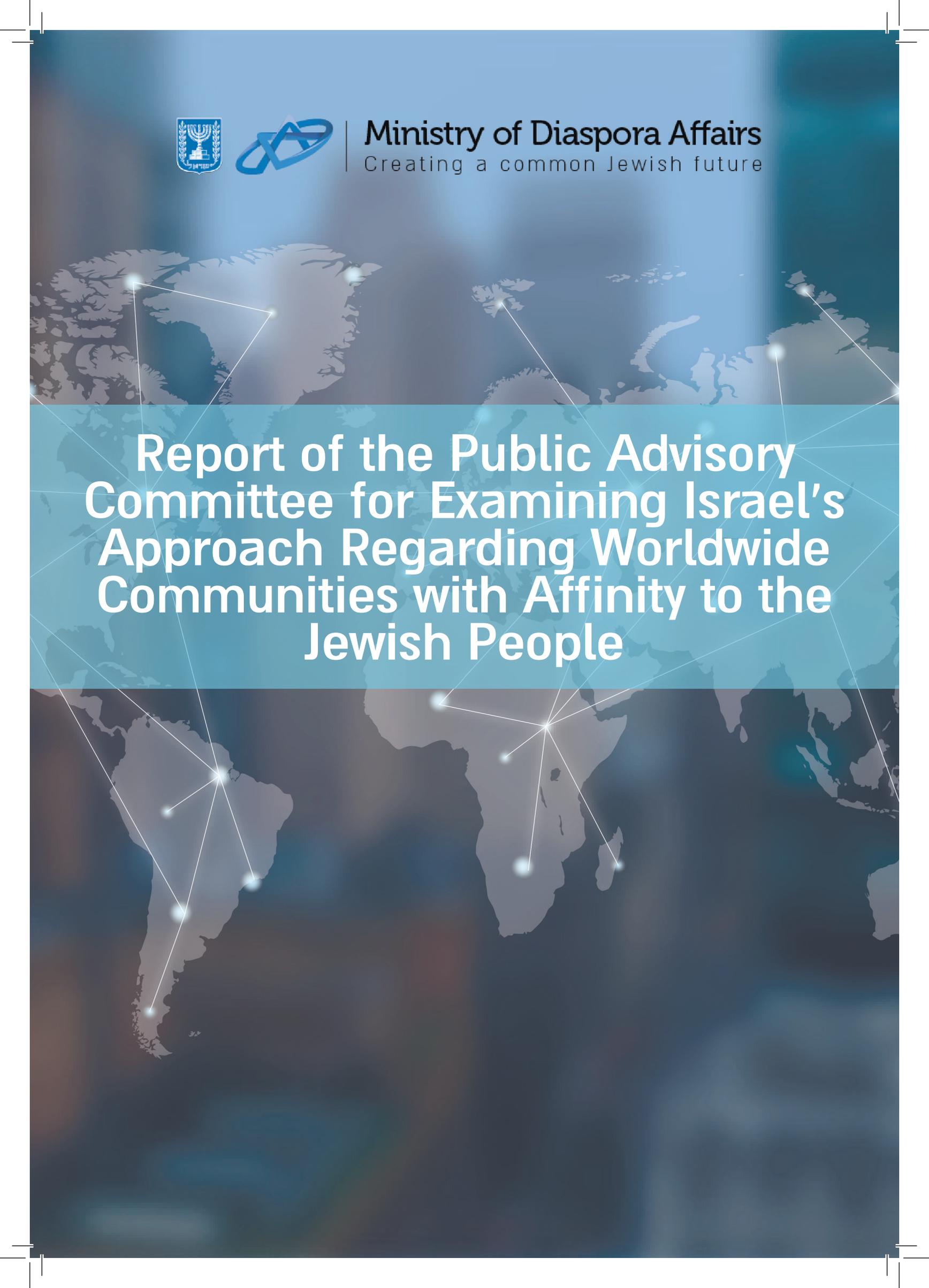




Ministry of Diaspora Affairs
Creating a common Jewish future

A dark blue world map with white lines connecting various points across the continents, symbolizing a global network or diaspora.

Report of the Public Advisory Committee for Examining Israel's Approach Regarding Worldwide Communities with Affinity to the Jewish People





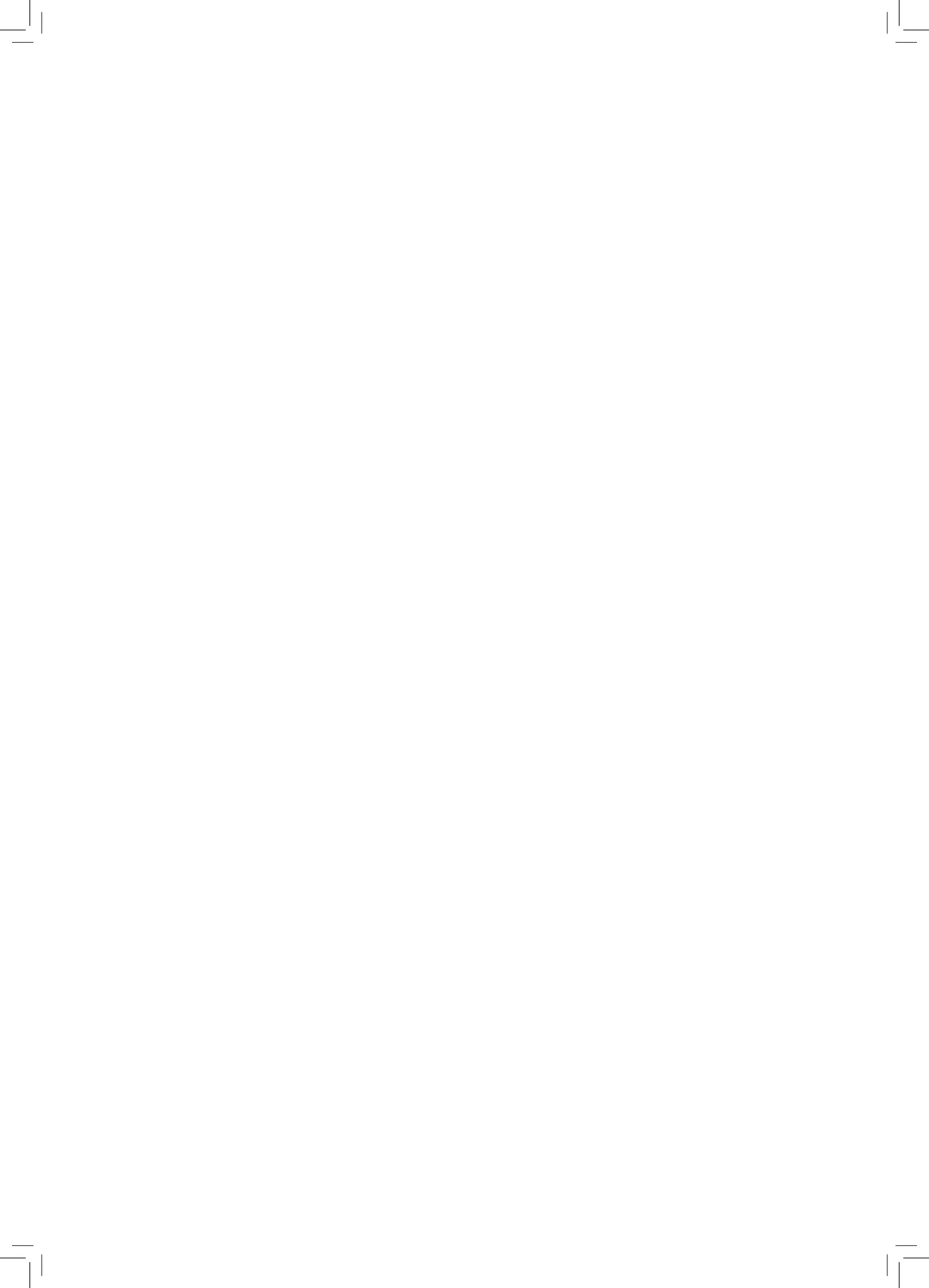
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Report of the Public Advisory Committee for Examining Israel's Approach Regarding Worldwide Communities with Affinity to the Jewish People

10 Adar, 5777 (March 10, 2017)

Committee members:

Dr. Ofir Haivry – Chair, Professor Benjamin Ish
Shalom, Adv. Zvi Hauzer, Adv. Rotem Yadlin, Mrs.
Fiamma Nirenstein



A word from the CEO

In recent years, there has been a growing awakening of various groups with affinity to the Jewish people or to Israel, even though they are neither Jews, nor are they entitled to the Law of Return. This is a fascinating trend with strategic potential for the Jewish people and the State of Israel, since these are tens of millions of people who can constitute circles of contacts, affinity and support for the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

The existence of these groups and their desire for a contact with the Jewish people raised the need to investigate the phenomenon and formulate operative recommendations pertaining to the State of Israel's treatment of this phenomenon, as well as thinking about the attitude of the Jewish people in the Diaspora towards these groups.

As a rule, we do not have a distinct category to which they can be associated, having the Law of Return on the one hand, and the Entry into Israel Law on the other.

That is why I have established a public advisory committee that will be tasked with examining the matter comprehensively and in a far-sighted manner, and with clarifying both the factual aspects of the existence of these communities as well as the possible long-term implications for any policy that will be formulated regarding them.

The committee is also required to formulate policy recommendations to the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs in order to lead their implementation within the government of Israel and among the Jewish people.

I would like to thank Dr. Ophir Haivri, Chairman of the Committee, and members of the Committee:

Prof. Benjamin Ish-Shalom, Adv. Zvi Hauser, Adv. Rotem Yadlin, Piama Nirenstein for their in-depth and thorough work and for having developed for the Israeli government the opportunity and possibility to lead effective policy and action regarding this issue.

We are committed to advancing and developing the subject, strengthening our ties and knowledge in this field and presenting it to the policy makers in Israel and the Jewish people and its institutions in order to bring about a prosperous future for the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Best regards,

Dvir Kahana

**Director General of the Ministry
of Diaspora Affairs**





משרד התפוצות

יוצרים עתיד יהודי משותף

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A. Abstract

In recent decades we have witnessed an unprecedented surge in the number and diversity of individuals and groups seeking to establish affinity with the Jewish People and with the State of Israel. Among them are some who wish to fully join the Jewish People, but others seek a different type of affinity, one which focuses on their affection and ties to the Jewish People and the State of Israel.

This represents an unparalleled development in the history of the Jewish People, both in scope and in nature.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Israel's second president, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, and a number of personalities connected to him, engaged in studying several of these communities and forming ongoing ties with them, but their efforts did not achieve long term impetus, fading when Ben-Zvi passed away. Since then, Israel's approach and that of Jewish institutions worldwide to the subject has been characterized by randomness and inconsistency. Several communities seeking affinity to the Jewish People enjoyed an official positive attitude (for instance, the "Falashmura", descended from Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity), whereas other communities, such as groups of descendants of crypto-Jews known as Anussim, have been ignored by the authorities so far as a result of the absence of any clear policy or guiding hand.

Today, only a few organizations and figures from Israel and abroad are active among those seeking ties to the Jewish People and to Israel, attempting to help bridge the gap between these communities and the Jewish and Israeli institutions. There is a lack of reliable and well-founded information in this area, even among researchers and organizations involved in these subjects for many years. Clearly, substantially expanded research and knowledge collection is necessary.

The committee, studying the situation, has listened to researches, organizations and representatives of communities with affinity, and has also received various written materials, all of which assisted in the compilation of the report.

The following are the committee's main findings and conclusions:

- The scopes of communities with affinity to Israel and the Jewish People, who are not considered Jews or eligible to the Right of Return, are significant and stable.
- This phenomenon is basically positive, and could be an important asset to Israel and to the Jewish People, even though it also poses challenges and difficulties.
- This is a very important subject for the country and for the Jewish People from several perspectives, and Israel must establish a clear policy regarding it.
- The committee concluded that there is a genuine need for creating systems that can study and collect information on these subjects, as well as form and maintain ties with different groups having an affinity to Israel and the Jewish People.
- The committee recommends that Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs establishes a system responsible for the subject of communities with affinity to the Jewish People. The system will engage, inter alia, in researching, collecting and coordinating the information relevant to these communities, in creating and nurturing ongoing ties with these communities, and in providing adequate response to inquiries and questions regarding these subjects, both by government entities as well as by organizations and individuals.
- The committee recommends that the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs strives to have the committee's proposed policy in this area adopted by Israel's government.



B. Background

Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish People. As such, its relations with the Jewish People are a central part of its values and goals. During most of the country's existence its relations with the Jewish People, the majority of whom resided outside its borders, were conducted along fairly clear-cut and constant lines: most of the world's Jews were organized in communities or in known organizations, and even those who were not, such as Jews living in Communist bloc countries which prohibited or severely limited Jews from establishing organizations, identified themselves as Jews and were clearly identified as such by their environment. Other phenomena were also always present, such as those who left the Jewish People of their own volition or by necessity, as well as those who wished to join it, but up until two decades ago the scope of individuals taking such steps was marginal in numbers and negligible in substance.

In the past two decades a series of developments began fundamentally altering this situation. The first is the enormous success of the Jewish population in Israel, which just a century ago numbered less than 1% of world Jewry, at the time of modern Israel's establishment just 5%, is now the largest single population worldwide, and slated in the coming years to constitute the absolute majority of the Jewish People. Along with the successful growth of the Jewish population in Israel, almost all other Jewish communities in the world have experienced an accelerated demographic decline, both in number and in substance (negative birth rate, accelerated aging), bringing many communities into a serious crisis, and some of the smaller ones to the brink of eradication. These processes lead to a constant increase in Israel's importance as far as the composition of Jewish identity, on one hand, and to the continued undermining of traditional communities, on the other. Together, these two processes create a gradual transformation in the balance between world Jewry and Israel, turning the latter into the epicenter of the Jewish world and therefore responsible for its destiny.

Simultaneous to the demographic processes described above, and as a direct consequence of the weakening of traditional Jewish communities worldwide, boundaries defining communities tend to blur and new phenomena surface outside of them. These phenomena, which existed in the past but were numerically insignificant, today encompass tens and even hundreds of thousands of people: individuals who long ago abandoned any Jewish community framework and at times even adopted a lifestyle opposed to its principles but did not officially sever all ties to the Jewish People (such as by converting to another religion): their relations with the Jewish People remain undefined. More specifically, these are people of Jewish origin who abandoned any attribute of Jewish life long ago, often marrying non-Jews, yet they or their offspring (and occasionally also their non-Jewish spouses) express a degree of connection to, and identification with, the Jewish People and its ideas. This phenomenon has manifested lately even among descendants of Jews who converted to, and fully embraced, Christianity, yet they wish to maintain a bond with the Jewish People, be it as Christians, as faithless persons or as individuals returning to Judaism's fold. Famous examples include Chelsea Clinton, Hillary and former President Bill Clinton's daughter, marrying a Jew in a ceremony where both a rabbi and a Christian priest officiated; or the wedding of Lauren Bush, former President George. H. Bush's granddaughter, to a Jew in a ceremony conducted by a rabbi despite the bride not converting to Judaism. Another example is that of Laurent Fabius, France's Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Prime Minister, whose Jewish parents both converted to Christianity after WWII, yet he publicly identifies with his Jewish legacy. Interestingly, although Fabius is a Jew according to Halakhah, he is not eligible to the Right of Return because his parents converted to Christianity.

The State of Israel has also contributed to the complexity through laws and legal rulings. The Law of Return as currently interpreted has created a definition of eligibility that is an unstable compound of Halakhic and other

components. The legal practice in Israel today applies Right of Return eligibility to individuals who can prove Jewish ancestry on their mother's side, or who are relatives of a Jew up to the third generation back, even if the applicant is not Jewish, provided the Jewish relative, whether on the father's or the mother's side, did not convert to another religion. This results in the Right of Return being granted to people who are by no means Jews nor consider themselves Jews, such as the wife of a man whose father is Jewish; yet denied to some who Halakhically are Jews, such as the child of a Jewish couple who both converted to Christianity, making the child Jewish, in fact, yet ineligible for the Right of Return.

Israel caused an additional level of complexity in the past two decades, when it created what is essentially an "Immigration for Conversion" track. Israel, displaying good will as it sought to facilitate the immigration of communities with distinct affinity to the Jewish People yet who are not eligible to the Right of Return, but who have led a fully Jewish lifestyle over many years, allowed immigration of these communities together with a process of full conversion. Examples include the Falashmura community, descended from Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity, and the Bnei Menasheh community from North-East India, whose members claim to be descendants of the biblical Menasheh tribe. Following their conversion, these communities took on the status of new immigrants (Olim). The Israeli government's solution resulted in the formation of a mechanism which in principle enables bringing in communities with affinity to the Jewish People but who are not eligible under the Right of Return, and making them eligible here to the Right of Return. So far, tens of thousands of people have become eligible to the Right of Return via this mechanism, but the mechanism is only activated by specific government decisions with respect to particular groups, and is not available across the board for all groups.



Descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity, called "Falashmura" in the Jewish Agency Complex in the city of Gondar, Gondar County, Ethiopia 2013 (Photo: Ofir Haiyry).

As already mentioned, up until several decades ago, the practical implications of this situation seemed marginal both in principle and in numbers. Now, however, the phenomenon of affinity embraces hundreds of thousands of people at the least and will, in the not too distant future, encompass many millions. Currently, several million individuals formally qualify for immigration based on the Right of Return but are not linked to a Jewish community, and sometimes do not even consider themselves Jews. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of people or even millions consider themselves Jews, or at the least, descendants of Jews, some of whom are active in



communities with Jewish attributes yet do not qualify for the Right of Return. These groups have feelings of affinity towards the Jewish People and Israel, even though in most cases they do not meet the conventional definitions of the Jewish People.

The picture becomes even more complex when another surprising phenomenon of the last years is added to the mix: new and ever-growing circles of individuals who feel affinity to the Jewish People. This phenomenon hardly existed before the establishment of the State of Israel, owing to the persecution and danger associated in almost all countries worldwide with being connected to the Jewish People. The establishment of an independent Jewish state set off a change, with the discovery of small communities and individuals who openly sought links to the Jewish People and to the State of Israel. But in the last two decades a number of developments, first and foremost among them being technological capability that enables the free flow of information anywhere an internet connection exists, greatly accelerated the phenomenon as far as both numbers and quality.

Among the groups which until Israel's establishment were outside the circle of recognized Jewish communities but have since joined it, the most striking example is that of the entire Ethiopian Jewry, comprising the "Beta Israel" Jews recognized as part of the Jewish People and most of whom immigrated to Israel in the 1980s, and the Falashmura, descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity, tens of thousands of whom were brought to Israel during the 1990s as part of a specific government decision. The Bnei Menasheh community is a smaller but equally significant group. In addition to approximately three thousand members who immigrated to Israel and converted there to Judaism per special government decisions, some seven thousand members are still waiting in India to immigrate.



A group from the Bnei Menasheh community of India arriving in Israel to complete the conversion and Aliyah program in accordance with government decision. Ben Gurion Airport, 2014 (photo: OfirHaivry).

Similar phenomena exist in other countries although not necessarily directly connected to the wish to immigrate to Israel. Of course, recognizing Judaism in any community worldwide entails the future possibility of immigration to Israel. The most prominent example is that of the "Belmonte Conversos", a group of families forcibly converted to Christianity in Portugal about 500 years ago but who maintained clandestine Jewish lifestyles and remained

concealed and isolated from the Jewish world for centuries until their reconnection with the Jewish world in 1917. Gradually, some 35 families, from a community that numbers about 200 members, restored open Jewish identity; in 1992 their Judaism was officially acknowledged by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. Another example is the community of Majorca Island conversos, descendants of Jews forcibly converted to Christianity: ironically, local hostility towards them ensured they remained separate, and identified as "Chuetas" (pigs) until the 20th century. The estimated total of Jewish descendants is 20,000 at most. Currently, hundreds are at some stage of return to Judaism; their Jewish origins have been recognized by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate and other rabbinic entities, which in principle entitle them to the ceremony of returning to Judaism rather than conversion.

Besides these structured and well-documented groups, other much larger communities, who have been active in one or another way over the past two decades and whose Jewish descent has been in the process of internal examination by various groups or associations, number at least hundreds of thousands. Many attempt at some point to forge a link with the Jewish People and Israel. These groups represent a very wide range of disparate phenomena and communities. The largest group consists of descendants of Conversos in Latin America and in South-Western United States, as well as in Southern Europe (mainly Spain, Portugal, France and Italy), but there are also "Red" descendants of Conversos, Jews in Eastern Europe who concealed their identity from their children and grandchildren in fear of the Communist regime, and in many cases without converting to another religion. They began to return to Judaism only after the fall of the Communist bloc about 25 years ago.

Another phenomenon of increasingly growing importance relates to descendants of Jews in Europe and the USA who are not eligible to the Right of Return. This may be because they are more than third generation descendants of a Jew on their father's side (such as a male Jew's great-grandson) or because a family member converted to Christianity, negating the offspring's eligibility to the Right of Return. Current estimates number hundreds of thousands of people with this status.

Other groups claiming more distant Jewish origins include the Lemba in South Africa and the Igbo in Nigeria, and additional groups in India and Southern Asia. Alongside affinity based on claimed Jewish ancestry, the trend of aspiring to connect with the Jewish People and even become Jewish based on conceptual and spiritual affinity alone has been expanding. A few small communities in the world have already successfully undergone the process of conceptual formulation, at the end of which they adopted a Jewish lifestyle, converted to Judaism, were recognized by Israel, and eventually immigrated to Israel. One notable group of this type is the San Nicandro community. At its peak it numbered a few dozen members. It formed in southern Italy in the first half of the 20th century and most of its members immigrated to Israel a few years after its establishment. Similarly, the "Bnei Moshe" group, from a Peruvianborn population, converted to Judaism as a community in the second half of the 20th century. Following their conversion, the majority immigrated to Israel in the 1990s, coming in successive groups. Today the community in Israel numbers several hundred. Many groups such as the Abayudaya in Uganda, likely totaling some tens of thousands of people worldwide, seek to undergo a similar process.

Furthermore, a growing number of people worldwide wish to convert as individuals. The motives for these processes are diverse and complex, starting with the search for identity or a spiritual journey and ending with ideas originating in the "New Age" movement which has flourished in the West since the late 1960s and sees eclectic approaches to spiritual exploration and alternative lifestyles.



