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## BEYOND THE GREEN LINE:

### AMERICAN JEWISH SETTLERS IN JUDEA, SAMARIA AND GAZA

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**Eighteen Percent of the Settlers / Who Are They? / How Do They View the United States? / Why Did They Settle in Israel? / Why Did They Choose the Territories? / What About Democracy and Arab Rights? / Where Do They Stand on Gush Emunim and Messianism? / Conclusions**

#### Eighteen Percent of the Settlers

As the delicate tango of peace negotiations weaves back and forth across the international diplomatic halls, reports are emerging of a disturbing backlash by Jewish settlers in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. International press reports regularly depict Americans living in these areas as religious-nationalist extremists, often supporters of right-wing Rabbi Meir Kahane and obstacles to peaceful coexistence. Most recently, *Newsweek* in an article on dual citizenship (25 November 1985) emphasized how American Jews in the territories, including Kahane, cling to their United States passports, at least implying that their American citizenship was being used to protect extremists.

Although Americans are not the majority of Jewish settlers living in these areas, they do represent a substantial proportion of the Jewish population — 9,000, according to *Newsweek*, out of 52,000. Indeed, they represent no less than 15 percent of the approximately 60,000 American Jews living in Israel.

During the 1983-1984 academic year, I conducted lengthy interviews with an appropriately selected sample of 100 adult men and women, one per family unit, from some thirty-eight different settlements throughout the territories. All of the interviews were conducted between January and May of 1984. The results stand in stark contrast to the prevalent stereotype that the bulk of the settlers in the territories are

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political extremists and religious fundamentalists who are zealously driven by political messianism, and that the Americans among them are the most fanatical.

### Who are They?

The typical American settler in the territories is married, between the ages of thirty and forty and has an above average number of children. Most had three or four children, and stated that they expected to have more. Since about 75 percent of those interviewed were younger than forty years of age, it is reasonable to assume that many of them will have more children.

One of the most striking characteristics of the sample was the exceptionally high levels of education. Less than 10 percent of the men did not have a bachelor degree; about 17 percent had doctorates. Among the women, the educational levels were somewhat lower — 34 percent had less than a bachelor degree and none had a doctorate. However, more than 21 percent had master degrees, and about 45 percent had bachelor degrees. The level of education of the group is very high not only in comparison with other Israelis, but also when compared to Jews in the United States, a group which has one of the highest education levels in the world. Since there is most commonly an inverse relationship between level of education and number of children, their high educational level is particularly remarkable.

In contrast to the widely-held view of the American settlers as rebels against their parents and American society, a radically different reality emerged. For example, when their religious behavior is compared with that of their parents, only about 20 percent came from religiously non-observant homes; most were reared in either Orthodox or actively Conservative families. The vast majority also had intensive Jewish education; more than 40 percent of the men and 25 percent of the women continued their Jewish education on the post-high school level.

Whereas it is widely believed that there is little connection between affiliation with American Jewish youth organizations and subsequent immigration to Israel, that is not true for this group. Close to half had belonged to Orthodox Jewish youth groups with clear Zionist ideologies, such as Bnei Akiva and National Conference of Synagogue Youth, and 16 percent had belonged to non-Orthodox youth groups, such as Young Judea, Haborim, Betar, and

Conservative Judaism's United Synagogue Youth. Less than 30 percent had not been members of any Jewish youth group. There is nothing in these patterns to suggest that the American settlers had rejected the socialization which they received in their parents' homes, or that they were part of the *Baal Teshuva* movement (the movement of "returnees" to Orthodox Judaism) which has received extensive media coverage recently. For most of the sample, their current religious behavior conforms with that of their parents.

### How Do They View the United States?

Seventy-five percent of those interviewed immigrated to Israel between 1967 and 1980, and virtually all of them retain their American citizenship. When asked to identify their parents' political affiliation in the United States, the overwhelming majority responded that their parents are Democrats. Only five indicated that either or both parents are Republicans. With respect to their own political affiliation in the United States prior to their immigration to Israel, almost all stated that they had voted as Democrats, Liberals (in New York), or independents; only one stated that he or she was politically conservative. Thus, their political socialization and behavior is consistent with their past. They are clearly within the American Jewish tradition of political liberalism.

