; and
3) a centralized leadership concerned with international Jewish issues rather than particularistic needs.

On the other hand, there were those traditional groups which devoted themselves exclusively to their particularistic concern, namely, charity for the old, the sick, the large family, and of course for the poor of Jerusalem.

However this divisive process within World Jewry did not carry over into joint action on behalf of the distressed Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe. To a large extent the plight of the refugees prompted greater cohesion and collaboration among the different congregations and Jewish communities in Western

Europe. For the younger Jewish generations in the West, already raised on the high hope of emancipation, the very humanitarian aspect of the task provided a useful rallying point and opened up a whole new field of activity. At the same time, it conferred legitimacy on all-embracing Jewish solidarity without its running counter to the universality of human rights on which Western Jews had been brought up. This awakening, spurred by the Damascus Affair (1840), was further stimulated by the intervention of Montefiore and Cremieux, and led, inter alia, to the first local gatherings for fund-raising for educational activity among Jewish communities in North Africa.[12] And here too Palestine had a beneficial effect in the matter of attracting prospective givers. To quote Leeser, "the schools are established...near also to the Holy Land, and where, at no distant day, we hope, the services of enlightened and intelligent Jews may be required."[13]

The Damascus Affair, which later became a rallying point for Jewish National feelings (as in the case of Moses Hess for example) inspired Ludwig Philippson, one of the leaders of German Jewry, to launch immediate plans for his "Jewish Missionary Society"[14], an organization which sought to function on three very different levels:

1) to counterbalance the process of assimilation, which divided the Jewish people into two separate groupings, namely, religious and secular, especially at a time when political borders threaten the feelings of Jewish solidarity.

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12 *Occident* 1:8 (Nov. 1843) pp. 390-393; 1:10 (Jan. 1844) p. 511.

13 *Occident* 1:8 (Nov. 1843) p. 393.

14 *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (further quoted as A.Z.zj.) 6z;17 (April 24, 1842) pp. 241-242; 6:24 (June 11, 1842) pp. 345-346; 6:39 (Sept. 24, 1842) pp. 573-574. For more details on Ludwig Philippson's approach, see J. Kellner, "Issues and Trends in Jewish Philanthropy up to the End of the Sixties in the Nineteenth Century," *Betefuzot Hagolah*, 16:59 (Fall 1974) pp. 106-116 (in Hebrew).

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11 op. cit. *Proceedings at the Session for 5636, held at the City of Philadelphia, May 20, 1876,* New York, 1876. See also I. Elbogen, "The Montefiore Testimonial Fund and American Israel," *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society,* No. 37 (1947) pp. 95-101.

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2) to concentrate all Jewish efforts on the main objective of Jewish survival, instead of diverting energy on secondary issues rooted in local vested interests.
3) to direct the energy of the young Jew toward his Jewish community, and to strengthen his Jewish identity by involving him in community and inter-organizational issues.

As was typical in those days, Philippson's first proposal for his Jewish Missionary Society was related to Palestine and exploited world-wide Jewish sympathy for the establishment of a Jewish Hospital in Jerusalem.[15] For a time it appeared as if Christian missionary activity in Jerusalem would give it further impetus and lend its active assistance on the city's destitute Jewish community. However, the distress of the impoverished Jews in Jerusalem served to sharpen the interest of their brethren in Europe. In turn this heightened concern fanned the conflict between the contenders of the traditional aid pattern and the younger people, who sought to bring about a radical change in rendering aid to the needy in Palestine. This development served to polarize approaches to philanthropy not only vis-a-vis Palestine but in relation as well to planning emigration to America.[16]

The trend toward concerted action as an expression of overall Jewish solidarity stands out quite clearly in the Mortara Affair (1858)[17] which further spurred unification and led, inter alia, to the setting up of national bodies for supra-communal tasks, such as the Board of Delegates of American Israelites in 1859[18], and the first venture in forging a

world-wide Jewish alliance, namely, the Alliance Israelite Universelle in 1860.[19] But in the last analysis, it was basically the dire predicament of Russian Jewry which again pointed the way to overall Jewish cooperation. To be sure, by the early 'Forties, there had already been an initial attempt at collaboration between German Jewry and its sister community in the U.S.A. over emigration to the New World.[20] But essentially it was the famine in West Russia (i.e. Poland and Lithuania) of the late 'Sixties which brought about joint action and promoted the creation of coordinating national and international bodies out of the multitude of local committees, thereby encouraging supra-communal intervention in a common program agreed on by the Jewish organizations both in Europe and the U.S.A.

The appearance of Russian refugees in the cities along the eastern German border, and the response of the Assistance Committees in Memel and Koenigsberg, made the Western Jewry aware of the suffering of Russian Jews. The influx of the "poor aliens" spurred local committees to organize on a national level, but there was also a trend to halt sporadic intervention and to direct it into one channel of controlled activity. Only a comprehensive approach to philanthropy could make possible effective exploitation and efficient utilization of resources, and, indeed, only a broader organizational framework could succeed in this mission. It was the influx of refugees which prompted the founding of the Organization of Jewish Congregations in Germany ("Deutsch Israelitischer Gemeindebund"), and its most important and urgent function was to organize charitable institutions and to work out a uniform policy for offering assistance to the poverty-stricken

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15 *A.Z.J.* 6:39 (Sept. 24, 1842) pp. 573-574; 6:41 (Oct. 8, 1842) pp. 601-602, 8 : 15 (April 8, 1844) pp. 205-206.