It should be emphasized that relative to the past 2,000 years of Jewish history, this is an unprecedented phenomenon both quantitatively and qualitatively. For centuries few requests, as far as we know, were made worldwide for conversion. Even when they increased during the 20th century, they were mostly driven by a person's wish to marry a Jewish spouse. Joining the Jewish People on a large scale, whether by individuals or groups, had not occurred since the Second Temple era. Currently some 6,000 new applications for orthodox conversions are submitted annually to the Israel Rabbinate court, as are thousands more worldwide. Assuming a total annual rate of 10,000 orthodox conversions annually, we can assume that more than 100,000 individuals seek to join the Jewish People every decade, and the trend is constantly growing. We also assume that for every application to convert, 10 people for various reasons do not attempt to actively convert (due to personal or economic circumstances) but nonetheless share the values that drive active conversion. In other words, in recent years a pool of millions of people seek to form an active bond with the Jewish People, even though only a small number of them wish to convert and to immigrate to Israel.

C. Historical survey

Ancient history: destruction and renewal

This historical survey will elucidate the fact that the large-scope phenomenon of societies and communities expressing affinity with the Jewish People is deeply rooted in our history. In this survey we will limit ourselves to presenting a frame of reference and general outline of the phenomenon.

As far back as the Bible, we find figures or societies claiming affinity to the Jewish People, even though they could not prove their claim with historical facts. Our nation's ancestors present figures displaying partial affinity to the nation and its history, such as Abraham's household members who were circumcised; or some of the forefathers' children who did not belong to the dynasty that would later become the Children of Israel, such as the descendants of Abraham's offspring from Ketura; or Isaac's son Esau, whose descendants according to the Bible would become the nations of Midian and Edom. All these had strong affinity to the Israelite people although they did not belong to it in biblical times.

Other figures joined the nation of Israel. One such is the matriarch of the Davidic dynasty, Ruth the Moabite, who chose to attach herself to her childless mother-in-law Naomi and the latter's identity with the famous words that became the quintessential symbol of bonding with the Jewish People: "Your people shall be my people and your G-d, my G-d" (Book of Ruth 1:16). Other figures include Hiram, a very able coppersmith sent by the King of Tyre to assist King Solomon in erecting the Temple. The Bible finds it imperative to note explicitly, twice, that Hiram's mother was a widow either from the tribe of Naftali or Dan, and his father was from Tyre (Naftali: I Kings 7:13-14; Dan: II Chronicles 2:2-13). There is also the case of the Israelite woman among those who left Egypt under Moses' leadership; her son, accompanying her, is specifically noted as having an Egyptian father.

In addition to those individual figures, entire groups expressed affinity, as inferred from the Bible, and joined the People of Israel. Examples include the Kenites, a clan of nomads, kin to the tribe of Midian, with close ties to the Israelites throughout the generations, starting from Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (and possibly also Caleb Ben Yephuneh the Kenazi), the advance warning King Saul sent to the Kenite tribe to stay away from the war zone of Israel's anticipated battle with Amalek, and the progeny of Yehonadav son of Rechav the Kenite, who became a religious group known as the Rechavites, zealous for the G-d of Israel, and who ultimately joined the nation of Israel. The description of the Israelites leaving Egypt "**and a mixed multitude went up also with them**" (Exodus 12:38) may be similarly interpreted to imply that in one form or another they joined the Israelite people and became part of it. It is unclear whether this term refers to a group of descendants of Israelites who had been assimilated into other nations, or a population of mixed ancestry that were by no means descendants of Israelites.

In all of these cases one can delineate an "inward" movement, towards closer ties or even complete unification with the Israelites. But a simultaneous reverse, "outward" movement has always existed, distancing and even disconnecting from Israel. Quite naturally, this outward movement always intensified following political or spiritual devastation, when ties to the nation of Israel were seen by some as an unbearable burden. The most prominent biblical example is, of course, that of the Ten Tribes, members of the Northern Israelite Kingdom. The destruction of their kingdom related in II Kings 17:6 took place in the year 722 BCE: "The king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes." Soon the connection between Israelites in the land of Israel, and the exiles, was lost. The Ten Tribes disappeared from the stage of history as an active part of the Israelite nation. However, the exile of these tribes, their disappearance and the hope that at least some of their offspring would return some day to the nation's embrace, have become a central component of the Jewish story for 2500 years. This report later discusses groups located in various places like Africa, Afghanistan, China, India and Japan¹ who currently claim ancestry from the ten exiled tribes.



The narrative of the Northern Israelite Kingdom's exile accentuates two important spinoff processes: on one hand, survivors who avoided exile and remained in Israel at least partially preserved their Israelite identity; on the other hand, adoption of concepts and even Israelite identity by some of the immigrants who replaced the banished Israelites.

Normative for ancient times, and still occurring on occasion nowadays, wars drive population shifts, sometimes deliberately (the population exchange between Turkey and Greece following WWI) and sometimes unintentionally (the refugee problem created by the current war in Syria). On becoming victorious, the Assyrian Empire and its successor, the Babylonian Empire, commonly exiled populations which had stubbornly resisted them. Exiles were generally a defeated kingdom's social elites, however, whereas peasants and inhabitants of the remote locations were left in place to cultivate the land, grow crops and pay taxes to the empire. That was also true for the ruined Kingdom of Israel, where the poor population was left in place. Sensible Assyrian logic anticipated that in the absence of political and spiritual leadership, these impoverished remnants of the Israelite population lacked the ability to organize their own independent spiritual and material leadership, and would therefore soon assimilate and be absorbed into the stronger surrounding populations.

This projection certainly came true with respect to some of those who remained behind, but in effect two processes preserving Israelite identity developed among the remnants of Northern Israel. The first was adherence by part of the population remaining in the Northern Kingdom's region to the original Israelite identity, adherence which the Bible describes as one of the pinnacles of the entire Israelite story. Shortly after the Northern Kingdom's destruction, Hezekiah King of Judah decided to introduce spiritual and ritual amendments, at the heart of which was an especially large Passover sacrifice in the Temple. The holiday's date was postponed by one month to enable as large a crowd as possible to reach Jerusalem. When the King of Judah sent emissaries to the lands of the northern tribes, inviting them to participate in this Passover sacrifice, some reacted scornfully, rejecting the offer. By contrast, others from the tribes of Asher, Ephraim, Menasheh, Zevulun and Issachar accepted, coming to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem in Iyar, the second month, together with their brethren, the population of Judah. This event is described as the first Passover jointly celebrated by peoples of the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel since the partition of the United Kingdom following the reign of King Solomon. The Bible describes it as a spiritual and moral highlight in the history of the nation: "So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem" (II Chronicles 30:26).

From this description, it is reasonable to assume that at least part of the remaining Northern Israelite population continued to maintain some form of Israelite identity and linked to the Kingdom of Judah as its cultural and spiritual center. But even after the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah and the Temple some 150 years later, and the exile of its elite to Babylon, it is clear that not all Israelites left the country: the Bible explicitly describes the "people left behind in the Land of Judah" (II Kings 2:25). Although the remnants (She'erit) of Israel in the north of the country and the remnants (She'erit) of Judah in the south survived outside the mainstream of the Jewish People, they at least partially maintained a distinct Jewish identity, both in Judah and in the northern region. As such, they served as a significant foundation for the rapid restoration of the Israelite presence both in Judah and in the northern region at the time of the Return of Zion, which commenced with Zerubbavel just some 40 years after the Temple's destruction.

Simultaneous to the survival of the She'erit Israel within Israel, a wholly different process took place: Assyria brought a foreign population into the country to replace the exiled Israelites. According to the Bible, the incomers were from the Babylonian regions of Hamath, Sepharvaim, Ivah and Cuth (the last name becoming a Biblical eponym designated them all as "Cuthim"). These groups responded in an unexpected manner when exposed to She'erit Israel and the Israelite faith: instead of absorbing She'erit Israel into their culture, thereby eliminating it, many of these immigrants gradually assimilated into the Israelite faith. They even asked the King of Assyria to send them an Israelite Cohen (priest) from the exiles to teach them the Israelite faith.

Eventually this population of immigrants, centered in Samaria (and giving rise to their name as "Samaritans")

up to this day) adopted a version of the Israelite religion, most likely the Halakhah that had been practiced by the Northern Kingdom's priesthood prior to exile: based solely on the Five Books of Moses and unaccepting of later Biblical works collectively known as Prophets and Hagiographa (Ketuvim), or even explication presented in Mishnah and Talmud. The Samaritans established their Temple on Mount Gerizim, rather than in Shiloh or Dan, sites of previous Northern Kingdom temples, since Jerusalem was not in the Northern Kingdom's domain. The Samaritans as a group developed a complex relationship with the People of Israel, at times of alliance and at other times of hostility. They continued to, and still, live in Israel. They number several hundreds and are in fact one extended family congregated around that same Israelite priest sent to lead the Cuthim.²

A phenomenon parallel to the adoption of the Israelite faith by the foreigners who settled in Samaria took place also in the regions of Southern Judah and the northern Negev, which were partly depleted of Jews following the occupation and destruction brought about by Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian, enabling Edomites to enter from east of the Jordan river and settle. Gradually, under the influence of She'erit Judah and in a very similar process to that occurring in Samaria, many adopted some form of the Israelite faith. Later, during the Hasmonean period, the independent Kingdom of Judah was reestablished and took control of these Edomites, demanding a general conversion which, as far as is known, was not met by any substantial objection. The most prominent converts were an Edomite family, the House of Antipater, whose members first became senior stewards and close allies of the Hasmoneans, and later on exploited the rise of the Romans to crown themselves kings of Judah.

The knowledge we have points to the fact that these converted Edomites considered themselves an integral part of the nation of Israel. An offspring of this dynasty, Herod, became king of Judah under the auspices of Rome. Herod's grand construction projects brought Jerusalem and the Second Temple to the height of their glory. His grandson, Herod Agrippa, who also ruled over substantial parts of the Kingdom of Judah, was suspected of initiating a rebellion against the Romans, was loved by his Jewish subjects, and was favorably regarded by the sages of the Mishnah ("Khazal"). The sages relate how, on the festival of Succot, the king publicly read the Torah according to the commandment in the book of Deuteronomy 31: "King Agrippa stood and received it and read standing, and the sages praised him for doing so. When Agrippa reached the commandment of Deuteronomy 17:15 that 'you shall not place a foreigner over you as king', his eyes ran with tears, but they said to him, 'Do not fear, Agrippa, you are our brother, you are our brother!'"

Later on, as the Jewish population within the Roman Empire strengthened both spiritually and numerically, a remarkable large-scale phenomenon of individual conversions to Judaism occurred. According to tradition, among the converts and their descendants one can count, inter alia, central spiritual figures, such as Shemaya and Avtalion, Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Meir, Onkelos (who translated the Bible into Aramaic) as well as many gentiles who remain nameless but are described in the Talmud as requesting that Shamai and Hillel convert them to Judaism (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat, 2:5).

We see that in the Jewish tradition in general, and in the Talmud in particular, the prevalent view is that conversion is open to all, and by studying the Torah, even descendants of the Jews' greatest enemies can become important spiritual leaders of the Jewish People. Clearly, spiritual affiliation prevails over biological affiliation. Thus we find descriptions in the Talmud of Haman's descendants teaching Torah in Bnei Brak, and Sisera's descendants teaching Torah in Jerusalem; Rabbi Meir is described as descended from Emperor Nero, and the sages Shemaya and Avtalion as descended from Sennacherib. According to this approach even the descendants of the most detested gentiles could attain spiritual levels that surpass the most privileged Jewish families. The Talmud describes a particular Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) when Shemaya and Avtalion, arriving at the Temple, were greeted with great love by the crowd. Deeply offended by the public's obvious preference for the two sages, the High Priest saluted them with a nasty jibe, "Come in peace, sons of Gentiles", alluding to their lineage from converts. But the public was quick to retort: "Come, sons of Gentiles who do Aaron's work in peace, but the sons of Aaron, who do not do Aaron's work in peace, shall not come in peace."³

The widespread phenomenon of conversion to Judaism was not limited to within the Land of Israel. Given that the



exile and dispersion of the Jewish People from its land created significant Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire and beyond its boundaries, they exerted significant ideological influence on their surroundings. An important example of conversion was the Kingdom of Adiabene, in current Kurdistan. Located on the border of the Roman Empire, conversion to Judaism occurred, at least among the higher social echelons, and even among some of the local royals, during Christianity's early centuries. Queen Helena and her two sons, who became the kings Monobaz and Izates, converted to Judaism, contributed to the Temple, and during the Great Revolt against the Romans even sent warriors from Adiabene to fight side by side with the rebelling Jews. This conversion most probably was brought about by the influence of the strong Jewish community living there, and whose members were descended from those exiled to Babylon. This phenomenon may be due to the fact that at least some members of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were exiled to this region, and perhaps some among them remained particularly disposed towards adopting Judaism.

With respect to areas in the Roman Empire, ideological and spiritual Jewish influence spread exponentially, despite the great political crises in the Land of Israel, like the fall of the Hasmonean State in 37 BCE, the turning of the Kingdom of Judah into a Roman province in 6 CE and again in 44 CE, and even the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Unlike other nations which, when defeated, disappeared or willingly integrated into the Roman Empire and its culture, the Jews, despite many being exiled and enslaved, not only successfully preserved their identity but attracted many others in a way that greatly affected the empire. In addition to this large-scale phenomenon of conversion to Judaism, there was an even broader trend of adopting aspects of Jewish perspectives and values without fully converting. It entailed both observing the Mitzvot (commandments) and being exposed to economic and public maltreatment by the authorities. These communities, observing the basics of Torah without converting, were nonetheless labeled "G-d fearing." They are the focus of many Talmudic discussions regarding commandments to be upheld by the progeny of the Biblical Noah: according to Jewish tradition, these are the minimum commandments to which all humans are obligated.

Among the Roman elite of early Christianity numerous prominent figures were sympathetic to Jewish ideas, and were often persecuted on that account by the authorities who viewed Judaism and its beliefs as fundamentally undermining the Empire's values. Judaism's sympathizers were accused by the Empire of "atheism" in the sense of heresy: against the Empire's G-ds and the Emperors' divinity; in their opposition to the values of cruelty and arbitrariness, reflected in the Empire's justification of ruthless expansionist conquests and in gladiator games as a form of popular entertainment, on which the Empire was founded; and because of their desire to replace all these with the adoption of Jewish ethics based on the belief in one G-d. Among known prominent figures from the Empire's highest classes who were sympathizers of Judaism are Fulvia, wife of the leading Senator Saturninus, in the time of Emperor Tiberius; Popea, wife of Emperor Nero; Consul Flavius Clemens and his wife Flavia Domitilla who were nephew and niece of the emperors Titus and Domitian, and according to historian Dio's account: "They were both accused of atheism, an accusation for which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were convicted. Several of them were executed and the rest at least were deprived of their possessions, but Domitilla was merely exiled to Ventetone."

All these are examples of an inward movement towards Judaism and the wish for manifest affinity. But as in Biblical times, the Greco-Roman era is also marked by outward trends, moving away from Judaism. Even at the outset of the Return to Zion, with the first returnees' arrival from Babylon to Zion in the days of Ezra, a crisis is mentioned concerning mixed marriages between male Jews and gentile women native to the host country and who, it is implied, did not convert to Judaism. The Bible notes Ezra's efforts at solving the situation, which finally resulted in the decision to separate from the women and their offspring (Ezra, 9-10). This phenomenon is also noted numerous times vis-à-vis the Persian regime although apparently with lesser frequency.

The change of greatest significance in this context occurred following the conquest of the entire region, including the Land of Israel, by the Greeks. In the centuries which followed, the main factor in pulling Jews outward, away from their identity, was the undeniable attraction of Hellenistic culture and concepts: the process of moving towards them was termed "Hellenization." Marked by certain typical personal norms, Hellenization can be viewed,

first and foremost, as an ideological movement that aimed to adapt Judaism to Greek customs seen by many as the most progressive and enlightened. The worship of the body and the exaltation of Man at the heart of Hellenistic culture attracted many Jews seeking to adapt the antiquated Jewish religion to these values.

Interestingly, different levels of Hellenization existed. Often it was a predominantly external move aimed at attaining short term advantage, or connecting to a passing fashion, without adopting any values. In other cases it involved sincere and profound adoption of the tenets of the Greek worldview. There is no shortage of examples of Hellenization at different levels of manifestation in Jewish society, from a preference for Greek first names even by prominent spiritual figures like Antigonus of Sokho or high priests like Jason and Menelaus, and ending with repeated attempts to abolish any Jewish mitzvot seen as particularly repulsive by the Greek world. Dominant in that category was circumcision. The struggle to maintain this mitzvah (commandment) was the backdrop to the revolt against the Seleucid king "Epiphanes", Antiochus IV, and 300 years later against the most Hellenized of the Roman Emperors, Hadrian.⁴

Hellenization should not be viewed only as an attempt at external coercion, or flattery towards authority: apparently many Jews were truly convinced of Greco-Roman culture's superiority, finding themselves caught in an internal struggle that sought ways of reconciling Athens and Jerusalem. Philo of Alexandria is a superb example: a Jew and Roman citizen, active in the 1st century CE, a Platonic philosopher who simultaneously adhered to Mosaic Law. He authored dozens of works, making a courageous effort to demonstrate that the Jewish faith is totally compatible with the tenets of Platonic philosophy. However, Philo and his family reflect not only this attempt at syncretism but also its limitations, since Philo himself came out in defense of Judaism but were already too far removed from the tradition with his scant knowledge of Hebrew. Both his nephews, Marcus Julius Alexander and Tiberius Julius Alexander, were already completely absorbed into the elite of the Roman world and its values. They represent a total departure from Judaism, in particular the latter, who became a top commander in the Roman Empire and as such did not hesitate when asked to lead a ruthless suppression of the Jews of his city Alexandria. Worse still, during the Roman war against the great Jewish revolt he attained the post of Titus' second-in-command when the latter oversaw the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Here we see the inward and outward movements at work: King Herod Agrippa converted to Judaism, and the converted Jews of Adiabene fought on the side of Jews rebelling against Rome, whereas later family members of converts to Judaism joined forces with the Romans in the destruction of their Temple, land and people. Examples include Tiberius Alexander, already noted early, and Josephus Flavius, whose Hebrew name was Joseph ben Matityahu, one of the Jewish revolt commanders who deserted in favor of Rome.

The strengthening ascent of Christianity during that period should also be regarded, to a large extent, as a manifestation of the struggle against both Greek and Jewish beliefs. The fledgling religion generated various byproducts, both inside and outside Judaism. At its inception, Christianity was nothing more than another Jewish sect, one of many that disputed certain mainstream principles but not greatly different from other Jewish sects, such as the Essenes who inhabited the Judean desert, or the Boethusians who contested the traditional Torah (Masorah) text. The real turnaround occurred when the still unnamed small Jewish sect adopted several Greek principles, such as a semi-human divinity, with the belief in this divinity's death and resurrection at the core of its ritual system. In no more than several decades, Christianity rapidly distanced itself from Judaism but for several more decades, Christian groups like the Ebionites, who accepted Jesus' divinity but also insisted on observing the commandments of the Jewish scriptures, continued to exist.

The principal version of Christianity as disseminated by Paul (Saul of Tarsus) offered its followers a combination too good to turn down: an exhilarating mix of Jewish ethics, advance full salvation (rather than salvation that had to be earned through adherence to G-d's laws), and cancellation of all Torah laws deemed oppressive or burdensome. As this religious alternative's attraction rose, the attractiveness of conversion to Judaism plummeted. The new faith spread like wildfire, often captivating and capturing those who had converted to Judaism, or had considered converting but now found a much easier path to redemption. Just 300 years since the founding of this marginal sect, Christianity was adopted as the Roman Empire's official religion.



So far, the scope of phenomena in the ancient world has been described mainly as background to this survey's issues of concern. From the beginning of the Middle Ages and to date, the number and diversity of Jewish communities no longer makes it possible to fully trace the myriad developments. From this point on, therefore, only general outlines of the developments will be presented.

The middle Ages: Depletion and forced conversion

The spread of Christianity, and later of Islam, brought about a prolonged process of decline among the Jews. At the start of the Roman Empire, their numbers peaked at about one tenth of the Empire's 120 million inhabitants, declining gradually to one million at most at the height of the Middle Ages.

It should be emphasized that despite the gradual ascent of Christianity and Islam, important movements worldwide still exerted Jewish spiritual influence, with conversion to Judaism by individuals and groups. Among the most famous cases the following two are particularly noteworthy:

- The Kingdom of Ḥimyar in southern Arabia (Yemen of today) where some of its kings and elite class converted to Judaism during the fifth and sixth centuries CE, until the last king, Joseph Assar (known by the name of Dhū Nuwās), was killed after having been defeated by an alliance of Byzantine and Ethiopian Christians.
- Several large self-ruling Jewish tribes who lived for hundreds of years in other regions of the Arabian peninsula (most probably the majority of them were also descendants of converts), such as:
 - The Banu Qaynuqa or the Banu Quraysh celebrated in Yathrib (Medina), the most important Arabian city at the time.
 - The Banu Nadir (who also hailed from Medina) who ruled the important region of the Khaybar oasis.

During the 7th century CE these tribes were defeated by Muhammad and forced to either convert to Islam or go into exile.⁵

For centuries, Jewish tribes in North West Africa (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco of today) were reinforced in the 7th century CE by those escaping the Islamic conquest of Arabia. In the 8th century CE, Jewish tribes in North Africa together with other groups established a confederation headed by a Jewish leader named Cahina (priestess). They successfully fought the spread of Islam for a while but were ultimately defeated. The longest lasting community, extant to date, was Ethiopian Jewry. No one knows whether it descended from Israelites or converts, but it clearly existed for centuries as a community with a Jewish identity, and even enjoyed significant ideological influence on its surroundings, adding some converts to its ranks. In all probability, from the 6th century CE onward, the Jews in the region of Simien in North-Western Ethiopia enjoyed some type of independence, which lasted several hundred years, reaching its apex in the 10th century. At that time, a queen named Judith forged an alliance between the Jews and surrounding pagan tribes, and ruled for some time over large areas of Northern Ethiopia. Gradually the Jewish realm was weakened and in the end was brought down by the Christian rulers of Ethiopia in the 15th century.⁶



The Jewish cemetery near the city of Shire in the Tigray region, Ethiopia, 2013 (photo: Ofir Haivry)

But the most famous case of group conversion, reflected substantially in the Jewish tradition in a work attributed to Hasdai Ibn Shaprut and in the Book of the Kuzari by Judah HaLevi, undoubtedly took place in the Kingdom of the Khazars, nomads hailing from central Asia who reached the southern Russian plains between the Volga and the Don rivers. In the 7th century CE the Khazars established a strong State which lasted until the end of the 10th century, when it was destroyed by the strengthening Christian Kievan kingdom.⁷ The Khazarian State is notable for its phenomenon of converting to Judaism, especially among the elite classes. As far as it is known, several Khazar kings during the 10th century were Jews, with typically Jewish names like Joseph, Benjamin and Aaron.