However, these questions concerning political behavior were limited to the period prior to their immigration to Israel. Perhaps, their immigration to Israel and, especially, settling in the territories precipitated or was followed by a subsequent rejection of American society and American values. Quite to the contrary, the vast majority indicated that they are very proud of their American background, and many went so far as to argue that the quality of Israeli society and culture would benefit from the adoption of core American norms and values. Also, most stated that they view both their immigration to Israel and settling in the territories as consistent with their socialization in American society. For many, their settling is the culmination of a synthesis between their American values, in general, and their Jewish values, in particular.

The strong sense of pride and belief in the goodness of American society coupled with their Zionist convictions was typically expressed by a 40 year old man who immigrated to Israel in 1970 and

has lived in the territories since 1980:

*The United States is the greatest country on earth. I say it with a tremendous amount of conviction, without any hesitation. It affords the most amount of people a freedom which is unknown elsewhere on the globe. I also feel that Jews, however, belong in Israel.*

Another settler, a 44 year old man who left a prominent position in the United States and immigrated in 1983, stated that he continues to celebrate Thanksgiving in Israel by having a special family turkey dinner. He reported that at the Thanksgiving dinner he expresses, especially to his children, how grateful he is and how exceedingly proud he remains of his American background, and how they must continue to be. While the lengths to which this individual went were clearly atypical, it nevertheless is the case that over 80 percent of the sample indicated a strong sense of gratitude and generally very positive feelings about American society and their own American backgrounds.

#### Why Did They Settle in Israel?

Given the strong positive feelings about American society, why did they leave the United States? Almost all emphasized that they did not see themselves as having emigrated from American society, but having immigrated to Israel. In other words, their immigration was not the result of "push" factors, but almost solely of "pull" factors. They reported that they had not felt discriminated against nor had they experienced any material discomforts in American society. On the contrary, they were more materially comfortable in the United States than they are now in Israel. Their immigration to Israel, they reported, stemmed from religious and/or ethnic values, and/or because they simply felt more "at home" in Israel. As one 35 year old man who immigrated in 1978 and moved to a settlement shortly thereafter stated:

*I always knew I would make aliya (immigration to Israel). Israel was always central to my concerns. From a religious standpoint, it was, to me, where the action was in terms of trying to live in all spheres and not . . . the compartmentalized approach. Also, this is where I felt Jews express themselves. It's not because of anti-semitism or because of dislocation in the States, but simply, I felt Israel to be the natural place.*

Another 35 year old man, who immigrated to Israel in 1970 and moved to one of the newest

towns in the territories, stated that his immigration was directly related to two historical events which greatly affected world Jewry:

*I came of age at a time when the overwhelming Jewish event was the Six Day War. The Six Day War in a sense crystallized, on the one hand, the desire to return, to come on aliya, and on the other, the fear of another Holocaust. That, plus the other great event, the exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union. To someone who had a Zionist education and upbringing and was always sort of headed in that direction, those events really pushed me to actually make aliya. In fact, when I came to Israel, I felt absolutely at home, and I felt a great sense of fulfillment.*

#### Why Did They Choose the Territories?

Just as these do not sound like the expressions of political extremists and/or fanatically religious messianic zealots, neither do their motivations for settling in the territories. Less than 40 percent were primarily motivated by ideological factors. Most were motivated by associational factors — they were looking for a newly organized and fairly homogeneous community, or they wanted the conveniences of a suburban community. More respondents were concerned with the social and religious quality of life and better educational opportunities for their children than with a private home and a bit of lawn. In this respect they are probably indistinguishable from other American Jews who live within the pre-1967 borders of Israel (the Green Line).