16 L. Philippson, "Wie ist den russischen Juden zu Hilfe zu kommen," *A.Z.J.* 10:5 (Jan. 26, 1846) pp. 61-64.

17 B.W. Korn, *The American Reaction to the Mortara Case,* Cincinnati, 1957.

18 See M.J. Kohler, "The Board of Delegates of American Israelites," *P.A.J.H.S.* No. 25 (1925); A. Tarshish, "The Board of Delegates of American Israelites," *P.A.J.H.S.* 48:1 (Sept. 1959).

19 "L'Affaire Mortara," *Archives Israelites,* Nov. 1858. "L'Alliance Israelite Universelle," ibid. Dec. 1858. See also N. Leven, *Cinquante ans d'histoire de L'Alliance Israelite Universelle* (1860-1910) 2 vol. Paris 1911-1920.

20 *A.Z.J.* 10:7 (Feb. 9, 1846) p. 97.

aliens.[21] The organization of the German congregations for supra-communal projects functioned for a brief period in competition with the Alliance Israelite Universelle, Paris, which from its beginning sought to provide a universal framework for tasks in which the organizing in Germany had become involved. But since great distress of Russian Jews also brought the representatives of the local assistance committees and the leaders of the German congregations into direct contact with leaders of the Alliance, this led to a joint conference (Berlin, October 1869), which ultimately brought philanthropic activities on behalf of Russian refugees within one framework. Thus the Hauptgrenzkomitee in Koenigsberg, came to represent both the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Organization of German Jewish Congregations.

A parallel situation evolved in the United States. The distress of Russian Jewry and the European efforts to organize mass emigration, gave rise to spontaneous local activities in America as well, and as could be expected, a struggle developed among protagonists of different approaches. There were those who encouraged immigration, and others who sought "to have this cruel business stopped".[22] But this temporary struggle between various trends ultimately brought about the coordination of activities for the absorption of Russian immigrants, particularly within the framework of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites. It was this organization which became the official partner of the Jewish organizations in Europe, and arrived at an agreement with the latter on support for voluntary emigration of "young men and boys who are able and willing to work". (July 1870).

This first venture into universal Jewish social welfare, planned and organized on the basis of a clearly-defined division of duties between the leading Jewish organizations in America and Europe, constituted a decisive turning-point in the history of Jewish philanthropy.[23] It was the suffering of refugees fleeing from the famine in Russia which created a high measure of public awareness and advanced the cause of universal Jewish organization for tasks beyond the scope of local institutions wholly unprepared to cope on their own with aid on a world-wide scale. Thus, a framework for new universal-Jewish solidarity was created at the very moment when the dissolution of Western Jewry threatened to deepen and expand.

This turning point was given concrete expression in meetings convened at the time by Jewish leaders in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as in America, a development objectified by Cremieux in his address before the General Assembly of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, February 3, 1870:

> In the course of our activity towards "regeneration", news arrived about the famine in Poland and Russia. The Alliance deliberated and asked what should be done, and it appealed to the committees in Germany....There is no competition between Paris and Berlin. Nationality is not a divisive factor, and the distress of Jews is a uniting one.[24]

In such hour of trial, the reality dividing nations disappears, and is replaced by the common Past—and its clear and realistic expression is this universal Jewish solidarity, which sees in "Jewish brotherhood, universal brotherhood".

At the same meeting Chief Rabbi Isidore also gave the Alliance credit for reviving Jewish solidarity, noting in particular the cooperation between the religious movements, which had split and were becoming more and more divided within their own countries.

> The Alliance has reunited the Orthodox and the Reform; it has abandoned the ideas which divide people, and it has reunited them in religion, which is the love of humanity.[25]

However such encounters and acts of cooperation also gave rise to the need for framing a universal Jewish social policy. In the final analysis, the universal Jewish organizations brought to public view essential policies which local or national institutions might be tempted to ignore or even undermine. In this process of determining universal Jewish social policy, the distress of Russian Jewry again provided the turning point in the history of Jewish philanthropy. Neither the traditional charitable institutions which tried to relieve acute distress on a local level, nor the philanthropic organizations, which supported "regeneration" programs through educational activities in distant lands, could continue to operate as they had been operating in the past. They were now faced with immense social problems and needs which had to be identified and clearly defined. What was needed in the new era could no longer be met by traditional forms of charity geared to bare survival needs or to provisions for increased education. The widespread suffering in East Europe called for bold undertakings, such as mass emigration to the New World.