A Khazar coin dated to the beginning of the 9th century CE. The inscription reads: "Moses is the Prophet of G-d" (Photo: W. Carter)

However, these phenomena of conversion did not change the overall trend of decline among the Jewish People during the Middle Ages, marked by the spiritual and demographic center of the Jewish People outside the Land of Israel and other Jewish centers rising in Egypt, Babylon, Italy, Provence and later on also in "Ashkenaz" (Eastern France and Western Germany). Although these centers saw periods of material and spiritual flourishing, in most cases they did not attain the numerical size, stability and continuity that would enable them to become leading spiritual and cultural centers for the entire Jewish People. The principal exception during this era of



decline was the Jewish community in the Iberian Peninsula which, between the 13th and 15th centuries, was the undisputed center of the Jewish world and enjoyed spiritual and material prosperity as well as demographic growth unprecedented in the Diaspora. The high status attained by this center meant that its destruction became one of the most crucial calamities in Jewish history. It gave rise to a conversion phenomenon of unprecedented dimensions, which remains to date the main source of communities with affinity to the Jewish People.

It should be emphasized that generally speaking, forced conversion is always more complicated than what can be assumed at first glance. Superficially, it appears to be a simple situation stemming from a necessity to change one's religion, but this definition immediately raises a question about the nature of necessity. The necessity to abandon the Jewish faith in favor of another may derive from direct threats of imprisonment, torture or death, or from milder threats such as exile, denial of rights or serious economic damage, which are less obvious and immediate. Sometimes 'necessity' presents itself as indirect pressure expressed through overt or covert discrimination rather than cautioned premeditated harm, making it harder to tell the difference between forced and voluntary conversion.

Forced conversions were carried out relative to a very wide range of pressures, from direct existential threat leveled against Jewish communities in Middle Ages Europe, annihilation of Portugal's Jewry in 1497 and ending with what can be termed "Red Conversion." The latter relates to the prohibition by 20th century communist regimes against practicing religion, which caused many Jews to conceal their faith or convert to another religion; or 20th century Europe's Nazi extermination machine, and the Soviet regime's antisemitic persecutions in the era of the "Doctors' Plot".⁸

Another particularly important aspect of the conversion phenomenon relates to the issue of what could be termed "Multiple Generational Commitment" or the continuation (or non-continuation) of commitment by second or later post-conversion generations to a Jewish predecessor's conversion to another faith. It is a question that mainly arises when the attitude of a later generation differs to that of the converting generation. An example would be a Jewish person at peace with converting to another religion, yet the offspring one or more generations down the line wish to return to Judaism. Often their viewpoint is that their predecessor's conversion does not obligate them; rather, the tradition of pre-conversion ancestors does.

In light of the numerous variables comprising the phenomenon of forced conversion, clearly each significant conversion event and the lives of the resulting "conversos" have unique characteristics and features. Reports from the 14th century refer to temporary converts such as the Maimonides family, probably forced to publicly abandon Judaism but who returned to open practice after emigrating to another country, alongside permanent conversos and their progeny who covertly preserved Jewish practices for generations. England, for example, expelled its Jewish population in 1290, yet in the decades that followed, repeated reports describe Jewish children abducted from their families, forcibly baptized, sent to live in northern England, yet continued to secretly observe the commandments of the Jewish religion. During that same period, the Jewish population of the southern Italian city of Trani was forcibly converted. A group formed among them, and succeeded in living like a crypto-Jewish community for at least several hundred years more; in 1572, hundreds of years later, some of that community's members were burned at the stake for Christian heresy. As noted earlier, communities of conversos and conversos' children who secretly observed their Jewish religion also formed in areas under Islamic rule, such as the Chula in Bukhara and the "Jadid El Islam" in the city of Mashhad in Iran, during the 19th century.⁹

The diversity and complexity of the conversos phenomenon were reflected in the complex attitude of Jewish tradition towards them and their offspring. Essentially, the most important sources in Jewish tradition acknowledge the element of coercion vis-à-vis these converts, and seek to encourage and facilitate their return to the Jewish People. The Talmud presents a sympathetic discussion of cases where Jews were prevented from observing the Mitzvot (commandments) due to "coercion" or "in times of forced conversion." Later, most of the leading Rabbinic figures held a similar position, often owing to bitter personal experience, such as that of Rabbenu Gershom, known as "Light of the Diaspora," around the year 1000 CE: his own son converted to Christianity following

persecutions. As a result, Rabbenu Gershom prohibited displays of negativity towards forced converts wishing to return to Judaism.

About a century later, Rashi demanded that efforts be made to bring forced converts back into Judaism's fold with kindheartedness and persuasion. Later in the same century it was Maimonides, whose family had also undergone a period of conversion to Islam, who clarified that those who had been coerced to convert their religion, and their children, should be considered fully Jewish, and every effort made to include them.

Although the more lenient positions remained the leading approach in Rabbinical tradition, Spain of the 14th to 16th centuries saw cases of "Spiteful Converts", Jews who, reacting to the prolonged pressure to convert, persecuted their own people. As a result, the leading attitude among Sephardi Rabbinic mainstream towards such converts and their progeny tended to be much harsher, due to their essential doubts regarding the motives behind the conversion and the degree of observance of the Jewish religion following the conversion. Unsurprisingly, they therefore doubted whether to view the descendants of such converts as Jews. This led to a strengthening tendency in Sephardic rulings to view the community of conversos and offspring, often fourth and fifth generation down the line from the converted predecessor, as complete gentiles wishing to convert to Judaism, rather than taking the more lenient approach applied to 'returning' Jews. In fact, many Sephardi Rabbis were so strict that even when individuals could prove descent from a Jewish maternal lineage, they were required to undergo full conversion in order to be recognized as Jews.¹⁰

The exception to the above mentioned majority was the Sephardi Duran family, who served for many years as chief rabbis of the city of Algiers. They tended to view the converts as Jews unless proven otherwise, and despite circumstances, ease their return to Judaism. A sympathetic position towards the conversos' descendants was held by Duran-family Rabbis even hundreds of years after the initial conversion, as inferred from a 1693 letter signed by Rabbi Benjamin Duran, Rabbi Solomon Bar Joseph Duran and Rabbi Mas'ud Ganon (author of "Zera Rav") from the city of Algiers. In the letter they recommend monetarily redeeming David Fariro and his family, descendants of converts who returned to Judaism and were captured on their way to the Land of Israel by pirates from North Africa. The Algiers Jewish community agreed to the rabbis' request and aided by the Livorno community not only redeemed the Fariro family from captivity but also financially assisted their journey to Israel.¹¹

An intermediate approach between the relatively lenient view of mainstream rabbinic tradition, that of the Duran family's Rabbis, and the stringency of most of the Sephardi rabbis was developed by Don Isaac Abarbanel. His historical and spiritual beliefs incorporate hostility towards the conversos, since he felt that most had not sufficiently struggled against the conversion, together with the explicit hope that eventually at least some would return to the People of Israel's embrace. He felt that the supervision program, which persecuted both voluntary and forced converts, was responsible for the converts' failure to fully integrate into Christian society. The gentiles, he said, would continue to treat converts as Israelites "despite themselves," would torture them or burn them at the stake as punishment for being crypto-Jews, although in most cases this accusation was baseless. According to Abarbanel, Jewish sentiment revealed by persecuted conversos was a product of Inquisition torture rather than a preexisting status. In fact, Abarbanel's approach created an ironic situation where "Marranos" were forced to "Judaize" because of the Inquisition's persecution, a reverse image of their ancestors forced to convert to Christianity for fear of persecution. Despite his negatively colored attitude towards conversos, Abarbanel did not object to accepting their return to Judaism, viewing this move as part of the divine plan linked to Israel's salvation. Furthermore, Abarbanel referenced another outcome of this return: when converts' offspring "assimilated by the gentiles" return to Judaism, it would trigger the "Judaization" of many more gentiles. However, it is unclear whether he meant full gentiles, or children of mixed marriages.¹²

Obviously the expulsion from Spain was tightly connected to the conversion phenomenon. Spanish authorities suspected that at least some Jews coerced into becoming New Christians secretly preserved their Jewishness and maintained ties with Jews. The expulsion was meant, first and foremost, to sever the bond between the conversos and their brethren who remained Jews, with the aim of extinguishing once and for all any remaining



Jewish spark the converts may have harbored. This position clearly emerges from the edict of expulsion signed on March 30, 1492, by King Ferdinand and Queen and Isabella, which states that converts actually "Judaized and have abandoned our sacred Catholic faith" because "Jews dwell together with Christians." Therefore, "a complete separation of dwelling was decided upon, but after it turned out that the remaining Jews take advantage of every opportunity and conversation to upset the converts' Catholic faith, to convince them to keep and sustain Moses' teachings as much as they can, and make them understand there is no law or truth besides it," the Catholic kings decided there was no choice but to banish all Jews from their kingdom.¹³

The fate of those expelled from Spain in 1492 played a crucial role in the conversion phenomenon's continuation for centuries afterwards, and is therefore worth studying. Following the expulsion, the king of Portugal permitted entry into his kingdom for a ransom. Many, unable to pay, sneaked into Portugal via byroads, especially to the country's mountainous north-eastern region. There they were employed as agricultural laborers for local land owners, often under conditions of slavery. Tens of thousands of Jews entered Portugal following the expulsion from Spain: together with Spanish Jews who came in previous years and the small original community of Portuguese Jews. Jews now totaled some 10% of the population of 1,200,000. As soon as the close of 1496, and following his marriage to a Spanish princess, the king of Portugal also decreed that all Jews (and Muslims) must undergo baptism or leave by 1497.

Unlike the Spanish royals who, at the time of the expulsion, allowed most of those wishing to leave to do so, the King of Portugal did all he could to convert as many Jews as possible to Christianity. In various places in Portugal, forced conversion of Jews to Christianity began, encouraged by the authorities. March 1497 saw an order given to baptize Jewish children between the ages of 4 to 14, clearly intended to draw parents into baptizing themselves too. The king also made significant efforts to allay the Jews' fears of the fate awaiting them following their conversion, promising that the authorities would not check their loyalty to the new religion after their baptism too vigilantly. In the end, only a few hundred Jews left Portugal in 1497. The vast majority of over 100,000 was forcibly baptized and did not leave the country. By contrast to events transpiring in Spain, it is therefore incorrect to reference events in Portugal with the term "expulsion" and more accurate to say that a small minority was actually expelled and the great majority coerced into conversion.¹⁴

The entirely different background and circumstances vis-à-vis forced conversions in Spain compared to Portugal led to a profound difference in the nature of the conversions in the two countries: meager numerical and spiritual preservation of Judaism among Spain's converts compared to the central role played by Portuguese Jewry in the annals of forced conversion and clandestine observance of Judaism. In Spain, the comprehensive process of conversion had been operating for more than a century prior to the expulsion. This wore the converts' spirits down and without support, since the majority of those faithful to Judaism left Spain. The destruction of Jewish spiritual and practical connectedness began long before the expulsion. Unequivocal conclusions in this regard were presented by the researcher Benzion Netanyahu, who stresses the wide-ranging incidence of self-hate that facilitated the assimilation of the converts. He claims that in the generations preceding the expulsion, a deep mutual hatred developed between most of the Marranos, and the Jews who remained in Spain, manifesting in the marked lack of compassion shown later by most Sephardi rabbis towards the suffering of the Marranos at the hands of the Inquisition. The expulsion from Spain was the culmination of a long and painful process of decline, following which Judaism disappeared almost entirely from among the Spanish conversos in the course of a generation or two.¹⁵

Portugal's conversos were entirely different from Spain's. Portuguese Jewry consisted largely of Spanish Jews who, for generations, had resisted all attempts to convert them, preferring exile in 1492 to conversion. In other words, this community displayed the greatest determination to preserve their Jewish loyalty. The adherence by this community of formerly Spanish Jewry to the traditions of its ancestors was repeatedly tested throughout the generations by threat and temptation, and withstood the test. Furthermore, the conditions relative to forced conversion to Christianity in Portugal did not provide for Jews to voluntarily leave the country. In the most literal sense, conversion was forced on them; acceptance of conversion resulting from persuasion was not a significant

element, and in some cases, conversion involved physically dragging people to church and baptizing them.

The king of Portugal, however, kept his word. For more than a generation, forced converts were not interrogated or tested as to the extent of their adherence to Christianity. This created a situation in which the conversos of Portugal, a large number of whom had a personal, family and community background that encouraged them to maintain their Jewishness in spite of conversion, could organize almost totally unobstructed as families and even as entire communities, and secretly, methodically and for an extended period of time, preserve their Jewish identity.

These are the unique circumstances under which conversion held for some centuries in Portuguese Jewry. Even Netanyahu's tough standpoint, which claims that most Portuguese Jews eventually accepted conversion, agrees that within the Portuguese conversos, and particularly among the 20,000 Jews physically forced to convert at the last moment, there was a substantial sector that remained fully loyal to Judaism, continuing secret observance for generations. This framework of existence enabled and even promoted the emergence of extraordinary phenomena relating to clandestine observance of Judaism among Portugal's Jews over a lengthy period of time as far as quality and scope, and remains unparalleled in Jewish history, and perhaps in overall human history, as described below.

Portugal's country-wide sweep of forced conversion in 1497 signaled the beginning of a persistent struggle to preserve Judaism. Many communities of converted Jews carried on for two and even three centuries, their offspring later forming the foundation of overt Jewish communities in Hamburg, Amsterdam, London and New York. In several cases, communities of conversos succeeded preserving their Jewish identity for 500 years and more, up to current times. It is not the Jews who were left in Spain but rather, the Jews of Portugal, the majority of whom, as said before, were Spanish Jews who moved to Portugal in order to preserve their Jewish identity, who are the source of almost all cases known to us of continued secret Jewish observance in one form or another hundreds of years following the forced conversion. In fact, almost all cases of persecution carried out by Inquisition officials against secret observance of Judaism during the following centuries, both in Spain and in the American continent, involved Portuguese conversos who returned to settle in Spain rather than Spanish conversos who remained in Spain at the time of the 1492 expulsion.¹⁶

The discovery and rapid development of the American continent in proximity to the expulsion from Spain and the forced conversion of Portuguese Jews resulted in many conversos making their way to the new continent. Whereas Spain mostly did not permit the "New Christians" to leave and settle in America, Portugal did. Unsurprisingly, a substantial number of Portuguese conversos settled there.

From the beginning of the 16th century, when there were no more overt Jews in the Iberian Peninsula or Iberian colonies, and when the ties between conversos to overtly Jewish communities were scarce and risky, what might be termed the "Conversos' religion" began to develop. With the passage of time, new generations of conversos' descendants grew up without direct access to mainstream Rabbis and Rabbinic authorities, active Jewish communities, or the majority of classical Jewish texts. The progeny of Jewish converts learned their Jewish customs mainly from oral traditions, from reading the Bible in its Christian version, and paradoxically, often from Christian anti-Jewish polemic literature and by studying the Inquisition's actions of persecution, and their rationales. As generations passed and descendants of conversos increasingly obtained their knowledge about Judaism from third or fourthhand sources, a type of Conversos Judaism with unique attributes developed. Central to this framework of Judaism were:

- The rejection of several fundamental Christian tenets, including Jesus as the realization of the biblical messianic promise, and Jesus' divinity.
- Emphasis on the existence of inner faith over actions and external behavior.
- Acknowledgment as martyrs of those who had given their lives in sanctification of G-d's name rather than capitulate to the persecutors.



- And most of all, one fundamental principle appearing time and again in the words of the conversos' descendants interrogated by the Inquisition: redemption of the soul comes through the belief in Moses' Teachings rather than in the Gospel of Jesus.

To a considerable extent, the "Conversos' religion" used Christian Catholic terms and ideas to express devotion to Judaism. Thus the conversos developed a cult of Jewish martyrs similar to the Christian concept, turned fasting into a pivotal part of religious observance, and created religious fraternities with names like Saint Raphael and Saint Esther, with similar activities to Christian ones. A typical example of this trend is the way the Eve of Passover was marked in the large community of Marranos in Mexico City in the 1630s, more than 130 years after the ancestors' forced conversion to Christianity: the community's members gathered in a secret room, lined up, and a piece of Matzo was placed in each one's mouth by their spiritual leader, Blanca Enriques. This clearly simulates Christian mass and perhaps even expressed protest. It is important to stress, however, that the conversos' observance also included unmistakable Jewish principles, such as the belief that a person's soul can be redeemed by the person's behavior and not just by affinity with a stated faith or its declarations; efforts to observe a few fundamental Mitzvot, such as circumcision; marking the Sabbath and the main festivals; maintaining some form of Kashrut; and intensely praying for national salvation, worded as the hope to return to Zion, which held a central place in conversos' prayers and dreams.¹⁷

Despite the tremendous hardships and persecution, communities of conversos' descendants continued to exist in the Iberian Peninsula and the colonies, and often maintained close family and economic ties among themselves. These connections allowed descendants of conversos who felt they were suspected by the Inquisition make their way to another country or even to another continent, where they integrated into a community with which they had been in contact. A network of close ties was gradually established among the conversos' descendants in the main port and commercial cities, which existed for generations across countries and continents, and gradually turned into a commercial network extraordinary in its power and geographical spread, gained prominence and even controlled, to a large extent, the transatlantic (and Mediterranean) commerce in the 16th and 17th centuries. During the 16th century such communities were formed in places where the Inquisition was not active, such as Southern France and the Netherlands, and thus international commercial networks that connected descendants of converts became well-established, whether they remained outwardly Christian or openly returned to Judaism. Later, some of these groups renewed contacts with the Jewish world, and during the 17th century in some places, such as Venice, Amsterdam, Hamburg and London, they openly returned to Judaism and formed communities that were among the richest, and leaders in the Jewish world.¹⁸

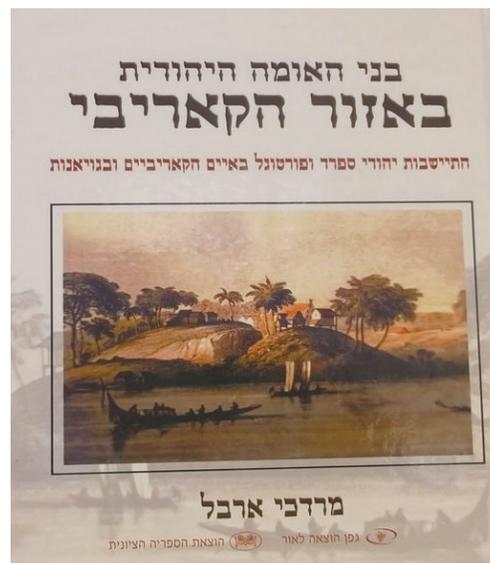
The descendants of Portuguese conversos were so outstanding in the 16th and 17th centuries in international commerce that they were called "The Portuguese nation" by others, so much so that the term "Portuguese" became a synonym for Jews in the commercial centers worldwide. The conversos' offspring tended to refer to themselves mainly by the term "the Nation", which referred also to descendants of conversos who had returned to Judaism, as well as to those who had not returned nor had any intention of doing so. The use of the term "nation" on its own enabled them to consider themselves members of the Jewish nation, whereas to foreign ears this term was considered as referring to their Portuguese origin. It also enabled a community definition that did not emphasize the degree of religious devotion, but rather the common national origin.

This mode of self-definition underlined the manner in which, despite the diminishing of Jewish knowledge and the continuing extensive connections with Marranos' offspring who had remained Christians, the national component gradually attained centrality in the identity of conversos' descendants. The advantage of a national identity enabled bypassing the problem of paucity of knowledge or religious disagreements among descendants of the conversos, while emphasizing common destiny and distinguished lineage. What is more, the emphasis on Jewish descent from Biblical heroes served oftentimes as counterbalance to the contempt shown towards their Jewish origin by the Christian surroundings. Interestingly, some researchers view this identity as an adoption of a racial purity of blood ideology, but through a reversal of values which elevates the Jewish origin. However, this approach completely ignores the fact that contrary to religions like Christianity or Islam, Jewish identity has always included

a clear national element and not just a religious one.

As a consequence of the astonishing economic success experienced by communities of conversos, literature began appearing of an accusatory nature against them. It served as a precedent to many of the accusations leveled against Jews in later centuries: the New Christians were accused of being crypto-Jews, and as such could not claim any national or religious loyalty to the surrounding society; and additionally accused of greed, materialism and atheism, traits identified as essential to Jews and transmitted from one generation to the next through blood ties. This is in effect an early version of the biological racism that would take root throughout Europe in the 19th – 21st centuries.¹⁹

The "nation" of Portuguese conversos' offspring, the undisputed rulers of Trans-Atlantic commerce in the 16th and 17th centuries, numbered only some 10,000 members, but despite their limited number and precarious legal status, its members always expressed a high degree of concern and responsibility for the fate of their kin. A conspicuous example arose at the beginning of the 17th century. When Phillip III, king of Spain and Portugal, experienced a severe budgetary crisis, a group of the "nation's" rich merchants presented him with an offer to waive his enormous debts to them, and even add the huge sum of 1,200,000 crusados as a gift, with another 150,000 crusados to the king's council members, in order to facilitate their support of this proposal. In return, the king would pardon all descendants of Marranos under Inquisition arrest and interrogation at that time. The Spanish king's council, finding the "nation's" argument convincing, approached Pope Clement VIII with their request for leniency towards the sinners. In August 1604 the Holy See published a document offering clemency for all Inquisition prisoners taken for observing Jewish customs. This clemency resulted in many hundreds of released Jews flowing into Amsterdam, where they openly returned to Judaism.²⁰



The late Dr. Mordechai Arbel's book on the history of the "Nation" of Jews descended from the Portuguese Conversos in the Caribbean region. Dr. Arbel passed away shortly after his testimony before the committee.