Even among the minority who stated that they were primarily motivated to settle in the territories for ideological reasons, the majority did not seem particularly fanatical. As one settler, a 42 year old mother of eight children who immigrated in 1971 and was a founder of a new settlement in 1977 put it: "It was a feeling that settlement must be done, and we have no right to sit in Jerusalem when work has to be done here."

A representative of the most extremely ideologically motivated is a 46 year old mother of eleven children who immigrated to Israel in 1956 and moved to the territories almost immediately after the Six Day War in 1967. She concurred with the religio-ideological argument of her husband, who is non-American:

*The Six Day War was a sign from Heaven . . . The idea to come . . . (here) was my husband's. He*

said that G-d did His part, and now we have to do our part. Even though people are saying not to do anything because there will probably be a peace agreement, he said that we can't leave Judea and Samaria Judenrein.

However, she and the others who stated that they were primarily motivated by ideological factors were clearly in the minority. When I asked my respondents if they would have considered a new and similar type of community within the Green Line were one available, many said that they probably would have, and others stated that they might have. A substantial minority even stated that they would have preferred such a community within the Green Line.

#### What About Democracy and Arab Rights?

Fully 50 percent of those interviewed stated that they were strongly supportive of the value of democracy and indicated no qualifications, while another 29 percent, although strongly supportive, did qualify their support. Less than 15 percent rejected the appropriateness of democracy for Israel asserting that, "Democracy is not a Torah concept," "I want a religious state in Israel," "I hope for a Jewish monarchy in Israel," or, as one man opined, "Democracy is fine for the United States; in Israel, I would like to see a military junta."

When asked, "What should Israel do about the Palestinian Arabs in the territories?," 30 percent of the respondents were ready to extend democratic rights to the Arabs in the territories were they to accept citizenship with the same rights and responsibilities as Israel's Jews. The majority expressed concern for the individual civil rights of the Palestinian Arabs while rejecting the notion of corporate political rights. In contrast to widely-held beliefs about these settlers, only four percent subscribed to the extreme position that the Arabs should be forcibly driven out, while another 10 percent asserted that various economic incentives should be utilized to encourage them to leave. On the other hand, only three percent suggested that the territories should be divided up between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. Most felt that a *modus vivendi* either exists or must be found.

The vast majority also emphatically rejected the Kach movement of Rabbi Meir Kahane. When specifically asked about their attitudes towards it,

more than 80 percent rejected it as having no positive strategy, of being fanatical and a disgrace, and of causing more harm than good.

The extent to which American settlers reject both the proposals and tactics of Kach is also evident from their responses to a question concerning Israeli Arabs living within the pre-1967 borders of Israel. When asked if they believe that Israeli Arabs should have completely equal rights with Israeli Jews, 70 percent answered affirmatively. Of these, 38 percent responded without qualification, while 32 percent added either the condition that Israeli Arabs serve in the armed forces or do national service, or so long as they do not threaten the Jewish character of the country. Only 15 percent opposed equal rights for Israeli Arabs.

#### Where Do They Stand on Gush Emunim and Messianism?

Almost 90 percent of the sample were favorably disposed toward Gush Emunim, because of its practical results in settlement. Whereas most analysts of the origin of Gush Emunim attribute to that movement a commitment to messianic Zionism, the large majority of the sample do not identify with that aspect of the movement. When asked directly, "Do you view these times as the period of the Messiah?," 11 percent stated that they definitely do, and 21 percent stated that they do not. Almost 70 percent hope that these times are the period of the Messiah, or that it is now but full messianic redemption could take centuries. In response to a specific question, the overwhelming majority emphasized that their views concerning the Messiah were totally unrelated or only very indirectly related to their immigration to Israel and their settling in the territories. In this respect, there was virtually nothing in their conceptions of the Messiah which is any different from such conceptions among Orthodox Jews in general.