It is certainly correct that the distress of Russian Jewry did, as in the case of the "poor of Jerusalem", resurrect the entrenched religious debate, with respect to charity and to traditional education, in particular. On another plane the Alliance was reviled and criticized for concentrating most of its attention on educational activity, for sponsoring such activities in distant lands such as Asia and Africa, and for "ignoring for years the place closest to us and located on our continent".[26] But eventually these controversies subsided, for the critics of the traditional charitable institutions could not ignore situations which by their urgent nature called for types of institutions harnessed to unavoidable tasks at hand, including primarily the traditional assistance of "feeding the hungry and clothing the naked". On the other hand, the supporters of traditional charity also became partners to the general concern "that we must meet and talk in the future, in order to prevent hunger and suffering".[27] Many identified with a concept which was gaining wide acceptance, "that we must refrain from giving charity to the poor and must try to fight this chronic poverty by more efficient means".[28] Organizing support for Russian Jewry taught the leaders of philanthropic organizations "that it is not enough to take care of temporary distress, but we must correct defects which have taken root over hundreds of years...and the correction of which must lay the foundations for an existence that will be based on sound economic principles".[29] Public consciousness arrived at a clear realization that there was a need to create "something great that will pull up the evil by its roots".[30] This realization became the basis for a declared policy of universal Jewish social welfare, ready to create the necessary organizational structures and tools for realizing their goal.

The first of such intercommunal projects, namely the organization of emigration to the U.S.A. at the end of 1869, spelled a turning point in that intervention was no longer geared to situations of acute distress, but began to encompass methods of social planning aimed at creating new ways of life and enlargement of opportunities for overcoming poverty among the disadvantaged. In other words, this first project by the intercommunal Jewish philanthropic establishment began to channel sporadic intervention into planned aid schemes under the aegis of one central authority, and by virtue of this departure the protagonists of comprehensive planning came into sharp

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21 "Bildung von Groesseren Armenverbaenden ...behufs Beseitigung der im Fremden Unterstuetzungswesen Herschenden Missbraeuche," as defined by the Constitution of the Deutsch-Israelitischer Gemeindebund, A.Z.J. 33:28 (July 13, 1869) p. 555.

22 Jewish Messenger, 27:16 (April 29, 1870) p. 6.

23 For more details see: Jacob Kellner, The First Project of Social Planning in Modern Jewish Society, Paul Baerwald School of Socil Work, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1974 (in Hebrew).

24 Bericht der Alliance Israelite Universelle, 1869, 2 Semester, pp. 39-40.

25 op. cit., pp. 47-50.

26 op. cit. 1870 1 Semester, p. 55.

27 op. cit. 1870 2 Semester, p. 18.

28 op. cit. 1869 1 Semester p. 54.

29 op. cit. 1870 2 Semester p. 85.

30 op. cit. 1870 2 Semester p. 84.

conflict with the humanitarians who insisted that the individual in distress came before impersonal planning and hence had to be accorded immediate help no matter what priorities had been established in accordance with the dictates of social planning.[31]

The shift in focus from overall Jewish support for the indigent Jews of Palestine to organized selective emigration to the U.S.A., as well as the shift from an emphasis on charity to the individual in distress, to methodical social planning to avert such a predicament, were the essential features of the struggle within Jewish philanthropy between the 'forties and the 'eighties of the nineteenth century.

[31] J. Kellner, "Contrasting Models to Community Welfare," this *Journal*, 51:1 (Fall 1974), pp. 67-72.

Social Work in Kibbutzim*

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There is a need for professional social workers in kibbutzim for the many cases in which the existing structure of the kibbutz is unable to cope with the problems of members who find themselves poorly equipped to participate properly in kibbutz life and do not find opportunities for self-expression and the satisfaction of their social and emotional needs.

This article will deal with the educational program for social workers conducted at the Midreshet Ruppin (labor college near Netanya) for the past six years.

The beginnings of social work under kibbutz auspices go back some 22 years, with the organization of the Station for the Care of Mother and Child. Today there are eight such stations, a residential center for children with emotional problems (56 beds), courses for special education, and treatment for brain-damaged children. Some sixteen years ago, the Union of Kibbutz Movements organized a service for vocational guidance and rehabilitation. It employs 15 social workers, plus a physician, a psychiatrist, psychologists and occupational rehabilitation workers.

The training program, which is the subject of this article, is the latest addition to the network of social services set up by the kibbutz movement. Like other aspects of kibbutz life it arose out of a felt need and adapted itself to existing conditions.

When the School of Social Work at Tel Aviv University was opened, there were about a dozen students, kibbutz members, who planned to return to their kibbutzim. The director of the School, Shimon Spiro, wished to organize a course built around the kibbutz as the central subject, instead of the traditional subjects of casework, group work and community organization. To this end, a committee was appointed, on whose behalf Gad Kaufman and Tova Adiv (both graduates of the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem) undertook a review of the social work problems arising in kibbutzim, and the existing machinery for handling them, and proposed their scheme of a model for social work in kibbutzim.

Committee Report

A brief summary of the Committee's report is given below.

It was found that there *is* a need for professional social workers in kibbutzim for the many cases in which the existing structure of the kibbutz is unable to cope with the problems of members who find themselves poorly equipped to participate properly in