Against the background of flourishing networks among conversos' descendants in the 16th and 17th centuries, and with the emergence of complex and circuitous routes of transmitting Jewish consciousness among the conversos' offspring, an important phenomenon took place mainly in the 17th century which has barely been researched: an initiative of "bringing back" children of conversos to Judaism, which can be defined as inward Jewish "missionary activity." Individuals and groups of descendants of conversos began setting an activity in motion aimed at bringing descendants of conversos back to Judaism, and in some cases even converting "Old Christians." Numerous reports exist concerning local and private initiatives of this type. Among the prominent figures involved in this activity, who engaged in teaching Judaism and spiritually empowering conversos and their descendants we find Daniel Franco (aka Fernando Gómez) of Portuguese conversos origin, who was, as far as we know, a leader in "restoring" offspring of conversos in South West France, and who later returned to Portugal with the explicit goal of doing



the same among the Marranos there, until he was caught and burned at the stake in the city of Evora. Another "restoration" activist in Italy and France was Emanuel Aboab (also born with the family name of Gómez) who, inter alia, wrote letters and texts, including a book on Numerology. His works aimed to convince descendants of conversos to fully return to Judaism. Towards the end of his life, he moved to Jerusalem.

Another important figure was Álvaro de Acuña, who travelled throughout Mexico to teach and help descendants of conversos and brought the renowned merchant Simón Waez from Mexico City, a descendant of conversos, back into Judaism. Waez later became head of the main conversos community in that city. Acuña later stayed for a period of time in the city of San Juan, but as far as we know he was never caught by Inquisition authorities, who chased him for many years. Diego Perez Da Costa was also an activist in restoring conversos. Operating in South America, he was the brother of no less than Fra Francisco De Vitoria, Bishop of the city of Tucuman. In 1601 the Inquisition publicized that it was seeking Perez, follower of Judaism, participant in forbidden Jewish meetings, held among other places in the cities of Potosi and Cusco, but they never managed to lay a hand on him. It was reported that he successfully avoided capture by escaping through Seville to Venice, where he most probably returned to Judaism publicly. The Inquisition could only burn his effigy at the stake in the Lima auto-da-fé of 1605.²¹

The gradual disintegration of many of the conversos communities resulted in more and more conversos' descendants, who had survived in the Iberian Peninsula or in the colonies, marrying spouses known as "Old Christians. This phenomenon naturally created problems of identity and loyalty among the children of these marriages. But it is surprising to what extent even offspring of two or three generations down from conversos' marriages with old Christians were willing to adhere to Judaism despite facing enormous dangers and difficulties, and despite meager knowledge of Judaism chiefly derived from secondhand sources. The scope of their difficulties clarified when the often uncircumcised progeny of these mixed marriages left for countries where they could return to fuller Jewish life. At that point, Halakhic, psychological and social problems surfaced, as did the inexperience of Jewish rabbinic life. The motives behind returning to Judaism were often very complex, and did not necessarily result from a deep rooted loyalty to a Jewish identity. One example is the son of conversos from the town of Lagos in the region of Algarve, who lived in the 1560s in Damascus as a Jew. When questioned about the circumstances leading him to live as a Jew, he replied that he had been a good Christian in Spain until he saw his father arrested and burned at the stake as a Jew. He then decided to behave like a Jew, and escaped to Turkey to live freely according to the Teachings of Moses.²²

The foremost and widest ranging effort of "internal missionizing" to restore conversos' children to Judaism took place in Dutch Brazil in 1640-1654. Anti-Catholic Dutch occupying the area shaped extraordinary circumstances which aided the movement of Return. Rejoining Judaism no longer required moving to an unfamiliar country but was possible in the place where the "New Christians" resided. It also enjoyed certain advantages via the anti-Catholic authorities. The considerable successes of this activity are partially documented in the Inquisition's reports from that period following Portugal's recapture of the region, reports which describe an expansive return to Judaism among the "New Christians." The reports also show that in some of these cases, returning to Judaism led to complicated family problems when some family members opposed the return, even leading to cases of couples separating. Hundreds of families publicly returned to Judaism at that time, many later emigrating from Brazil when Portugal's rule resumed. Following Northern Brazil's recapture from the Dutch in 1654, all overt Jews left Brazil. Only those who chose to remain Catholic stayed behind, whether because of their beliefs, or a preference to continue their identity as conversos. The generation-long period of overt Jewish existence in Brazil under the Dutch regime led to spiritual emboldening and renewed exposure of the "New Christians" to vibrant Jewish life. Even after the Catholic Portuguese retook control, the spiritual decline of communities and families of Anussim was delayed for another generation or two compared with other regions in South America. It is no coincidence that Northern Brazil is currently probably the most significant center throughout the American continent for the formation of communities comprised of conversos descendants.²³

From this survey it appears that until the end of the 17th century, most communities of Marranos in the Iberian Peninsula and in the American continent disintegrated. This was the product of a combination of factors: a trend

of departures by many of the most loyal and determined community members to places where they could live openly as Jews; spiritual depletion due to a prolonged lack of connection with the centers of Jewish life; and of course, the pressure of the Inquisition. Thus, in most places during the 17th century, the communities of Marranos that had survived more than two hundred years under difficult conditions declined and disappeared. From the end of the 18th century the continuation of Marranos' existence remained almost exclusively a family matter other than in several locations where special circumstances preserved the possibility of some kind of "Marranos" existence. These were mainly isolated places, such as the remote, poor rural areas of northern Portugal, Brazil and Mexico, as well as places where the surrounding milieu continued to discriminate against families of Marranos, as in Majorca. Naturally, the conversos' Jewish existence, already weak, continued weakening over the course of further generations. Nonetheless it is surprising to discover the extent to which it did manage to survive, by preserving certain customs, marrying within the family, and transmission of the tradition, commonly from mother to daughter or granddaughter. We are now witnessing tens of thousands of people, from Italy to Puerto Rico, testifying that a spark of Jewishness was nevertheless preserved in their family throughout the generations.

Other groups with a crypto-Jewish history in Europe, Southern France and to a lesser extent in Germany and East Europe can be counted, but apparently the most significant group with centuries of conversos history is in Southern Italy. According to experts in Italy who appeared before the committee, apparently at least tens of thousands view themselves as conversos' descendants. Researchers cite, as an example, the 0.8 percent of tax payment that every Italian can transfer to a religious organization of choice: each year about 80,000 Italians choose to transfer this payment to the Jewish community, although the community numbers only about 30,000 members. Clearly, tens of thousands of Italians, predominantly in southern Italy where no significant Jewish communities have existed for centuries, voluntarily transfer financial support to the Jewish community. The assumption is that a sizable number of them are descendants of conversos.²⁴

A broad survey has been presented here on the fate of conversos of Iberian origin since, according to all the testimonies heard by the committee and based on research materials obtained by the committee, the descendants of these conversos are numerically the largest and most significant group as far as their links with the Jewish people relative to all communities claiming affinity to the Jewish people. Any official or public dealings with communities claiming affinity must first and foremost relate to these communities of descendants of conversos.

Modernity: diversity, assimilation and rebirth

From the perspective of the Jewish People, the modern age is marked by sharp contradictions: crises and unprecedented destruction, versus no less unprecedented flourishing and development, in the context of the increasing diversity of Jewish experience as well as the challenges facing Jewish identity. These trends also reflect in attitudes towards groups claiming affinity to the Jewish People; these groups also multiply and become much more diverse than in the past.

Descendants of forced converts to Christianity

Although extensive research literature exists on the subject of conversos and offspring of conversos, very little material exists regarding 20th and 21st century descendants of conversos. The committee was aided by testimonies of attending experts who noted that the subject is shrouded in mystery, both as far as communities or families who persevere in the observance of Jewish traditions, and the number of descendants of conversos who plan joint activities and seek to strengthen their affinity to the Jewish People. These experts predominantly offer partial and unmethodical impressions, indicating our deficiency of current knowledge.

Concerning the geographical distribution of descendants of conversos today, whether as individuals, families or communities interested in an active connection with the Jewish people, our picture is very limited at this stage:



- **In Spain and Portugal**, other than communities of Marrano descendants striving to return to Judaism in Belmonte (Portugal) and Majorca (Spain), there is no other knowledge of communities or families organized in significant frameworks. Although the committee heard various testimonies regarding active groups in other places (such as "Shavei Israel" concerning several towns near Belmonte in Portugal, and from Mrs. Gloria Mound concerning the town of Zamora in Spain) no clear-cut proof has been presented yet regarding the scope of this phenomenon or its seriousness. Until further study is conducted, names or regions of communities or organizations in these countries cannot be added. By contrast, a clear trend shows an increase in the number of individuals who, owing to family tradition or family name or genetic testing, claim descent from Marranos. These individuals contact Jewish communities, Israeli representatives, and Jewish organizations with requests for information that will assist establishing a continuous connection. Some even express a wish to convert to Judaism. While currently impossible to know the scope of this phenomenon in these countries with any certainty, clearly hundreds of applications of various types are being made.
- **In Italy**, the phenomenon of descendants of conversos organizing as a community is more developed than in the Iberian Peninsula. In southern Italy, several groups have already organized as communities for the purpose of full return to Judaism. Other groups seek information and wish to develop friendly relations with Israel and the Jewish People despite currently having no intention to convert. The most well-organized community is in the Apulia region near the city of Trani, where the community has succeeded in regaining the synagogue that was turned into a church hundreds of years ago, as well as in other cities. In that region, Jewish presence as organized communities was very meager. As a result, most members of these communities are descendants of conversos who returned to Judaism and only a minority was born as Jews. A similar trend, although much smaller in scope, has been taking place in the regions of Calabria and Sicily, where cultural and pro-Israel activity is more pronounced than any actual return to Judaism. Lately the offspring of the conversos community in Palermo, Sicily, saw the old historical synagogue of the city's Jews restituted to their ownership: for centuries the seized synagogue had served as a church. These activities, together with the testimonies heard by the committee, clearly show that while the phenomenon in Italy has not yet been properly researched, communities and groups of conversos' descendants in Italy number at least several hundred people, and initial approaches by individuals or groups already number many thousands.²⁵
- **Latin America** undoubtedly has the largest human pool of descendants of conversos, both in quantity, attempts to organize as communities, and efforts at returning to Judaism. As far as currently known, the phenomenon is not geographically evenly distributed. It is pronounced in some countries but hardly exists in others. The committee did not receive even one relevant testimony or research item from a number of Latin American countries. Without further research it is impossible to know whether that outcome is due to solid reasons or just bad luck so far. Other countries, such as Peru or El Salvador, produced meager testimonies, and a few second or third-hand testimonies about some degree of awareness of the conversos' descendants, but at this point not much can be learned from them. In four countries, reports and organizations were detected: Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Costa Rica. Relevant proof was presented to the committee for each country, as well as research literature dealing with the scope and quality of communities of conversos' offspring, and with the organization and activity of these communities today.
- **Brazil** has at least 20 communities of descendants of conversos returning to Judaism, mainly in the north. They are estimated at some 1500 members. Various organizations are also active among descendants of conversos, such as ABRADJIN, which strives to preserve the memory of Inquisition-enforced conversion in Brazilian society, and has also erected a small museum documenting Inquisition activities in Brazil. It is quite probable that some overlap exists between communities and organizations, but many individuals are members of organizations although not members of communities. This may be because they are interested in the topic but not in a complete return to Judaism or community affiliation. It is noteworthy that in some places, the conversos' descendants who returned to Judaism (sometimes with the acknowledgement of the Jewish communities and sometimes without it) form a sizable part of the Jews in the region. The city of Natal in northern Brazil, for instance, is a significant center of activity by conversos' descendants, and the Jewish community there consists mainly of about 60 families of descendants of Jews who resumed a Jewish lifestyle.²⁶

- **In Mexico**, communities of conversos descendants are noticeably active, mostly in northern regions where historically many families descended from conversos congregated in what was then the remote frontier, fleeing the Inquisition's wrath. These conversos' descendants in northern Mexico gained a reputation as successful businessmen, and a decisive role in the success of the leading Mexican hi-tech center in the city of Monterey is often attributed to them. In the 20th century, when part of the community of descendants of conversos emigrated to the USA, many of the families organized in Chicago, where up to this day an esteemed community of well-known families descended from conversos lives.²⁷
- **Colombia**, as far as we know, was not one of the places where families of conversos arrived in significant numbers when America became an option, but in all probability, in the 16th and 18th centuries, it became a destination for families of conversos wanting to distance from larger centers such as Peru and Mexico²⁸ which were under Spanish rule and the Inquisition's grip. According to the testimony of Dr. Arbel, former Israeli ambassador to Colombia, for many of these communities in South America, the process of returning to Judaism suffered a critical blow following the Holocaust, since these communities received traditional spiritual leadership from Sephardi rabbis in places like the Netherlands: these religious leaders were closer to the legacy and sensitivities of the conversos' descendants. The murder of many of those leaders during the Holocaust, and the depletion of the European community able to supply substitutes, caused a deep crisis that resulted in the collapse of Latin American communities of descendants of conversos. Arbel testified that in the course of his work he met dozens of people who presented their Jewish descent to him, including Colombia's then ministers of labor and of foreign affairs, in places like the capital Bogota and in the city of Barranquilla, Colombia's major seaport. Today there is no doubt that a substantial flourishing of groups descended from conversos occurred in Colombia, more so than in most parts of South America. According to testimonies heard by the committee, an estimated 20 communities of conversos offspring number approximately 4000 members, although the known Jewish community numbers only 2,500 members.²⁹
- **Costa Rica** was historically a very remote region of small mountain communities, where church supervision was lax and the Inquisition was never active. The entire population of Costa Rica was twice excommunicated by the Church in the 19th century for not participating actively and widely in Mass. To this day many Costa Rican dignitaries claim Jewish lineage, among them former President Luis Alberto Monge Álvarez, whose niece even wrote a book on the subject.³⁰
- **The United States**, The last significant group of descendants of Marranos hailing from the Iberian Peninsula currently lives today in the USA. It consists mainly of residents in northern Mexico's regions, conquered in the 19th century and annexed to the USA, primarily in today's states of Colorado and New Mexico. In many of these states' towns extended families probably lived, preserving some recollection of their Jewish origin until the 20th century. The last two decades has seen great awakening in this region, with dozens of groups and at least several hundred individuals active in settings designed to aid a deeper familiarity with Judaism, and in a small number of cases even offering guidance towards conversion to Judaism.
- **West Africa** is another noteworthy region for descendants of Iberian conversos. Reports indicate conversos settling in some port cities in this region in the 16th century, but whether long term consequences resulted is unclear. One place known with certainty to have had a significant conversos population is the island of Sao Tomé in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of West Africa, currently a small republic together with the island of Príncipe. Sao Tomé's inhabitants are mostly of mixed African descent, with some European settlers. This remote island is unique in that, following the conversion in Portugal at the start of the 16th century, thousands of Jewish children who had been torn away from their parents and forcibly baptized were sent there in the hope that the distance from their nuclear families would guarantee they remained in Christianity's bosom. Years later, some of the children who grew up managed to leave the island and return to Judaism in other countries. Some of those who stayed behind likely kept their Jewish identity even when they mixed with the black population brought to the island. Today, many of the island's black people proudly claim to carry this component as part of their identity although there is no evidence of people identifying themselves personally and directly as descended from this group, or requesting recognition or conversion to Judaism.³¹



Right to Spanish or Portuguese citizenship

The final point worth mentioning vis-à-vis descendants of conversos from Spain and Portugal is the amendments which both these countries introduced in 2015, explicitly aimed at enabling descendants of conversos and expelled Jewish citizens to reinstate their citizenship. Portugal decided that a citizenship application would require the individual's acceptance into the Jewish community of Lisbon or Porto. Porto had a small Jewish community which, prior to the amended law, experienced difficulty in financing its activity, but now receives hundreds of applications to join the community from individuals who also pay an annual membership fee of several hundred Euros. The Portuguese government reported that since the passage of the law, at least 300 applications have already been approved. In Spain, on the other hand, it was reported that just one day after the citizenship law amendment was confirmed, 4302 applications pending for many months were immediately approved. The majority of citizenship recipients were from Morocco, Venezuela and Turkey. The citizenship laws in their current formulation do not grant citizenship to descendants of conversos who remained Christian, but rather to those who are currently Jewish. In effect, the current Spanish and Portuguese citizenship laws encourage descendants of conversos to convert to Judaism as a precondition for restored citizenship.

Other groups

This survey has noted, first and foremost, the Iberian Peninsula descendants of conversos, who numerically form the vast majority of populations and communities claiming affinity to the Jewish people. But there are other groups, some descended from conversos and some from communities of different types, which should be considered and are briefly surveyed below:

Conversos not of Iberian descent

Many generally smaller worldwide groups of offspring of Jewish conversos do not hail from the Iberian Peninsula or its colonies. In fact there is hardly a country, Christian or Muslim, west of India that did not at one point or another experience incidents of forced conversion of Jews. But among the non-Iberian groups, the numbers, as well as the success in preserving even a partial Jewish existence for an extended period of time, were much smaller. The group most successfully preserving Jewish existence was probably the Iranian community of Mashhad converts, who lived secretly as Jews after being forcibly converted to Islam in 1839. But their case is the exception, and converts in Islamic countries usually disappeared after two or three generations.

Cantonists

The most comprehensive phenomenon of forced conversion outside Iberia was probably the "Cantonist" converts in Russia. In 1827 a law enacted in Russia allowed forcible drafting of Jews from age 12, and stated that Jewish recruits under 18 would be stationed in units of preparation and training for the army called "Cantons," giving rise to the "Cantonists" nickname. Snatchers were responsible for filling quotas of recruits, and showed no inhibition when it came to forcibly drafting Jews: often they simply abducted the "recruits" and did not shy away from kidnapping even 7 or 8 year-old children to fill their quotas. Recruited children were separated from the Jewish environment and its influence as a method for convincing them to convert to Christianity. Cantonists were transferred to remote camps in the eastern Russian Empire, such as Perm, Kazan and Siberia, which had no Jewish population.

An estimated one third of the cantonists converted to Christianity, but the number of converts was much larger, of course, among those drafted as small children, and the vast majority likely converted. During the 30 years of

the harshest cantonists' regulations an estimated 70,000 Jews were forcibly recruited. About half were under 18 years old and most converted. Military service lasted 25 years (later reduced to 20 years) from the day the recruit reached 18, meaning that the youngest drafted children sometimes spent about 35 years within military confines. Following discharge, many cantonists were settled in remote outposts and never returned to their families; most married non-Jewish women and assimilated.

Only in 1856 was Cantonism officially annulled as part of a comprehensive military reform when the failures of the Russian army in the Crimean War exposed the method's shortcomings. The case of cantonist Michael Grulev (1857-1943) was well-known. Born Jewish in the pale of settlement, he was drafted and converted to Christianity, and attained the rank of General. Most likely after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, he went into exile in France where, well past the age of 60, he returned to Judaism. He wrote "Notes of a Jewish General." His book, published in Paris in 1930, described his career and attests to his story. He stated that the book's proceeds were dedicated to the Zionist cause.³²

So far, individual conversions and crypto-Judaism were mainly surveyed. Although encompassing very large numbers, they are still actions of individuals who decide for themselves or, at most, for their family. Another phenomenon worthy of separate examination and research is that of group conversions in which entire communities abandoned Judaism. We can debate whether the conversion of Ethiopian Jews, later known as "Falashmura" to Christianity starting from the 19th century, when entire villages converted, is an individual or a group action. But clear-cut cases of group conversion exist, when a Jewish group converted its eminent spiritual leader's order. The most notable examples are:

- Followers of Shabtai Zvi in the 17th century Ottoman Empire. They converted to Islam under his order, but still preserved a group identity that later developed into the "Dönme" sect, still active in Turkey. Some of its offspring are now seeking to return to Judaism.
- The followers of Jacob Frank, himself influenced by Shabtai Zvi. They converted to Christianity in the 18th century at his order and became the "Frankist" sect. Its members were active in Poland and in other Eastern European countries, as far as we know, until the end of the 19th century. These groups raise fundamental, Halakhic and other questions that will not be discussed here, but their unique characteristics should be deliberated when the time comes.³³

20th century "Red" crypto-Judaism

A completely different case of clandestine Judaism is the 20th century "secular" crypto-Judaism which led at least tens of thousands of Jews, if not more, to convert while keeping their Jewish identity concealed in fear of the deeply tyrannical European regimes of this century. The 20th century marks the emergence of a new type of crypto-Judaism, unrelated to religious faith in the literal sense, but stemming from the gentiles' view of Jewish identity as national or racial. This cryptoJudaism was in essence a conversion meant to conceal Jewish identity as a defense against the authorities' murderous persecution.

But under 20th century totalitarian regimes, even Jews who had gladly tossed their millennia-old Jewish identity to history's dustbin in favor of a modern identity discovered, to their complete amazement and exactly like the "New Christians" of the Middle Ages, that despite their efforts to erase their Jewish identity, it was by no means forgotten in their milieu. When the time was ripe, it was hauled out again to hound them. This was the backdrop for many cases of crypto-Judaism, when Jews tried to conceal their origin, sometimes even from their children. It was true for Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and later in France, Hungary, Belgium and other countries swept by Nazism. Puppet regimes established in these countries under the auspices of the Nazi occupation led to crypto-Judaism occurring in some form or another, but only between 1933-1945, after which the real danger seemed to dissipate with the end of WWII.

However, a sizable number of Jews, often children and youngsters who had been converted due to the pressures



of events, did not return to Judaism, perhaps due to convenience, precaution, or inner conviction to follow the new religion. One of the most remarkable cases is the Jewish youth Jean Marie Loustiger who was hidden in a convent in France during WWII, but after the war remained faithful to Catholicism and later became the Archbishop of Paris. As far as we know, these phenomena were limited in scope in Western Europe and ultimately involved only a few thousand individuals who remained Christian as a result of coercion under the constraints of the Nazi regime.

This was not the case in Eastern European countries. There the Nazi threat was inherited by Communist regimes hostile to Jews and which ruled these countries for more than 40 years. In the Soviet Union, the situation was still more severe, since communism had dominated it since 1917. Many Jews, mainly in the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but in other countries too, decided to conceal their Jewish identity from their surroundings and sometimes even from their own children for many decades. This created the wide-scope phenomenon of "Red" crypto-Judaism encompassing tens of thousands of people at a minimum. In many cases this "Red" crypto-Judaism continued out of habit even after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and in the Soviet Union in 1992. Only in the past several years its dimensions are beginning to be fully revealed.