Finally, while most of the interviews were conducted prior to the arrest of the "Jewish Underground" (the group of settlers who have been convicted of having committed a number of violent actions directed against Palestinian Arabs in the territories), 20 percent were conducted just after the arrests. Those later interviews contained additional questions probing the reactions to the activities of the Underground. Virtually all of those questioned

strongly condemned the Underground on legal and pragmatic grounds and many on moral grounds as well. This was the case not only among those unaffiliated with Gush Emunim, but even among some of its strongest adherents. For example, a thirty-three year old mother of five who is actively involved with the settlement movement responded:

*If it turns out that there is truth in all of the allegations, I am opposed to every action . . . I am even more opposed when it comes to harming innocent people. Not only were those actions mistaken, but they were bad, very, very, bad. Number one, you're not allowed to harm innocent people, and number two, you're not allowed to take the law into your own hands when you have a sovereign government. . . The danger of undercutting the government by taking the law into your own hands is very serious . . . I think that, in terms of the basic ideology and principles of Gush Emunim, no reexamination is called for. With respect to actions, on the other hand, I think that there are attitudes we might have unconsciously or deliberately passed on that have given messages, not just to our children, but to ourselves, our neighbors and our society that there are times when taking the law into your own hands is a good thing. And they confuse it because this country doesn't have a long tradition of democracy and what we used to call 'the legitimate limits of protest.' They don't understand that. They think that if you are right, then to the end. So you can even sit in a bunker and blow yourself up if they're taking away Yamit, and you can throw soldiers off the roofs, as some lunatic fringe said . . . It's not that they're really lunatics. It's just that they don't understand what are the legitimate limits of protest. In a democratic system there's some point at which you say that I've come to the end. Now I've done all that I can and there's nothing more that I can do . . . You can't hurt your own army; you can't hurt other people; you can't undercut your own government . . . There are some*

*things that you just can't do, and that's when you have to fold your tail between your legs and go home, back to the drawing board and say, 'How come I couldn't influence'?*

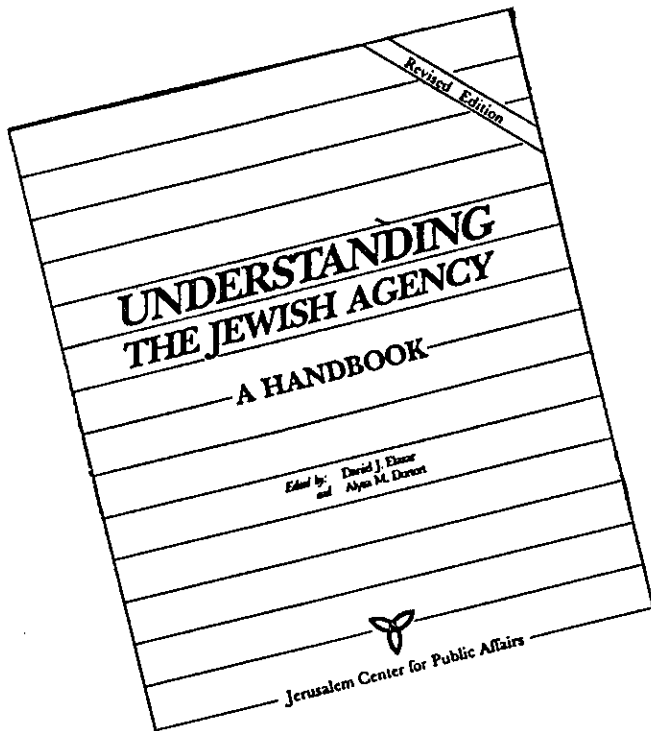
### Conclusions

The evidence presented underscores the wide gap between the conventional wisdom and reality. Among other things, it points to the continuing strong influence of basic American political and social values upon the American Israelis in the settlements. If their settling in the territories seems anomalous, it suggests a lack of understanding of the sociology and social psychology of a major segment of American Orthodox Jewry. While this is not the place to develop the analysis, it may be suggested that their settlement is fully consistent with, and indeed, is a natural consequence of the attempted synthesis of Orthodoxy and modernity — one of the responses developed by American Orthodox Judaism to the confrontation between the two. In essence, it is part of a much larger and deeper struggle and quest for a more complete Jewish life within modern society, and part of that entails living within what the settlers perceive as the whole land of Israel.

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