For obvious reasons it is still hard to precisely assess the scope of this phenomenon, but from testimonies heard by the committee, among them the testimony of Rabbi Schudrich, Poland's Chief Rabbi, it appears that in Poland, for example, the phenomenon already embraces thousands of Jews who are in the process of full return to Judaism, and tens of thousands more who currently exhibit weaker affinity but show signs of coming closer and an interest in learning about Judaism, Israel and the Hebrew language. We can assume many more individuals are "Red" crypto-Jews, about whom nothing is known to Jewish organizations. Rabbi Schudrich admits that he himself does not have a clear and full picture of the numerical and essential aspects of the phenomenon, but testifies that in his own community in Warsaw, which numbers several hundred members, about half did not know about their Jewish provenance when they were children. The situation seems to be similar in other countries in East Europe, especially in Hungary.³⁴

Descendants of voluntary assimilation

So far, cases of people forced into abandoning their Jewish faith, and conversos' descendants, have been presented. However, down the generations, desertion of Judaism occurred not just as a result of coercion but also for various reasons of advantage or persuasion. Whereas in the past voluntary desertion was almost always followed by complete disengagement from the Jewish world, in recent generations there have been increasing incidents of voluntary desertion without a complete disconnect from affinity towards the Jewish people. In the past, deserters and their offspring lost connection with the Jewish People within one or two generations at the most; often they exerted effort at concealing their origin. One of the most famous cases in the history of the weakening ties to Judaism without any coercion or even conversion is the **Jewish Community of Kaifeng**, China, where the distance from the Jewish centers brought about its continued depletion and assimilation and until, by the end of the 18th century, the community disintegrated. However, there was no organized conversion of the Jews' descendants, and some of the descendants of this community even preserved the memory of their Jewish origin and transmitted it to their offspring. Today some of these offspring are in the process of returning to Judaism.³⁵



Panel of the Ten Commandments in Chinese Inscription, Community of Jewish descendants, Kaifeng, China, 2016 (Photo: Ilan Bass)

In Europe and America, where the environment's pressure on Jews had always been much greater than in China, for instance, assimilation almost always caused complete severance of ties to the Jewish people within one or two generations. However, in recent decades, an increasing number of cases can be defined as "partial disconnection" and include abandoning Jewish life without converting, or mixed marriages in which children are not raised in a particular religious tradition. Alongside these are cases of "partial joining" where spouses of mixed marriages agree to raise their children as Jews even though the children are not Jewish by Halakhah, or the non-Jewish spouse becomes an active member of the Jewish community without converting to Judaism. In other cases people who have had no prior connection to Judaism adopt attributes of Jewish lifestyle and sometimes even participate in a Jewish community's activities without taking official steps to convert to Judaism.³⁶

Another recent phenomenon, expected to expand considerably as access to genetic tests becomes easier, is that of people discovering a Jewish element in their pedigree or through genetic testing, and embracing this element into their identity without taking further steps which would express affinity to the Jewish people. Although difficult to evaluate numerically, it is clearly a wide-ranging process. In his testimony before the committee, Professor Eliezer Ben Rafael described an extensive 2013 survey in which he participated on behalf of a large Jewish organization which partially mapped these phenomena. The survey, dealing with Jewish identity in Europe, found that within European Jewry the phenomenon of assimilation and even desertion of Judaism continued while an opposing phenomenon of joining the circles of the Jewish people was occurring, including a sizable number of people who do not convert to Judaism. Out of thousands of Jews and their family members throughout Europe who participated in the survey, it was found that 13% are newcomers to the Jewish people, and of them about a third, or 5%, of people defining themselves as Jewish are "assimilated into Judaism" by actively joining the Jewish people without undergoing any type of conversion, and likely with no intent to do so. As far as we know, these phenomena are expanding, although the information regarding their scope and characteristics is, as of now, very limited.³⁷



Communities with no known documentation of Jewish origin

The last significant group which should be included among Jewish descendants seeking to renew their ties to Judaism is that of communities claiming ancient Jewish provenance, but contrary to descendants of conversos, groups like Ethiopia's Falashmura, or the Jewish descendants in Kaifeng, there is no historical evidence whatsoever to prove their claims. These communities claim a very distant connection to the Jewish people, severed millennia ago. The most conspicuous group, mentioned earlier, is "Bnei Menasheh," part of the Kuki-Mizo nation in North-East India. Claiming descent from the Biblical tribe of Menasheh, they number about 10,000 members. Some 3,000 have already converted to Judaism and immigrated to Israel in the past decades.



A family from India's "Bnei Menasheh" community, arriving in Israel to complete the government's Aliyah and conversion program, are welcomed by relatives who were earlier immigrants. Ben-Gurion Airport, 2014 (Photo: OfirHaivry)

Many communities of this kind can be found, very different from each other in nature, size and degree of organization, nor is there any uniformity regarding the available information on each group. For some communities, tangibly researched information is accessible; for others, hardly any reliable information exists. Some groups about which information and preliminary research are available are the **Igbo (also Ibo) from Nigeria**, and the **Lemba (also called Mwenye) of South Africa**. With respect to the latter, a possible corroboration to their claim of Jewish ancestry was discovered some years ago via an unexpected source: genetic tests revealed that they carry a gene usually only found in such high frequency in families of Cohanim.³⁸ Other groups concerning whom information is scarce are the "**Bnei Ephraim**" from **South Eastern India**, and the **Chang-Minn people from Western China**.³⁹

Seeking to join the Jewish People

Having surveyed different groups of Jewish descendants, it is now appropriate to relate to a group essentially different from the previous ones: those who seek to join the Jewish People of their own volition without claiming Jewish descent.

In general, there were always cases of individuals joining the Jewish People, but since the times of the Second Temple and up to the establishment of the State of Israel, newcomers were a numerically negligible factor. By contrast, over different periods from the ancient to the modern era, movements of groups joining the Jewish People did exist, sometimes having substantial numbers. Examples include the **"Zhidovschenia" in 15th and 16th century Russia, the 16th and 17th century Hungarian Sabbathians, and the Traskists followers of Judaism in 17th century England.** Generally, very little information can be found on these movements, which still awaiting in-depth research. Other, more significant phenomena are seen even to date. The most noteworthy are: the **"Subbotniks" in Russia since the 18th century**, part of whom underwent full conversion to Judaism and even immigrated to Israel. Today too, there are several such groups in Russia who wish to convert and immigrate to Israel. Other groups are the **Converts of San Nicandro in Italy**, as well as the **Community of Bnei Moshe from Peru and the "Maim Chaim" community from Colombia**, each of which, in recent decades, has undergone a process of group conversion and immigration to Israel by dozens (and in the case of Bnei Moshe, by hundreds) of members.

Several groups are trying to move towards the Jewish people, seeking eventual full conversion. The most prominent among them is the **Abuyadaya in Uganda**, who have been living for decades as Jews, although not yet officially recognized by the State of Israel. Less organized communities include **Beit Yeshurun in Cameroon, "Kasuku" in Kenya** and similar communities in the African countries of Ghana, Gabon and Madagascar. In all the latter cases, these are groups of Christians who have no claim whatsoever to a Jewish lineage, but who have concluded that Judaism is the true faith, not Christianity. They have established communities which strive to live according to the commandments of the Jewish religion. As far as is known, each of these groups numbers some tens to hundreds of members.⁴⁰

Slightly different is the case of Christian communities in the USA and Latin America. They do undergo a process similar to the one described above, abandoning Christianity for a Jewish lifestyle and identity which, at least according to their understanding, is based on the Bible, but they do not seek conversion or some kind of recognition from Jewish entities or from the State of Israel. According to Rabbi Birnbaum's testimony, many such communities exist, numbering hundreds of thousands of members at a minimum, and possibly much more. The members of these communities are mainly people who have deserted a Christian Evangelical identity and independently adopted a Jewish identity.⁴¹

The attitude of Zionism and the State of Israel toward communities with affinity to the Jewish People

As already noted in this report, the State of Israel currently has no clear cut policy or guidelines for addressing communities with affinity to the Jewish People. Because the attitude of Zionism and the State of Israel towards communities with affinity to the Jewish people has hardly been studied, only a very general and basic survey will be presented.

Since modern Zionism's inception, several organized groups attempted to formulate an official and positive approach toward communities seeking connection to the Jewish People. But the tremendous challenges with which Zionism and Israel had to contend, especially in the mid-20th century, prevented making the issue a top national priority. As early as 1924, the "Committee for Nidkhei Israel" (Israel's Scattered Brethren) was established, among whose founders were Jacob Faitlovitch, a member of the Mizrahi movement and activist for Ethiopian Jews, Nahum Schultz, one of the Zionist movement's founders and an associate of Max Nordau, and Yitzhak Ben Zvi, a supremely outstanding leader of the Workers Movement and Zionism. Several years later "The Association for Gerei Zedek" (Righteous Converts to Judaism) was established by Faitlovitch, and Israel Ben-Ze'ev, among the first scholars of Eastern cultures. They collaborated with another prominent activist on these matters, the notable journalist Shalom Ben-Horin.

Following Israel's establishment, the "Committee" became "The Association for Nidkhei Israel" and worked with communities whose relationship to the Jewish People was questionable. These included "Bnei Israel" in India



and the Ethiopian Jewish community. The committee was also active among groups with lesser affinity to the Jewish people, such as descendants of Marranos; and groups seeking conversion, such as the community of San Nicandro in Italy. The activities of these organizations peaked during the 1950s when they enjoyed a certain amount of cooperation with entities like the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization, and open encouragement from Yitzhak Ben Zvi, Israel's president from 1952 until his death in 1963.

In the early 1960s and following the death of most of these organizations' founding members, the organizations' public activities and involvement in official affairs declined. The one exception was the relatively limited activity of Rabbi Eliyahu Avichayil's "Amishav" organization, which continued to promote these issues throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Since the end of the 1990s, renewal and growth of activity has accelerated, assisted by various persons and organizations seeking solutions to communities and populations with affinity to the Jewish people. Outstanding among them is undoubtedly Michael Freund who, in 2002, founded the most important organization active today "Shavei Israel" (Returners of Israel), involved in all areas and communities previously mentioned. Other smaller organizations focus on particular groups, such as "Reconnectar" involved with descendants of conversos, "From the South Wing to Zion" for Ethiopian Falashmura, and so on. Public activities conducted by these organizations manifests in several government decisions already noted, as well as heightened awareness on the part of the Israeli and Jewish public. However, no clear-cut consistent government policy can be referenced nor any substantial public debate regarding this phenomenon and its consequences.⁴²

D. The Committee's Work and Findings

The committee's work lasted about a year, during which an announcement invited interested parties to appear before it or transfer materials and information. The committee heard some 25 testimonies (in some cases via video call) from experts, organizational activists, and representatives of groups and communities from Israel and abroad (see list in Appendix 1). Some responded to the announcement, and others were specifically invited. The committee also received a large quantity of written materials including research books, documents, letters and presentations.

1. Testimonies

Below are some of the committee's most important findings, collated and emphasized in this report, from the presented testimonies and materials:

- Professor Sergio Della Pergolla, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University:

Several levels of affiliation with the Jewish People can currently be found. The first comprises some 14.3 million people, indisputably the core of the Jews; the second comprises some 9 million people generally classifiable as eligible to the Right of Return (divided roughly into 3 million Jews with one Jewish parent, another 3 million kinfolk of Jews or persons with one Jewish parent, and 3 million others eligible to the Right of Return). The next level comprises an undefined number with direct connection to the Jewish People who are not eligible to the Right of Return, such as third or fourth generation or descendants of people who converted, and estimated at about 5 million, although there is no real basis for this number.

The next, fourth level contains large groups best described as communities with affinity to the Jewish People who are mostly descended from conversos, especially of Iberian origin, mostly in Latin America (although groups can also be found in Italy and other European countries). Their number is even harder to estimate, but in all probability reaches many millions, and as proof one can note that according to studies dealing with genetic origin – about 10%-15% of the Iberian Peninsula's population are probably offspring of Jews – meaning 5-7 million out of a population of 50 million. In Latin America, possibly 100-150 million out of a population of about billion people could trace their origins to the Iberian Peninsula (among these populations the number of acknowledged Jews does not reach even half a percent). Not all in the fourth level, nor even the majority of them, identify as Jews, but even a few percentage points interested in some kind of connection to Judaism suffice for this to become a numerically significant phenomenon expected to continue growing. This phenomenon is not confined only to people hailing from the Iberian Peninsula. In Italy there are today, in addition to the Jewish community which numbers about 30,000 members and some other small groups of several hundred conversos' descendants who have returned to Judaism mainly in the South (for example in the city of Trani), tens of thousands of people who are not known to the Jewish community and who voluntarily allocate part of their state tax payments to Jewish organizations. The obvious conclusion is that by rough calculation there are probably about 100,000 people who feel affinity to the Jewish People but are not identified as Jews.

"Many millions around the world have an affinity to the Jewish People – mostly descendants of Marranos from the Iberian Peninsula"

In order to establish a policy with respect to those these levels, a serious study must be conducted to precisely and clearly map each level and its characteristics: Jews and their kinfolk; those eligible to the Right of Return who are not included in the previous groups; offspring of Jews not eligible for the Right of Return (fourth generation and more, descendants of voluntary converts to Christianity); those with affinity to the Jewish People (mostly



descendants of conversos). Only after such mapping is done, will it be possible to consider how to handle these groups.

- Mr. Michael Freund, Founder and Chair of the "Shavei Israel" organization:

Since its founding in 2002, the "Shavei Israel" organization has engaged in locating groups with affinity to the Jewish People and assisting members who wish to convert to Judaism and immigrate to Israel.

I founded the organization after it became clear to me that no Jewish or official Israeli entity responds to requests and enquiries of groups with clear affinity to the Jewish People, let alone initiate contact or other bonding with groups of this type. This is both neglect and failure to fulfill the moral and historic mission of Israel as the Jewish Nation's State, as well as a strategic mistake which misses the opportunity to embolden the Jewish People and the State of Israel.

Among the many groups with affinity to the Jewish People with which the organization is connected, only a small part is interested in full conversion and Aliyah to Israel, but very large groups of people show interest in information and ties with the Jewish People and hold clearly pro-Israel positions. They are numerous, and of Jewish origin but wish to remain in their countries without converting to Judaism, and will become great supporters of and activists for Israel. Of special importance in this context is the Hispanic community in the USA, whose public and electoral influence is on the rise.

"Colombia is an example of a country where the official Jewish community has fewer members than the communities of conversos' offspring, who keep a Jewish lifestyle and are recognized as Jews by their surroundings, although they are not recognized as such by entities like the Jewish Agency and the Government of Israel"

Even if Israel and Jewish organizations continue to be inactive, ignoring the trend of drawing closer to Judaism taking place today in many places around the world, the process will go on and probably increase in the coming years, and may have far-reaching consequences if Israel does not handle it properly. A good example is Colombia, a country in which the Jewish community numbers only about 2,500 members. Nonetheless, more than 20 communities of conversos' descendants, numbering some 4,000 members, lead a Jewish lifestyle but are not recognized by the Jewish communities. Simply put, the number of offspring of conversos leading a Jewish lifestyle is already larger than the Jewish community, a trend that is expected to increase in the future. It is clear that at a certain point the question will arise as to which of these communities is recognized by the State of Colombia as a Jewish community. Over time it is hard to imagine how Colombia will avoid recognizing the Jewishness of communities that lead a Jewish lifestyle, a situation that may bring up fundamental questions and will also pose a problem for the Government of Israel.

It is proposed that the Israeli government adopt an approach which separates the handling of the identity issue from that of the status issue. Identity is an individual's affair and one can identify as one wishes; on the other hand, the issue of status as a Jew is an official technical matter which officially binds the Israeli government.

- Dr. Nathaniel Fischer, coordinator of a study group on the subject of newcomers to the Jewish People in the Van Leer institute:

Considerable awakening of the wish to belong to, or have an attachment with, the Jewish People is seen worldwide. This awakening is expressed at various levels, starting from personal or academic interest and up to the wish to fully join, individually or in a group, the Jewish People.

In the past two decades more than 80,000 people in Israel alone converted to Judaism (about half of them hailed from Ethiopia). Many others convert in different manners and settings around the world.

The Israeli authorities are completely unprepared for this reality, and as far as we currently know are not making any efforts to prepare for this emerging reality. Such is the state of affairs that not long ago Spain and Portugal

passed laws granting the eligibility to citizenship of these countries to the descendants of the Marranos, whereas in Israel they are not granted this eligibility and no significant public debate is conducted on this issue.

"There is no precedence in the history of the Jewish People to the numbers and diversity of those wishing to join it today."

It is important to stress: There is no precedence in the history of the Jewish People to the numbers and diversity of those wishing to join it today. If until two generations ago joining Judaism was a problematic and sometimes even risky endeavor, today in many places there is no risk at all. Thus, the deterrents of the past which impeded the attractiveness of Judaism and the State of Israel, and felt mainly by those already having an affinity for or interest in the Jewish People, no longer apply. The Israeli and Jewish leadership must be mindful of this important development.

- Rabbi Michael Shudrich (Chief Rabbi of Poland, Warsaw):

Only in the past few years has the scope of "Red" crypto-Judaism begun to be exposed. The term refers to East European Jews who converted outwardly after WWII but concealed their origin from their families too, to avoid the persecution they were subject to by communist regimes. The scope of the phenomenon is hard to estimate, but in Poland thousands are in the process of full return to Judaism, and about ten thousand more, while feeling a lesser affinity, nonetheless try to draw closer and are interested in learning about Judaism, Israel and the Hebrew language.

"More than half of the Jewish community members in Warsaw did not know as children of their Jewish origin."

It can be assumed that many more thousands if not possibly tens of thousands of "Red crypto-Jews" exist about whom Jewish entities know nothing. In the Jewish community of Warsaw, there are as of today several hundred active members; more than half did not know as children of their Jewish origin. At times they discovered it by chance, and at other times an elderly parent revealed it to them on his deathbed. There are many testimonies of a similar situation, though on a smaller scale, in countries like the Czech Republic and Hungary.

- Professor Michael Corinaldi, Jurist, expert on ethnicity status in Israel, Netanya college:

Marginal communities always existed alongside mainstream Judaism but in the past several years, some experienced crisis and were finally accepted by Judaism's mainstream and by the State of Israel. In the past, the "Bnei Israel" community from India underwent the process. In the last generation it was Ethiopian Jewry: following crisis and struggle, it is currently accepted by the Jewish institutions, the state apparatus, and by most rabbinic authorities as a legitimate Jewish community whose members are not required to convert to Judaism. However, there are also mishaps, and even today many Ethiopian women who wish to marry are "converted" unknowingly as part of the preparation processes, by immersing in the Mikveh before three rabbis and reciting a blessing.

"Several communities that in the past were at the margins of Judaism's mainstream and whose Jewishness was doubted have succeeded in recent years in receiving full recognition from the State, the Ethiopian Jews and the Karaites among them."

Prof. Corinaldi has also assisted two other marginal communities: the Karaites who, according to different estimates, currently number some 40,000 in Israel; and the Samaritans, with some 750 members. Both had existed at the fringes of the Jewish People but with an affinity to it, and in recent years have been recognized as eligible to the Right of Return, and are additionally allowed to conduct ceremonies of marriage and divorce and even conversion to Judaism in their own courts (rather than in Chief Rabbinate courts).



- Dr. Shulamith Halevi, independent historical researcher of Iberian conversos' descendants:

Awakening affinity of conversos' offspring to their Jewish heritage has been on the rise in the past decades. Many conversos' descendants are admirers of Israel and show affinity towards it. They constitute enormous potential to which Israel can connect. Currently, the State or its representatives have no policy whatsoever on the subject, and Israeli representatives worldwide do not know how to handle the many enquiries from conversos' offspring, most of whom request information about Judaism in general and the history of Anussim, or about a specific location and family. Currently, most enquiries remain unanswered.

Israeli representatives worldwide do not know how to handle the many enquiries of conversos' descendants who request information about Judaism in general and the history of the ".Anussim, or about a specific location and family. Most enquiries remain unanswered

The event Dr. Halevi conducted in Mexico City in 1991 to mark 400 years since the burning at the stake of Luis de Carvajal, one of the most important and well-known descendants of conversos in Mexico, demonstrates the phenomenon's strength and the emotions it arouses. She expected several dozens of guests, but to her complete amazement hundreds of people she never knew showed up, sobbing as they told her of being descendants of conversos.

The phenomenon of the conversos' descendants is complex and varies widely from place to place. For example, there is a difference between a country like Colombia, where conversos' offspring are organized in orderly communities, which today number more than 15, and a country like Costa Rica, where there seems to be a very large concentration of conversos' descendants who preserve the traditions of Jewish families (as far as we know, almost all the ambassadors of Costa Rica in Israel were from families of descendants of conversos) but have no significant community or public organization.

Another case is that of several fishing towns in North East USA (near Boston) as well as in Southern Canada, where immigrants from Portugal settled, likely descended from Marranos. It turns out that many of the families there maintain traditions such lighting Sabbath candles, and aversion to pork, but are not aware that these customs are connected to Judaism.

- Dr. Matheus Miranda-Guimarãesh (an activist from the descendants of Marranos in Brazil):

Matheus is a journalist by profession, married (his wife, he says, is also descended from conversos) and a father of two, who is currently in Israel studying for a Master's degree in Jewish studies. He claims that the Miranda family was always aware of its Jewish provenance, kept secret, and wandered over the years from Portugal to Italy, arriving in Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century. There, its members became farmers in the remote region of Minas Gerais. He claims that up until one generation ago, the family maintained the tradition of marrying within the family in order to preserve their Jewish identity.

Matheus' father, Marcelo Miranda-Guimarãesh, decided after retiring some 15 years ago to found an organization for conversos' offspring in Brazil, named ABRADJIN. The organization focuses on preserving the legacy of the struggle against the Inquisition, and currently numbers about 1000 members. Several years ago the father single-handedly established a small museum on the history of the Inquisition in Brazil. He was officially recognized by the Provincial State. The museum serves as a center for research and distribution of information on inquisition activities in Brazil, is maintained wholly through the family's funds and contributions, and is frequented by about 5000 visitors a year. In the past there was hardly any awareness or interest in the Inquisition in Brazil, but the museum's activity has led to the launching of a municipal annual memorial day for Inquisition victims. The museum and the organization are working in collaboration with the local Jewish community, which also recommends visiting the museum.

"The great majority of conversos' descendants strongly object to the process of conversion, which implies they are not Jewish: in their eyes this would be a denial and betrayal of their conversos ancestors' legacy of adherence to the Jewish Identity; therefore a process of "Returning to Judaism" should be conceived for the descendants of conversos."

The situation of conversos' offspring in Brazil is complicated due to their unclear religious status. Since many families had zealously maintained Jewish identity and tradition for centuries, the majority of them vehemently object to the process of conversion, which implies they are not Jewish. In their eyes this would be a denial and betrayal of their conversos ancestors' legacy of adherence to Jewish Identity. Miranda-Guimarães thinks that a process of "returning to Judaism" should be devised for the offspring of the conversos. However, it should be noted that there are also Evangelical Christians among the descendants of conversos, who are trying to use the issue of returning to Judaism to avoid a situation in which they'll have to renounce Christianity. He notes that while the majority of rabbis in Jewish communities in Brazil do not cooperate with the groups of descendants of conversos, they can nonetheless be hospitable. Thus, for example, Matheus' children, who he claims to educate as Jews in every sense, have been accepted into study frameworks and cultural activities in the local Jewish community institutions.

- Mrs. Gloria Mound, founder and director of "Casa Shalom," an independent center for the study of the Anussim in Jerusalem.

Mound began her activity by chance, after having met some people in Spain, several decades ago, who claimed to be descendants of Anussim. The more she continued to research this area, the more people started contacting her requesting information on the subject, some requesting historical information about their family name or the history of crypto-Judaism, and others interested in learning about Judaism or even in converting. At first the requests came only from Spain, but with time they came also from Portugal, the Caribbean Islands, and South America. Over time other organizations dedicated to the subject of Marranos' offspring were established. The subject shows growing internet presence. According to her, one can cautiously estimate at least several tens of thousands of people currently taking an active interest in their Jewish origin.

A large majority of the enquirers searching their roots discover that their family is of Jewish origin. They do not seek conversion to Judaism but become admirers of Israel and of Judaism even if initially their attitude was anti-Jewish. In several cases Mrs. Mound has succeeded in obtaining recognition of Jewishness for women who could prove a 16-generation continuous chain of Jewish mothers.

"A large majority of the enquirers searching their roots discover that their family is of Jewish origin. They do not seek conversion to Judaism but become admirers of Israel and of Judaism even if initially their attitude was anti-Jewish."

From her experience, in most cases these are individuals (neither families nor groups) who had no idea of their Jewish provenance and started searching after a piece of information had reached them, or because they were looking for an explanation of their family name. The exception is the town of Zamora in North-West Spain (close to the border with Portugal), where some real relics of a community of Marranos were left, and it would be a good idea to help the people of this town with information on Judaism, genealogy, crypto-Judaism and the Inquisition.

- Mr. Ashley Perry, President, "Reconectar" organization, and Knesset Lobby for Spanish and Portuguese conversos:

The network project of "Reconectar" began under a different name in 2007, with the aim of conducting a preliminary mapping of numbers, locations and self-definition on the population of descendants of Marranos from the Iberian Peninsula. The project had a budget of about 3 million shekels, and a team of 12 experts from relevant fields were involved in its various stages. The team analyzed entries of more than 300,000 surfers to sites connected to the



project, and dealt with family origin, family names, and so on.

The project's conclusion: there are more than 100 million people, mainly in the continents of America and Europe, who are identifiable as descended from Iberian Marranos. Of them, some 30% are aware to some degree of their Jewish roots and wish to know more about Judaism, Jewish history, and Israel. Out of these about half, or 10%-15% of the 100 million identify themselves as Jews in one way or another, even if the practical expressions of this self-identification are minute or non-existent. The data demonstrate the average situation in 22 Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries, as well as in the USA, but varies widely from country to country.

About 30 million people who are descendants of conversos from Spain and Portugal "are aware of their Jewish roots and wish to know more about Judaism, Jewish history, and Israel."

In other words, currently two populations of Jewish descent (the Jews, and the descendants of conversos), are more or less equal in size (14-15 million each), and ways must be found to reconnect them. Millions of people in the American continent and beyond are interested in learning about Judaism and Israel, in doing business with Israel or visiting it, and in somehow connecting with the Jewish People. New technologies, such as genetic tests, are expanding and expected to increase the possibilities for information about and identification of offspring of Jews. We should be prepared, so that we can offer those interested an opportunity to connect to the mainstream Jewish People. In order to advance this cause, "Reconectar" is currently developing a network of applications designed to enable "reconnection" of these populations to the Jewish world, at first by virtual means and in the future in tangible ones. "Reconectar" aims to assemble the largest and most significant database worldwide on the subject of Iberian Peninsula descendants of conversos.

Currently there is no government policy or any real activities assisting these communities. This is a dangerous situation, since in view of the increasing demand for information and attention from Israel which is not adequately responded to, Christian Evangelical groups actively seek to integrate into the community of conversos' offspring as a method for being accepted by Israel in the future. It is imperative that Israel address the subject in a clear and unequivocal manner.

Among the activities the Israeli government could initiate in this context: a "Taglit" type program aimed at youngsters from conversos' offspring; issuing special entry permits to conversos' offspring for study and work in Israel; recognizing the affinity to Israel of those who can prove real connection to the Jewish People; creating historical and genealogical databases to aid the offspring of conversos; creating an option similar to that for the Falashmura, which enables Aliyah during the conversion process. In addition, a network of "Batei Israel" (Houses of Israel) can be erected worldwide to disseminate Jewish and Israeli culture, similar to how the Goethe Institute or the "French Institute" are promoting the cultures of Germany and France.

The organization's activity is gaining increased recognition. Both the President of Israel and the Head of the Jewish Agency already expressed official support in the past for the organization's efforts. In September 15, 2016, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sent an official letter in English praising the organization for its activity towards reconnecting many of the conversos' descendants to the Jewish heritage, and stating that "The renewed connections of the conversos to the Jewish traditions which we share is a source of inspiration and empowerment for our People."

- Rabbi Bukhbut (Chief Rabbi of Venice):

Every year the rabbi receives dozens of enquiries, mainly from southern Italy (Napoli and further south), and particularly from women, regarding forced conversion and Judaism. Only in few cases the enquirers ultimately convert to Judaism, but most of the enquirers who do not convert become staunch supporters of Israel. The enquiries are usually made after a person discovers, by chance, that a certain family custom, such as lighting candles on the Sabbath, or their family name, is Jewish. The potential inherent in these enquirers is large and will expand even more when publications describing the names and customs of Marrano offspring are available, leading many more to realize that they too are of Jewish provenance.

In addition to the conversos' descendants, there are also many descendants of Jews in Italy who, owing to the tolerant circumstances prevailing during the last two hundred years since the establishment of the united Italian State, converted to Christianity or simply assimilated without actively converting.

"It is advisable to engage in informational activity among the Jewish communities leaders, in order to increase their awareness of customs and names typical of descendants of conversos, so that they can better handle the enquiries they receive."

Comprehensive research and a genealogical pool could help many Italians reveal their Jewish roots. In almost any city in Italy there are huge hundreds-years-old archives that have not yet been researched. They can easily provide a lot of information regarding pedigrees and history of the conversos and their offspring in Italy. A serious scientific committee researching these archives would be able to build a database and later on publish it and even launch a series of lectures throughout Italy on subjects like Israel and Judaism, activities that would drive people to learn more. It is also advisable to engage in informational activity among Jewish communities' leaders in order to increase their awareness of customs and names typical of conversos' descendants so that they can better handle the queries they receive.

• **Professor Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Emeritus, Sociology, Tel Aviv University:**

Prof. Ben-Rafael participated in a comprehensive survey of over 6,000 persons conducted in 2013 by a large European Jewish Organization. The survey mapped the condition of Jewish communities in Europe and simultaneously raised several phenomena relating to communities with an affinity to the Jewish People, with which the committee deals. The survey explored Jewish identity in Europe, and found that alongside a protracted and widespread phenomenon of assimilation and even desertion of Judaism, a reverse trend has also been taking place, of joining at one level or another although in many cases this involves people who are not Jewish and do not convert to Judaism.

From a population of thousands of Jews and their family members throughout Europe which the survey checked, it was found that about 13% are newcomers to the Jewish People. Of them, about a third, or almost 5% of the people defining themselves as Jewish, can be termed "assimilated into Judaism" that is, people who have joined the Jewish People, but have never undergone (and probably do not intend to undergo) any type of conversion to Judaism. In most cases these are probably spouses of Jews who raise their children in a Jewish community setting, and are sometimes even more active there than their Jewish spouse. As far as can be judged, these phenomena are expanding gradually, although the information regarding their scopes and attributes at the moment is very limited.

"About 13% of the members of the Jewish communities in Europe are newcomers to the Jewish People and about a third of them have never undergone (and probably do not intend to undergo) any type of conversion to Judaism."

It appears that this phenomenon developed because marriage outside the circle of Judaism was so widespread that hardly a Jewish family exists that is not part of the phenomenon. Additionally, Jewish life in Europe is generally more "secular" than in other places; therefore the demand or need for conversion in order to become part of the Jewish community and its activities are much milder. In countries like France, Belgium, Germany and Britain, many community settings are not religious, such as cultural centers, museums and more; and in educational institutions about half the students are not Jewish. In all these settings it is possible to participate in activity that does not necessarily entail a religious action. At the center of the Jewish consciousness of these communities is the memory of the Holocaust, the attitude towards Israel and the rise of the new antisemitism. The survey found that most European Jews do not think a link between Jewish identity and religion is essential, but they do have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish People.



- Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, Head of the "Amiel" Institute, which trains emissaries for communities abroad, also serves as Dayan (religious judge) in the national conversion system):

It is important to emphasize that currently there is no national body dealing with the subjects that the committee has been examining. Undoubtedly the past two decades have seen steep growth in the incidence of those searching for an affinity with the Jewish People, largely due to the expansion of the internet and other means of electronic communication and information. In contrast, a profound lack of awareness exists regarding the phenomenon of communities with an affinity to the Jewish People, and its scope in Israel and within World Jewry, both on the part of the Jewish public and decision makers. The result of no awareness is no policy or strategy on this subject.

An important aspect of the phenomenon, and beyond our control, is that each year tens and maybe thousands of people leave Christianity, either as individuals or as communities, at their free will and with no outside guidance or intervention. Some adopt Judaism the way they understand and define it. This occurs mainly in places where a Christian Evangelical world is active, predominantly across the American continent (North and South), in Australia and in Africa. In Europe the phenomenon hardly exists at this point. Since in many cases these "Judaized" individuals are not accepted into an existing Jewish setting, large groups form numbering tens of thousands of members defining themselves as Jewish, but who are completely detached from establishment Judaism. Therefore, it is conceivable that in the wake of these processes "An Alternative Jewish People" numbering millions will gradually be formed.

"The issue faced by the committee is not a stand-alone matter, but is also connected to the definition of the Jewish People's boundaries."

The issue faced by the committee is not a stand-alone matter, but is also connected to the definition of the Jewish People's boundaries. In order to discuss the issues at hand, and to reach decisions, taking action on several planes would be valuable: create broad public awareness in Israel and in the Jewish world on the subject; precisely map the phenomenon; develop frameworks to provide interested individuals with basic education on Jewish topics, Israel, and the Hebrew language; integrate communities with affinity to the Jewish people into worldwide distribution of pro-Israel information; adopt special tracks for obtaining visas and converting descendants of Anussim.

- Professor Abraham Gross, Department of Jewish History, Ben-Gurion University:

Until recently, the assumption when researching the descendants of Anussim was that other than small communities which survived, such as in Belmonte, Portugal and the Spanish island of Majorca, the population descended from the conversos essentially disappeared without trace. However, in the past two decades, an unprecedented awakening of groups of conversos' descendants has begun worldwide: it could be termed "the Phoenix rebirth". For about a decade Prof. Gross has been in touch with groups of conversos' offspring, mostly in Brazil, attempting to assist them in various ways. The phenomenon occurs in almost all South American countries, but is particularly conspicuous in Brazil. Besides the impact of the internet and the information revolution of the past decades, another source for this phenomenon in Brazil is the identification with and even admiration for Israel, shared by many. From what can be inferred the phenomenon is real, although naturally one cannot determine it for each and every case.

Despite the unequivocal opposition of the Jewish establishment in these countries, the phenomenon continues expanding, undoubtedly due to the infiltration of new information and communication technologies that allow unprecedented accessibility.

It can be estimated that at this time several tens of thousands people are exploring their Jewish affinity. The impression is that out of every 100 people with this type of background, who classify themselves of Jewish descent, only five to ten will wish to receive some kind of recognition of their Jewish origin and still fewer will want to

convert to Judaism. Those wishing to convert, although they can be easily accepted by Reform or Conservative communities, usually prefer to be accepted as Jews by the Orthodox communities, even if they do not intend to observe the Mitzvot following their conversion.

In Brazil today at least twenty communities are descended from conversos, which together number about 1,500 people. In certain places descendants of conversos who returned to Judaism form a substantial number of the Jews in the area. For example, in the city of Natal, one of the centers of descendants of conversos, the majority of the 60 families constituting the community are descended from conversos. In each place where these activists are present, they are a blessing to the veteran Jewish communities, which are often depleted and aging. Since in most places the descendants of Marranos are rejected by the established Jewish communities, they are starting to form their own communities. It is important to note that Christian Messianic communities are trying to join the Jewish movement of the conversos' descendants, for example in the city of Belo Horizonte.

It appears that the main problem for communities of conversos' offspring is leadership. Unsurprisingly, the leaders of these communities and their members lack a robust Jewish basis. Typically they are also very individualistic people who joined the community following their own self-search, and find it hard to bow to authority, especially the kind that lacks institutional recognition or strong inner traditions. The result is that many communities split and sometimes totally disintegrate due to internal fighting. It is important to empower the leadership of the conversos' descendants by providing education and training in Judaic studies, Jewish and Israeli history, the Hebrew language and more. Coming to Israel for this purpose is not always an option, and Brazil and other countries do not have institutions able to provide comprehensive and satisfactory Jewish education, and information on the internet is partial and quite often distorted.

"The main problem for communities of conversos' offspring is leadership. Unsurprisingly, the leaders of these communities and their members lack a robust Jewish basis. Typically they are also very individualistic people who joined the community following their own self-search, and find it hard to bow to authority."

Basically, the most important thing for members of these communities is moral support: the knowledge that the State of Israel is aware of their existence and supports them in principle. Being recognized in one form or another as part of the Jewish People and Israel is of the utmost importance to them and they expect the State of Israel to "Smile with benevolence upon them." It would be very desirable for the institutions representing Israel, including the Jewish Agency, to convey to the descendants of Anussim the message that they are welcome. But right now the opposite is true, and the attitude of the State is either disregard or outright hostility, including from major Jewish organizations, such as Hadassah, The World Jewish Congress and more. However, contrary to the chilly approach conveyed by official institutions, findings show that in interactions with the general Israeli public, the latter is very sympathetic to the offspring of the Marranos and wants to draw them closer.

- Rabbi Chaim Amsalem, Head of a Yeshivah and author of "Zera Israel" (Israel's Seed) about the Halakhic status of offspring of Jews:

In Halakhic tradition, restoring offspring of Jews to Judaism's fold is an undertaking of great merit, based on an explicit Jewish commandment. A particularly important Mitzvah is to return to Judaism the descendants of the Marranos: according to Abarbanel, the blessing "Mekabetz Nidkhei Israel" ("Who gathers in the scattered people of Israel") said as part of the Amidah prayer (the Eighteen Benedictions) is aimed at people who are not even aware of their Jewishness. Undoubtedly a huge awakening is occurring, mostly in Latin America, and Israel must be able not only to respond to queries but actively seek Israel's "scattered people." It is important that the State accesses communities of Jewish origin, first and foremost descendants of Anussim. The aim is not necessarily to convert them, but mainly to familiarize with them, and simultaneously deepen their acquaintance with Judaism and Israel. The Law of Return currently admits into Israel many immigrants who by all accounts are not Jewish or even offspring of Jews (for example non-Jewish spouses of persons eligible for the Right-of-Return), therefore the State ought to consider those who are of Jewish descent but are not eligible for the Right of Return.



"It is imperative that the State access communities of Jewish origin, first and foremost the descendants of Anussim. The aim is not necessarily to convert them, but mainly to familiarize with them and simultaneously deepen their acquaintance with Judaism and Israel."

Bringing the descendants of Anussim closer is an obvious and historical duty of the State of Israel, but as of today the topic seems "too big" for it to cope with, and there is no indication that it recognizes or understands its importance and its scope.

- Dr. Mordechai Arbel, former Israeli ambassador to several Latin American countries, researcher of Marranos and their descendants (passed away shortly after presenting at the committee):

The late Dr. Mordechai Arbel served, inter alia, as ambassador of Israel to Panama and Colombia, where he was first exposed to the phenomenon of conversos' offspring who had returned in one form or another to their Jewish identity. After retiring from service in foreign affairs, he began studying the subject of the descendants of the conversos in places like Jamaica, Barbados, Suriname, and even the Philippines and the city of Madras in India. His studies revealed that communities of conversos' descendants who had returned to Judaism did not become fully independent Jewish communities: rather, due to their meager Jewish knowledge, they remained dependent on spiritual guidance from communities such as Amsterdam, Salonika and others. Communities of conversos' offspring remained relatively weak, and many descendants of conversos who returned to Judaism left it later on, not by converting to Christianity or by active desertion, but rather through assimilation or convenience as a result of the Jewish world's neglect and disregard.

A major factor in the decline of communities of descendants of conversos who had returned to Judaism was Europe's Holocaust, which obliterated the spiritual leadership of communities like Amsterdam and Salonika on which they had relied. Quite often, the figures who, following the war, attempted to replace the old Sephardi Rabbinic leadership were Ashkenazi rabbis from Europe, who in their method and outlook ignored the sensitivities and the character of the descendants of the Anussim. The Ashkenazi rabbis, orthodox and reform alike, disregarded ancestral Sephardi traditions that formed the backbone of Jewish identity among descendants of conversos, pushing many to completely abandon Judaism. Nevertheless, it is still possible to invest efforts at restoring at least some of the conversos' descendants to Judaism.

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Among his experiences, Dr. Arbel tells how he once arrived as the Ambassador of Israel in Barranquilla, Colombia's main port city, to promote its economic ties with the State of Israel. He was a dinner guest with the mayor, the port director, directors of banks and other dignitaries. To his amazement he discovered that, of the eleven guests, all were progeny of Jews but only one was openly Jewish. Another case occurred in Panama where he served as ambassador. He met Alberto Osorio, a brilliant academic studying to become a priest. Osorio told Arbel that all his family had arrived in Panama from Portugal as conversos and over the years had become Christians, although they remembered their Jewish origin. Arbel confronted Osorio and asked what his conversos ancestors would have thought of his becoming a priest in a church that had persecuted them. Years later he again met Osorio, by now an outstanding Philosophy professor who had meanwhile, together with most of his family members, decided to

return to Judaism. Some months ago Arbel received a message that one of Osorio's female relatives made Aliyah and was about to be drafted into the IDF.

He estimates that in the Caribbean islands and in Guinea alone there are at least 9,000 descendants of Marranos who are aware of their Jewish provenance, and it is relatively easy to reach them, since the society in these areas is less traditional and the church does not exert as much influence. This is in contrast to places like Venezuela and Colombia, where numbers are larger, but local tradition and the church still deter people from deliberating the subject of Judaism. But offspring of Jews can be found in Venezuela and Colombia, for example among the contributors to fundraising for Israel, although outwardly they are not Jewish. With tolerance and persistence many of them can be brought back into the Jewish People's embrace.

- Rabbi Andrew Sacks, Director of the Rabbinic Assembly of the Masorti (Conservative) movement in Israel:

After visiting numerous places in South America, Africa and Asia in recent years, it is clear that an authentic and expansive phenomenon is taking place involving individuals and communities wishing for closer ties to the Jewish People, and sometimes wanting to convert. Even in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, an attempt is currently under way in the capital city of Jakarta to establish a community of offspring of Jews and converts.

In Israel, the authorities, and especially the Ministry of the Interior, contain in-built hostility towards those seeking affinity, except for those cases which the authorities, for ideological reasons, want to bring closer. The hostility shown by the Ministry of the Interior towards those wishing to come to Israel from Asia, Africa and South America contains clear racial elements, and some of its employees seem to harbor a hostile approach toward the Reform and Conservative Jews in general. These people should be removed from their post.

The Ministry of the Interior's policy does not permit entry into Israel to people interested in studying in a religious institution that is not part of that religion, such as someone wanting to study in a religious Jewish institution but is not officially Jewish. In fact, entry to Israel is blocked to anyone already in the process of drawing closer or converting to Judaism. Paradoxically, a descendant of conversos who has not yet been converted to Judaism can enter Israel for religious studies in a Christian institution but not for religious studies in a Jewish institution. The Israeli Conservative movement's "Rabbi's Assembly" receives funding for members of communities with affinity to the Jewish People to stay and study Jewish studies, but these people cannot get entry visas to Israel from the Ministry of the Interior.

"The Ministry of the Interior's policy does not permit entry to Israel to people interested in studying in a religious institution who is not part of that religion [...] Paradoxically, a descendant of conversos who has not yet been converted to Judaism can enter Israel for religious studies in a Christian institution but not for religious studies in a Jewish institution."

It is extremely important to establish an authority for appealing the decisions of the Population Registry and the Ministry of the Interior on matters of entry to Israel as an avenue to approach in cases of negative responses or arbitrary decisions at the bureaucratic level. Currently requests and various problems that arise can be "under examination" for years, and although the law states that queries will be answered within 60 days, there is no enforcement whatsoever, or sanctions leveled against the Ministry of the Interior in this regard.

Concerning worldwide conversion, the correct approach is to conduct conversions only in places with a Jewish community infrastructure that can enable Jewish life, otherwise the value of the conversion is doubtful. It would therefore be appropriate to oppose planned conversion activity in places that no longer offer adequate and wellfounded Jewish community infrastructures.



- Dr. Daniel Lees, Basel University, Switzerland, researcher of Jews and Judaized Africans, mainly the Igbos:

Lees has been studying the Igbo tribe (also called Ibo) since 2006 when he traveled to Nigeria and found four substantial communities of Judaized Igbos. Since then some of the communities have split and new ones created. The Igbo is an ethnic group numbering about 30 million members and is concentrated mostly in South-Western Nigeria, but its members are also scattered in other regions. Owing to the slave trade, some of the blacks in the USA and in the Caribbean are descendants of the Igbo. In recent decades many Igbos emigrated to Europe. Almost all Igbos hold the belief that they are of Jewish descent. The Igbos today are Christians, but even a minority of Igbos who remained faithful to their pre-Christian pagan religion believe in their Jewish origin. Dr. Lees' impression is that the belief in Jewish origin does not stem from economic motives, since the 20,000 Igbos currently living in Switzerland who hold to this belief do not benefit from it at all. Judaized Igbos currently number several thousand at most.

The Igbo's belief in their Jewish descent is nothing new [...] as early as 1840, when a British scientific delegation went out to research the Igbo tribes, the Chief Rabbis of London sent with them a letter of inquiry to the Igbo tribesmen, under the assumption they were of Jewish origin.

Lees noted that the Igbo's belief in their Jewish descent is nothing new. As early as 1840, Olaudah Equiano, a freed slave who became one of the first and most prominent spokesmen for the rights of colored people, authored a book which noted the many parallels he had found between beliefs and customs of the Igbo tribesmen and those of the Jews. In 1840, when a British scientific delegation set out to research the Igbo tribes, the Chief Rabbis of London sent a letter of inquiry with them to the Igbo tribesmen, under the assumption they were of Jewish origin. It would be advisable to establish an Igbo research and study center, send representatives from Israel to regularly meet these groups, and invite representatives of communities like this one to activities organized by Israeli embassies.

- Mr. Moshe Lee, member of the community of descendants of Kai Feng Jews in China, immigrated to Israel several years ago, converted to Judaism, today serves in the IDF:

As a child in Kai Feng, a city in the Henan region in Eastern China, with population of about 5 million, I knew from my family that we belong to a group called Jews, but I could not really understand what it meant. It manifested mainly in their avoidance of certain foods, and in grandfather telling them to believe that one day they would reach the Land of Israel. The community in Kai Feng numbers today some several hundred members who are descended from the historical community that existed until the 18th century, and who still preserve the identity of their Jewish origin. A current estimate would be less than a thousand members of the community still preserving their Jewish pedigree which ties them to the Jewish community that existed in the city centuries ago.

"As a child in Kai Feng I knew from my family that we belong to a group called Jews, but I could not really understand what it meant. It manifested mainly in their avoidance of certain foods, and in grandfather telling them to believe that one day they would reach the Land of Israel."

The community has its own kind of school where the children learn about Judaism and a little Hebrew after regular school hours. The community does not have a constant and official connection with the State of Israel or with a Jewish entity, such as the Jewish Agency, and only once in a while representatives of "Shavei Israel" come to teach for a certain period. It would be appropriate for the State to maintain a permanent connection with the community and send representatives to teach about Judaism and Israel in a persistent and ongoing manner. In the last few years mainly with the help of "Shavei Israel," several small groups of the community's youngsters, numbering less than 30 in all, converted and immigrated to Israel, but there is no one post-immigration to guide them regarding the laws, rights and regulations practiced in Israel, which are so different from those in China. This contrast with the situation for newcomers from other countries, for whom there are support organizations, communities of their origin, and many written materials.

- Mr. Danny Limor, who was active in bringing Ethiopian Jews to Israel via Sudan, and directed a study program about immigration:

Limor is mainly active in helping the Igbo communities in Nigeria interested in converting, and also other groups like the Lemba in South Africa. He visited Nigeria several times, accessing communities with an active synagogue run by Igbo tribesmen. He estimates some 10-15 communities total up to 5,000 people. The Igbos' overt process of closer links to Judaism began about 50-60 years ago. Currently these communities include a generation born and wholly living according to a "Jewish" identity.

"The people of the Igbo communities and similar groups are interested first and foremost in receiving an adequate Jewish education."

These communities' main source of information regarding normative Judaism is the internet. Limor helped students from the community establish a Jewish student organization in Nigeria. He organized two weeks of intensive studies on Judaism and Israel for the youngsters of these communities, but this is just a drop in the ocean compared to what is really needed. The people of the Igbo communities are interested first and foremost in receiving an adequate Jewish education. It would be very helpful to establish a school or institute in Israel for Igbo communities and similar groups, allowing the communities' youngsters specified study sessions offering meaningful materials about Judaism, Israel and leadership so that they can return to their countries and lead their communities.

- Professor Moshe Liba, former Israeli Ambassador to several countries, including in Africa:

During his career, Prof. Liba encountered claims of affinity to the Jewish People, some of which were genuine while others were groundless. He notes that in Senegal (West Africa) a popular theory also appears in a book recently published there claiming that many Senegalese people are of Jewish descent, but his impression is that the theory has no basis in facts.

"A sizable part of the population of the Island-country of Cabo Verde is in all probability of Jewish Marranos' descent."

A reverse example is Cabo Verde, an Island-country located off the coast of West-Africa, which was ruled by Portugal until 1975. It is known that many Marranos from Portugal arrived in Cabo Verde in the 15th and 17th centuries, since the Inquisition's activity in the islands was limited and inconsistent. Today there are about 400,000 inhabitants in Cabo Verde, most of them from mixed European and African origin. His impression was that a large part, if not possibly most, of the population in this island-state is of Jewish provenance, including also some of its presidents and prime ministers. He found a similar situation in the island of Sao Tomé, where the arrival of Jewish conversos' children is historically well documented.

- Professor Tudor Parfitt, researcher and lecturer on marginal Jewish communities; currently at the University of Florida:

The phenomenon of communities with an affinity to the Jewish People has grown considerably, mostly in the past two decades. In some cases the claim to affinity is grounded, but in other cases are completely baseless, and represent a wholly "imagined ethnography." However, even in the majority of those cases, the motive behind them is a genuine feeling and yearning for Judaism rather than any material gains. It is estimated that currently some 15 million people are not recognized as Jews, but believe they are Jews or of Jewish descent. This number is similar to that of recognized Jews worldwide. Even in Papua (near Australia) a tribe by the name of Gogodala claims affinity to the Jewish People.

Simultaneously, a new category has been emerging of late, of "genetic Jews" who, due to a relatively new scientific development, can with high probability claim Jewish lineage, although there is no historical proof to support the



claim. Currently some of the Jewish groups (like the Ethiopian Jews) are not included within the framework of a recognized genetic kinship, unlike some currently Christians populations.

"It is estimated that currently some 15 million people are not recognized as Jews, but believe they are either Jews or descended from Jews. This number is similar to that of recognized Jews worldwide."

Professor Parfitt personally experienced the great popular admiration for the Jews and for Israel in African locations, even in relatively isolated communities that have never seen a Jew or an Israeli representative. One of the most important and influential ideas in this regard is the search for the Lost Ten Tribes. There is no group in the world whose descent from the Ten Tribes can be proven unequivocally, but the mere idea of the existence of these descendants is a formidably attractive myth. He notes that in the colonial era, Europeans searched for the Lost Tribes' offspring among African populations, and the idea was adopted by different African groups as a way of presenting a lineage which was not inferior to that of the European rulers, a counterreaction to the racism that emerged in Europe in the 19th century and was intended to replace the weakening Judeo-Christian tradition by a "scientific" perception of human beings. In the 1930s, the king of the Ashanti nation in West Africa authored a book presenting his dynasty's Israelite origins. In Rwanda and Burundi, for instance, Belgian colonial rulers identified Jewish roots in the local Tutsi tribe, which dominates over the more populous Hutu tribe.

Today Judaism's attractiveness to African groups is substantial, owing to, among other things, the problematic legacy of Christianity and Islam. Many Christian groups in the continent adopt Jewish, Biblical and also Halakhic customs, and each year their members become closer and closer to the Jews. Parfitt does not know any other case where members of these groups became more Christian over time. There is a very broad phenomenon of Judaizing (without receiving recognition from Israel or Jewish organizations) in places like Madagascar and Cameroon. In his opinion there is a chance that Judaism may become a major religion in Africa, or even the principal one.

Parfitt met the Lemba people and researched them extensively. This very poor group has claimed Jewish descent for years but no supporting historical evidence was ever found. However, several years ago a genetic test was conducted that revealed they have a high frequency of the "Cohanim Gene" typical of Jewish Cohanim (priestly) families; they also seem to have a Middle Eastern genetic origin. Although Parfitt thought for many years that this represented another group having "Imagined ethnography," he testified that today he is convinced that their claim carries more than a grain of truth vis-à-vis linkage to Jewish and Middle Eastern origin (possibly from the region of Yemen).

It is important that Israel awakens to the fact that the number of groups claiming Jewish origin equals the number of recognized Jews in the world. Israel should establish a policy with respect to this phenomenon.

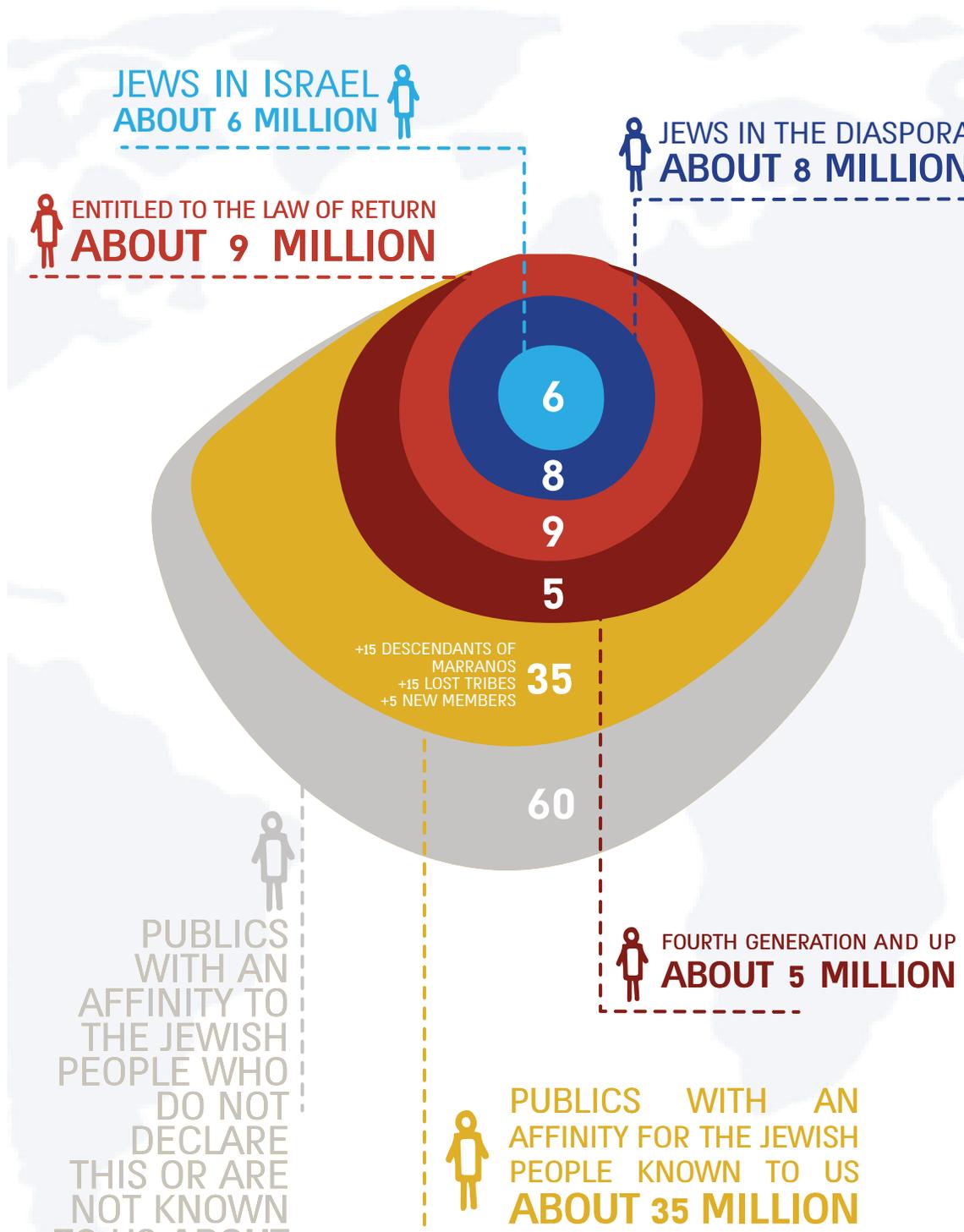
2. The committee's findings.

After the committee heard the testimonies and read the numerous written materials it received, and after the committee members discussed the information presented to them and its meaning, it reached the following main findings:

- a. The committee found complete consensus among all experts, organizations and community representatives as well as the professional literature regarding the huge growth in the past two decades of the populations and communities expressing affinity with the Jewish People and the State of Israel.
- b. The committee also found across the board agreement regarding the fact that at this time, both the State of Israel and the international Jewish organizations are not just unprepared for this significant development, but are devoid of any policy or significant debate of the issue, and lack even the will to invest in a preliminary effort to collect information about, and research, the issue.
- c. The committee found that all the information possessed by State authorities, worldwide Jewish organizations, experts, and interested groups on the subject of communities with affinity to the Jewish People is, at best, very deficient, and in other cases almost completely absent. What is more, no official body is investing considerable resources or continuously engaging in methodical collection and research of these topics. All the available information with respect to communities with affinity to the Jewish People derives from a small number of organizations and individuals, all of whom appeared before the committee, who took it upon themselves to engage in collecting and organizing the information, and maintaining connections with the communities. This is a very welcome activity which has created a preliminary factual infrastructure that the committee found useful, but it is highly limited and deprived of resources considering the magnitude of the mission. In short, currently available data is very partial. It is absolutely clear that a substantial effort at data collection as well as initial research in order to establish a reliable and precise factual database have become vitally required.
- d. Notwithstanding the above, the committee considered all presented data and is of the opinion that for the purpose of determining work assumptions and a preliminary reference framework, it is possible to create, based on the available data, a general picture describing the numerical situation of the Jewish People and communities with affinity towards it. The Jewish People today may be depicted as consisting of several levels of affiliation, the boundaries among which are often blurred, that also include populations with affinity towards the Jewish People and the State of Israel.
 - The first level comprises a core containing more than **14 million Jews** acknowledged by all accounts as such.
 - The second level comprises another **9 million people who meet the criteria of eligibility to the Right of Return**, and their kinfolk, divided roughly into a third who have one Jewish parent, a third who are kinfolk of Jews or of those with one Jewish parent, and a third being other persons eligible to the Right of Return, such as grandchildren of Jews and their families.
 - The third level comprises those who can be defined as distant relatives, fourth generation-and-up offspring of Jews, and Jews who have converted their religion in the recent generations: some individuals in this level are Halakhic Jews yet ineligible to the Right of Return. The numerical scope of this level is hard to determine and at the moment, the committee relies on cautious assumptions estimating their number at **around 5 million people at least**.
 - In the fourth level are populations and communities which, in one way or another, declare their affinity to the Jewish People, such as descendants of Marranos (whether in organized communities or acting as individuals) who claim an even more remote Jewish descent, as well as communities seeking to join the Jewish People with no claim to common lineage, "New Age Jews" and more. It is even more problematic to determine the numbers of this level, and the committee prudently decided that according to the presented information that number **could reach about 35 million people**.



- In the fifth and final level are those who could be defined as a future potential: this includes populations of Jews' offspring, descendants of conversos, and other groups with affinity to the Jewish People, but who do not declare affinity for a variety of reasons, or who are still unaware of their affinity but may be exposed to this type of information in the coming years. Naturally, the numerical data for this level are the least founded. The committee determined that according to available information, a reasonable assumption could be some **60 million people**.⁴³
- e. The committee believes the following diagram may illustrate the levels within the Jewish People as described.



Legend:

The core (about 14 million): Jews acknowledged by all accounts as such (about half of whom live in Israel).

Eligible to the Right of Return (about 9 million people): eligible to immigrate to Israel according to the Law of Return regardless of Halakhic status.

Distant relatives (about 5 million): fourth generation-and-up offspring of Jews, and of Jews who have converted to another religion.

People with affinity to the Jewish People (estimated at 35 million): declare their affinity to the Jewish People by origin or by their wish to voluntarily join the Jewish People.

Potentially have an affinity to the Jewish People (estimated at 60 million): either do not declare their affinity or are unaware of it.



E. The committee's conclusions

E.1 The main conclusion reached by the committee is that the fast expansion of communities and populations with an affinity to the Jewish People described in this report, expresses a new, unprecedented reality taking shape with respect to the Jewish People's boundaries and dimensions.

For centuries the Jewish People had been a very well-defined group, usually discriminated against in some form. The concept that desertion of Judaism led to assimilation and the speedy disappearance of those who left is no longer true in many places. On the contrary: for numerous and increasingly expanding populations, affiliation or at least affinity with the Jewish People is not only worthy but at times coveted. This profound change requires reflection and realignment regarding the issues of the limits of the Jewish People and their definition, the attitude of the Jewish People towards those who leave it and those who want to join it, and Israel's official role with respect to populations with an affinity to the Jewish People.

E.2 The existence of levels of affinity to the Jewish People comprising millions of people who are neither Jewish nor eligible to the Right of Return is a real challenge to the Jewish People and the State of Israel, but at the same time it is also an unprecedented strategic opportunity to bring populations with an affinity to the Jewish People closer. It is an opportunity to establish a fixed and clear-cut track for the minority who eventually decide on fully joining the Jewish People, while simultaneously creating avenues of stable and far-reaching cooperation with the vast majority of these communities interested in being attached to the Jewish People, and helping it and its country.

E.3 The levels described and connections with them are, in many cases, not fixed but very fluid. Clearly, within the levels of the Jewish People, various forces are and will continue to be at work, with individuals and groups being pulled inward while others pull outward. The absence of an Israeli government policy relative to communities with affinity to the Jewish People signals to many that no one is interested in them, and they are possibly not even wanted. At the same time, various groups, some Christian and others anti-Zionist, are trying to weaken the affinity of these populations to the Jewish People and Israel.

The disregard and continued inaction vis-à-vis these communities may have devastating consequences for the future of Israel and the Jewish People, among them: the creation of parallel communities which will be recognized in various countries as Jewish but will have no relation to the Jewish People or the State of Israel, forming a parallel, alternative Judaism; distancing those whose Jewish identity is weakening; missing important opportunities in cultural, economic and informational levels among those who wish to draw nearer and be of help to Israel; creating antagonism among those who could be Israel's best friends.

E.4 A huge gap currently exists between the scope and development of this phenomenon, and the lack of awareness of its existence among the country's institutions and the Jewish organizations, and among the Jewish public at large in Israel and throughout the Jewish world. This disparity has far-reaching significance, particularly because no preparation of any kind is being organized by the country's authorities or the Jewish People relative to understanding and addressing the communities with affinity to the Jewish People and Israel.

In view of this it is absolutely necessary to bring the characteristics and scope of the phenomenon of communities with affinity to the Jewish People to the attention of the public at large and that of the decision makers.

E.5 The goal is twofold: to begin a public debate on this significant issue, its implications and ways to contend with them; as well as to encourage the country's authorities to devise and formulate a clear policy on this matter.

E.6 The Diaspora Ministry, as the governmental arm in charge of dealing with the Jewish People outside Israel's boundaries, has the greatest responsibility and capability to jump-start governmental and public consideration

of communities with affinity to the Jewish People. It is imperative that the Diaspora Ministry take steps to start tackling the subject in three vital areas: 1) data collection and research; 2) creating public awareness; and 3) work vis-à-vis the communities being organized among these populations.

E.7 Although it appears from this report that the phenomenon of populations with affinity to the Jewish People is very complex and diverse, it is absolutely clear that the largest and most significant group of all is the group of descendants of the Marranos (mainly those of Iberian origin). This group comprises the vast majority both among populations with affinity to the Jewish People and among organized communities active in these populations. This is also a sector whose affinity to the Jewish People is well known and accepted (although many individual cases may be controversial). It would be extremely apt for the first stage of informational and organizational efforts to focus on descendants of the Marranos.

E.8 The committee concluded that in the past two decades the Israeli government and its leaders (as far as is known without a comprehensive debate) practiced a policy that can be described as "intermittent opening of gates", for certain groups and communities with affinity to the Jewish People. The two clearest examples are:

- a) In 2003 the government of Israel approved Decision 2948 enabling registration of Falashmura offspring, a community of Christians descended from Jews in Ethiopia, who are not eligible for Aliyah under the Law of Return. Eventually, based on this registry, many thousands were allowed entry (in several waves of immigrants) for the purpose of converting them to Judaism in Israel.
- b) In the past decade the Israeli government approved entry to the country of several groups, each numbering a few hundred members, from the "Bnei Menasheh" community from India, who commenced the conversion process in India assisted by the "Shavei Israel" organization and completed it in Israel. Signs indicate that the government is about to adopt a similar policy in other cases as well: one example is an official letter (in English) that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sent on September 15, 2016, to the "Reconnectar" organization which engages in activity among conversos' descendants. In the letter he praised the organization for its activity to reconnect many of the conversos' descendants to their Jewish heritage and stated that "The renewed connection of the Anussim to the Jewish traditions which are common to us and to them is a source of inspiration and empowerment for our people."
- c) Another example is the announcement issued by Minister of Absorption, Sofa Landver, in November 2016, in which she announced her intention to submit to government a decision to launch an Alyiah and conversion program for interested communities of Russian "Subbotniks" (estimated at a few thousand), much like the plan drawn up for the Ethiopian Falashmura. Since cases of this type are multiplying, it would be appropriate to examine the option of setting up a well-defined and permanent track that enables entry to Israel for conversion to Judaism of individuals, groups and communities deemed suitable.



F. The committee's recommendations

The committee's recommendations are presented as overall recommendations, followed by short-range recommendations for the years 5777-5778 (mid 2017 to mid 2019), medium-range recommendations for the years 5779-5781 (mid 2019 to mid 2021) and long-range recommendations for 5782 (2020) and on.

(Note: this report and its recommendations do not deal directly with issues of conversion or immigration to Israel, which are beyond the scope of the committee's goals and authority. In cases where these subjects come up following other recommendations, a referral for cooperation with the appropriate authorities is noted.)

F.1 Main recommendations

Having concluded that the levels of communities with affinity to the Jewish People which are not considered Jewish or eligible for the Right of Return are significant and stable, our main recommendations are designed to establish frameworks which enable ongoing engagement with this new and evolving reality.

- a. The Ministry of the Diaspora shall strive to convince the Israeli government to adopt this report's conclusions and recommendations as its policy.
- b. The Ministry of the Diaspora shall establish a system that will be in charge of the issue of populations with affinity to the Jewish People. This system shall deal, inter alia, with collecting and organizing the information related to these communities, registering communities and contact persons, nurturing and strengthening these communities and assisting with the general frameworks of these communities if they are already established, as well as with responding to enquiries and questions on these subjects from governmental entities, various organizations, and individuals. The committee further recommends establishing an advisory public council consisting of experts in varied areas. The council will provide, on a voluntary basis, advice and responses to different aspects of these issues as they surface in the course of the new system's activities.

F.2 Short-range recommendations – 5777-5778 (mid 2017 to mid 2019)

In order to jump-start the activity related to the populations with affinity to the Jewish People, and despite the scant information and resources currently available, the committee recommends that the Ministry of the Diaspora conduct a pilot project among communities of descendants of Marranos (the largest and most significant group of the communities in question) over the next two years to advance five topics:

- a. Distributing information in Israel and around the world on the subject of Anussim and communities of their offspring, thereby creating broad awareness of the phenomenon and promoting public debate on this issue.
- b. Significant and detailed mapping of currently active communities of conversos' offspring.
- c. Promoting the Ministry of the Diaspora's cooperation with communities descended from conversos, including coordinating and helping the activity of these selforganizing communities or any established comprehensive organizations involved with these communities to advance educational and informational projects.
- d. Harnessing communities of conversos' descendants in support of the State of Israel.
- e. Locating / preparing materials for a series of lessons on Judaism, Hebrew language and culture, and the State of Israel. Series of lessons will be taught by local facilitators following a short training period. Materials will

also be designed for interested groups worldwide, as well as for the course facilitators relevant to their specific community.

F.3 Medium-range recommendations for the years 5779–5781 (mid 2019 to mid 2021)

- a. The committee recommends that the Ministry of the Diaspora opens channels of dialogue and discourse with the public, both in Israel and the diaspora, as well as with Jewish community leaders abroad, regarding the dramatic significance of the evolving reality where levels of the Jewish People include increasing numbers of individuals who are not Jewish or eligible to the Right of Return.
- b. The committee recommends collaboration with government bodies and third sector organizations to build and maintain a national internet site that will digitize research and other information (including the option for genealogical pools), and will distribute information on subjects of importance to the populations with affinity to the Jewish People: information about Judaism, Israel and Hebrew language; historical events such as forced conversion and related information (such as genealogies of typical family names, etc.); topics from Jewish tradition considered significant by these populations (like the definition of "Zera Israel" in the Halakhah); options for visiting and studying in Israel; information about laws and regulations in Israel which touch on subjects of importance to these communities, such as criteria for the Law of Return, the government conversion system, and more.
- c. Inviting and encouraging academic research to comprehensively and methodically map these populations: descendants of Jews not eligible for the Right of Return, (fourth-and-up generation, offspring of voluntary converts to Christianity); offspring of conversos' groups claiming ties to the Jewish People, who are not of conversos' background; groups seeking to join the Jewish People.
- d. Initiating programs to bring the leadership of these communities to Israel for diverse dedicated courses (from summer courses to year-long studies and up to full academic degrees).
- e. Promoting community leadership training for suitable groups of conversos' descendants, if possible with the participation of Jewish communities in these countries.
- f. Examining the possibility of expanding participation criteria for programs like "Taglit" and "Massa" to include youngsters from conversos' offspring or alternatively, establishing a new "Taglit"-type program aimed especially at youth and young adults of conversos' offspring.
- g. Discourse with worldwide Jewish communities regarding particular challenges related to the populations with affinity to the Jewish People: communities of conversos descendants with different characteristics living in diverse regions (Poland, Portugal, Italy, South America); communities in South America that do not encourage conversion to Judaism (Mexico and Brazil); congregations of conversos' descendants of significant size relative to that of the Jewish community (Colombia); communities where congregations of converts to Judaism from non-Jewish descent have grown (Subbotniks in Russia, Bnei Menasheh in India, Bnei Moshe in Peru); communities where large groups or even the majority of members are fourth-and-up generational descendants of Jews who view themselves as Jews but are not recognized as such nor as eligible to the Right of Return (Russia, many European countries).



F.4 Long-range recommendations from 5782 (2022) and on

- a. Raising the Israeli Foreign Service's awareness relative to populations with affinity to the Jewish People. This includes examining collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding training and appointment of a new or existing employee in all Israeli representative offices worldwide, who will be in charge of these topics and will serve as the contact person for these communities in the relevant country. This contact person will develop permanent ties with these groups, will invite group members to participate in embassy activities, and if possible, will dedicate one day a year focusing on these groups.
- b. Collaboration with the National Conversion System to examine conversion channels defined as "Shivah" (Return) and meeting Halakhic requirements for such cases. These options will be designed from the outset for descendants of Jews who converted out of Judaism but are interested in registration under "Return to Judaism" instead of "Conversion to Judaism."
- c. Collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior's Population and Immigration Authority to create an entry permit into Israel for purposes of study and work uniquely for members of communities with affinity to the Jewish People.
- d. Collaboration with the Ministry for Strategic Affairs and Information, to create a framework for promoting information and ties with many of the populations having affinity to the Jewish People and the State of Israel, who are interested in obtaining materials about topics like culture, music, Israeli food, Hebrew language and literature, and more; as well as those interested in helping, either individually or through organizations, to combat incidents like BDS, and in disseminating information about Israel.
- e. Examining collaboration with the Ministries of Culture / Foreign Affairs / Absorption to expand the international network of "Batei Israel" (Israel Houses) around the world, to spread Jewish and Israeli culture, similarly to organizations like "The Goethe Institute" and the "French Institute."
- f. Establishing a national authority to tackle this issue in a reliable and ongoing manner. The committee recommends establishing a national institute within this authority, to research populations with affinity to the Jewish People, first and foremost among them issues relating to the descendants of Marranos.

Appendix 1 - List of persons appearing before the committee (in order of appearance)

Professor Sergio Della Pergolla, demographer, Hebrew University

Dr. Nathaniel Fischer, researcher of conversion trends, Van-Leer Institute

Professor Michael Corinaldi, researcher of fringe communities, Netanya College

Mr. Michael Freund, President of the "Shavei Israel" organization

Dr. Shulamith Halevi, independent researcher of the history of converso descendants in the American continent

Professor Abraham Gross, researcher of Spanish Jews and Anussim, BenGurion University

Mr. Ashley Perry, Director of the "Reconectar" organization and the Knesset Lobby for Spanish and Portuguese Marranos

Helen and Delfino "Dell" Sanchez, Sephardic Anussim Center, San-Antonio, Texas, USA

Dr. Matheus Miranda-Guimarãesh, ABRADJIN organization, Museum of Inquisition History, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Dr. Giovanni Melchionda, activist for a group claiming descent from Marranos, Ancona, Italy

Rabbi Uri Sherki & Rabbi Ephraim Chuban, Head and Director respectively of World Bnei Noah Organization

Rabbi Michael Shudrich, Chief Rabbi of Poland Jews, Warsaw

Rabbi Andrew Sacks, Director of the Rabbinical Assembly ("Knesset Rabbinic") of the Conservative movement in Israel

Mrs. Gloria Mound, founder and director of the independent "Casa Shalom" center for the study of the Anussim

Rabbi Shalom Bukhbut, Chief Rabbi of Venice, Italy

Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, Head of the Amiel Institute, Jerusalem

Rabbi Chaim Amstel, Author of "Zera Israel" (Israel's Seed)

Professor Eliezer Ben Rafael, researcher of Jewish identity in Europe, Tel Aviv University

The late Dr. Mordechai Arbel, researcher of the Marranos and their descendants, former Israeli ambassador Colombia

Professor Moshe Liba, researcher of descendants of the Marranos, former Israeli Ambassador to several countries in Africa

Mr. Danny Limor, activist for Igbos in Africa; previously active in bringing the Ethiopian Jews to Israel

Mr. Moshe Lee, community member of the Kai Feng Jews descendants in China, immigrated to Israel and today serves in the IDF

Mrs. Esther Kolani, member of the Bnei Menasheh community, India, immigrated to Israel and is currently a social worker

Dr. Daniel Lees, researcher of Nigerian Igbos, Center for African Studies, Basel University, Switzerland

Professor Tudor Parfitt, researcher of Lembas and African Jews, Florida University, USA



Appendix 2 - Endnotes

- 1 See for example T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel* (Phoenix, 2002) and A. Shakhan, *Towards the Sambation* (Hakibbutz HaMeuchad, 2003)
- 2 See for example, Y. Ben Zvi, *The book of Samaritans, their history, settlements, religion and literature* (5695).
- 3 J. Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (State University of New York Press, 1992) pp. 200-201. Later appears as Faur.
- 4 For example, the Midrash (commentary) by David HaNagid describes how Simeon the Pious promised Alexander the Great to name his children after Alexander if the latter refrained from erecting a statue of himself in the Temple. Regardless of the story's historical accuracy, it shows willingness for external "Hellenization" by adopting Greek names but nonetheless observing Jewish religious tenets. There is no shortage of practical examples regarding faithful sages of Israel with Greek names, from Antignos Man of Sokho and up to Philo of Alexandria. By contrast, High Priest Menelaus and his associates Jason and Elkimos acted, as far as we know, from their inner conviction of Greek culture's essential superiority to Jewish tradition, collaborating and perhaps even encouraging extreme Hellenization and religious persecutions during the reign of the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV. See for example the Book of Makavim II, chapter 5.
- 5 M. Lacker, *Muhammad and the Jews* (Ben Zvi Institute, 5774) Y. Ben Ze'ev, *The Jews in Arabia* (Achiasaf, 1957), B. Danah, "History of the Jews of the Arab Peninsula in the 7th century and their relations with Muhammad, Prophet of Islam", *Israel Heritage* 11 (November 2014).
- 6 M. Corinaldi, *Ethiopian Jewry, Identity and Tradition*, (Reuven Mass, 1988).
- 7 See K.A. Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, 2nd edition, but lately some are disputing the historical truth of the conversion to Judaism of the Khazars – at least regarding significant numbers), see Shaul Stampfer, "Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism?" in *Jewish Social Studies*, 19/3 Spring/Summer 2013 pp. 1-72.
- 8 From a "Shavei Israel" document submitted to the committee.
- 9 C. Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959) pp. 4-7. Later appears as Roth; H. Nissimi, *The Crypto-Jewish Mashhadis* (Sussex Academic Press, 2007); R. Patai, *Jadid Al-Islam* (Wayne State University, 1997).
- 10 B. Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late 14th to the Early 16th Century, According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources* (Cornell, 1999) pp. 172-174. Later appears as Netanyahu.

It may not be so surprising that this strict line developed among Sephardic rabbis, in view of the fact that for centuries they and their communities were forced to live in proximity to large groups of converts, and quite often these were actually converts who played a central role in using various threats and enticements to make the Jews abandon the religion of their ancestors. The hostility of Sephardic rabbis towards conversos caused these rabbis to develop an approach that explains the Inquisition's persecution as divine punishment, compatible to their sin, for conversos and their offspring who preferred Christian society's materialistic benefits over the hardships of exile, with prolonged torture in the form of materialistic injury including rejection by Christian society.

- 11 Rabbi Shlomo ben Simon Duran ('Rashbash'), as early as the mid-15th century, expressed views similar to those of other rabbis of his era, in which two generations of conversos lived as Christians at least externally and the Jewish element among them, was at an advanced stage of disintegration. Unlike the gentler attitude towards the conversos expressed by Rivash (Rabbi Isaac ben Sheshet) in the previous generation, harsher atti-



tudes developed, and Rabbi Shlomo ben Simon considered all conversos as publicly desecrating the Sabbath; he viewed conversos who did preserve Judaism as exceptions whose claim nonetheless needed investigation and proof. Rabbi Tzemach Duran, son of the Rasbash, who inherited the chief rabbinate of Algiers from his father in 1467, expressed a more tolerant position according to which the Jewish flame of the Anussim was never completely extinguished. His view resulted from his 1465 stay on the Island of Majorca, following which he testified that he realized many Marranos still lived on the island and remained faithful to Moses' teachings, observing the laws of Sabbath even for generations after forced conversion.

This was also the position of Rashbash's second son, Rabbi Simon Duran, who followed his brother Tzemach as Algiers's Chief Rabbi, and was in favor of considering the Marranos who returned to Judaism as Jews, not just with respect to the first generation, who should be viewed as fully Jewish (without taking into account their observance of the Mitzvot during their time of conversion) but also with respect to the offspring of the conversos and even regarding "Zera Meshumad," the offspring of voluntary converts. Rabbi Simon Duran felt that they should all be considered "conversos" in the full sense and therefore treated as part of the Jewish People rather than as gentiles. The Chief Rabbi of Granada, Se'adia ben Maimon ben Danan, also shared this view, which he explained as clearly aimed at preventing another crime, that of excluding the conversos from the people of Israel, in addition to the crime of conversion; he attempts to draw them closer by stressing that they are part of Israel, instead of distancing them and demanding that they re-convert to Judaism as if they were fully gentile. Rabbi Simon Duran even went further and set a rule stating that the number of Marranos marrying gentile women was relatively small, therefore one should assume that all the offspring of the returning conversos are Jewish, except in cases where explicit proof indicates that a certain person's mother was gentile (i.e., putting the onus of proof on the deniers). Netanyahu 50-51, 61-65.

12 See Netanyahu 184-185, 188-190.

13 Faur 338-37, Roth 52-53; Howard Sachar, *Farewell España, The World The Sephardim Remembered* (Vintage, 1995) pp. 70-71 Later on appears as Sachar. The edict of expulsion clearly points to the deep concern among the Spanish public regarding the degree of Christianity of converted Jews, leading to the conclusion that only separation from other Jews and full supervision by the Church would ensure they remain Christian. The depth of public hostility expressed by these views is attested to by the fact that as early as 1493, just one year after the expulsion of the Jews seemed to solve the danger of "Judaization" posed by the conversos, Ferdinand and Isabella were compelled to issue instructions to local authorities ordering that they refrain from persecuting or hurting the new Christians. See Faur, 41-42.

14 Sachar 160-161, Roth 58-60.

15 Sachar 160-161, Roth 60-62, Netanyahu 204-208, J. Israel, "Jews and Crypto-Jews in the Atlantic World Systems" in R. Kagan & P. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic Diasporas* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2009) pp. 3-8. Later appears as *Israel Atlantic*.

16 Sachar 160-161, Roth 60-62, Netanyahu 213-214, Netanyahu points to a clear indication of Portuguese conversos' loyalty to, and recognition of, Judaism in the rulings of the Sephardic rabbis, which were, as already noted, very hostile towards the Marranos and their offspring following the bitter experience with the Spanish Marranos. However, when many of the Portuguese conversos began to leave Christianity after 1507 and return to Judaism, one finds clear change, predominantly in the Ottoman Empire, in Rabbinic Halakhic attitudes towards conversos, which indicates acknowledgment of these conversos' loyalty to Judaism and easing their return to Judaism.

17 Roth 169-171, Jonathan Israel, *Diasporas within a diaspora* (Brill, 2002) pp. 108-109. Later on appears as *Israel Diasporas*. The nature of life as conversos complicated the issue of transferring religion to the children, arousing concern that it should be carried neither too early nor too late. Generally, conversos who preserved their Judaism chose to raise their children as Catholics while sowing inexplicable ideas and customs, exposing

their Jewish identity only when the child reached adolescence. Typical testimonies by Gabriel de Granada, sentenced by the Inquisition in 1643 in Mexico for "Judaizing," reported that when he was 13, his mother revealed to him that the righteous path to salvation was not that of Jesus but rather, of Moses. Similarly, Antonio Ruiz de Castello: executed in Lisbon in 1647 for his practice of teaching his children Jewish customs on reaching the age of 13. In both cases these families conveyed their Jewish faith to their children: this is some 150 years after the official abolition of Iberian Jewry, and many generations after the last of the conversos who had still seen Jewish life in their lifetimes had passed away. Another distinct characteristic of the conversos' religion was that in most cases, women became the leaders of the families', and group's, spiritual life. See Roth 172-175.

18 Israel Atlantic 5-6, 1-11 and Israel Diasporas 70-71. Run by conversos' descendants, the commercial networks that largely dominated the Atlantic and Mediterranean commerce also played an important role during that period in the Ottoman and Persian empires. Ironically, in both of these Muslim empires, the authorities were suspicious of the Christians, which caused them to prefer Jewish merchants. This in turn contributed to the prosperity of the communities comprised of descendants of conversos who returned to Judaism.

19 N. Wachtel, *The Faith of Remembrance: Marrano Labyrinths* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) pp. 11-13, 210..D. Studnicki-Gizbert, "La Nación Among the Nations" in Kagan & Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic Diasporas, Israel Atlantic 77-78*. Inquisition officials testified to discovering that descendants of conversos would update each other about Jews they knew in various places "because the Jews are making great efforts to know about those of their own religion who dwell in all the kingdoms and the regions, because they boast when they see themselves multiplying." *Israel Diasporas 110*.

20 See in F. Trivellato, "Sepharadic Merchants in the Early Modern Atlantic and Beyond" in Kagan & Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic Diasporas, Israel Atlantic 112-13, Israel Diasporas 470-477*, Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. iv (1864) pp.670-672. One example of the world of ideas and concepts held by the members of the "nation" is the trial, at the end of the 17th century in Mexico, of Fernando de Medina for "Judaizing." He was born as Moshe Gomez among the community of Portuguese Marranos who lived half-openly as Jews in southern France, but soon began traveling the world, eventually reaching Mexico where he became a successful merchant. Arrested by the Inquisition, he suffered physical and mental tortures which probably damaged his sanity. From the reports of the investigation, it is obvious that his knowledge and observance of Judaism were quite poor, and he even expressed doubts as to the existence of G-d, and the concept of divine reward and punishment with respect to all religions. But he stuck to, and was proud of, belonging to the Jewish "Nation" (NACION), which he understood to be his forefathers' legacy, a community Identity, and a common fate. He was proud mainly of his lineage from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and "the Master of Judah" – and in a manner that was clearly an ironic reversal of the Christian claims of "Purity of Blood", since he claimed to a much nobler lineage than any Spanish Christian could ever proffer. He also expressed his view, which must have shocked his Christian audience, that Jesus' death never happened and "If he worshiped Jesus, it was only because he had belonged to the Nation." This creates the impression that his adherence to the Teachings of Moses was first of all adherence to the Law: "The name we were given by our fathers whom we worship above all." [Wachtel 171-185].

21 Israel Diasporas 98-101, 133-134.

22 Israel Diasporas 42-44, 50-51.

23 See B. Feitler, "Jews and New Christians in Dutch Brazil 1630-1654" in Kagan & Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic Diasporas, Israel Atlantic 132-151, Wachtel xii-xiii 247-251*.

24 See the testimonies of Della Pergola, Corinaldi and Rabbi Bukhbut before the committee.

25 See the testimonies of Della Pergola, Corinaldi and Rabbi Bukhbut

26 See the testimonies of Gross and Guimarãesh, as well as Wachtel's book.

27 Testimony of Shulamith Halevi before the committee: F. Hernandez, "The Secret Jews of the Southwest"



in *American Jewish Archives* 44/1 (1992). Also in E. Del Hoyo, *Historia del Nuevo Reino de León 1577-1723* (1972) Mexican historian Eugenio del Hoyo claims that more than two thirds of the first settlers in the Nuevo León region in Northern Mexico, particularly in the city of Monterey, came from families of converted Jews. Although this fact proves nothing relative to any of those settlers' Jewish heritage, it is clear that at least some preserved a sense of Jewish identity in one way or another. See also Halevi, pp. 1-14, 36-40.

28 Israel Atlantic 16-17.

29 Testimonies of Mordechai Arbel, Rabbi Birnbaum and Michael Freund before the committee.

30 Doreen Carvajal, *The Forgetting River* (Riverhead, 2012) pp. 61-63. Carvajal did not convert from her Catholic religion, but reports feeling affinity and strong ties to Judaism. In 2013, when the Spanish Government announced that the descendants of Spanish Jews are entitled to Spanish citizenship, Carvajal applied to check her eligibility, but was told that in order to meet the requirements she would first need to convert to Judaism. See Carvajal 48-49.

31 Testimony of Ambassador Liba.

32 W. Slutzki, "Cantonists", *Encyclopedia Judaica* – internet retrieval of February 26, 2015. See also A. Ofek, "Cantonists: Jewish Children as Soldiers in Tsar Nicholas's Army" in *Modern Judaism* 277-308;13/3 (1993).

33 See M. Baer, *The Dönme Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford University Press, 2009), P. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude. Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755-1816* (UPenn Press, 2015).

34 Testimonies of Rabbi Shudrich, Rabbi Sacks and Michael Freund before the committee.

35 See X. Xin, *Legends of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng* (Ktav, 1995).

36 Testimony of Professor Ben-Rafael before the committee.

37 See H. Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River* (Houghton Mifflin, 2002)

38 D. Lis, *Jewish Identity Among the Igbo of Nigeria* (Africa World Press, 2015), T. Parfitt, *Black Jews in Africa and the Americas* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

39 T. Parfitt, "Israel in China – A Judaizing Discourse in the Far East" in Parfitt, *Judaizing Movements* (Routledge, 2002); Y. Egorova & S. Perwez, "The Children of Ephraim" in *Anthropology Today* 26/6 (2010) .

40 Testimony of Ambassador Liba before the committee.

41 Testimony of Rabbi Birnbaum before the committee.

42 E. Trevisan-Semi, "Conversion and Judaisation – The 'Lost Tribes' Committees at the Birth of the State of Israel" in T. Parfitt (ed.), *Judaizing Movements* (Routledge, 2002); J. Schulte, "Nahum Slouschz (1871-1966) and his contribution to the Hebrew Renaissance" in J. Schulte (ed.) *The Russian Jewish Diaspora and European Culture 1917-1937* (Brill, 2012); Y. Ben Ze'ev, *Jewish Converts (Gerim) and Conversion*, (Koma, 1961).

43 See the reports of Della Pergola, Ben Rafael, Reconnectar, and the testimonies of Gross and Freund

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