PART TWO

Review of the Year
THE YEAR 1947–48 witnessed the most dramatic and perhaps most significant event in post-exilic Jewish history—the establishment of the first independent Jewish state since the loss of Jewish political independence some 2,000 years before. As such, the year clearly marked a turning point in Jewish history—even though the significance and long-range implications of this event could not as yet be fully appraised. The year under review also witnessed other important if less dramatic developments in Jewish life outside of Palestine. The year registered further advances in the economic and social rehabilitation of Jews in war-devastated Europe, and witnessed the consolidation of Jewish communal life in many parts of the world, particularly in areas where the tragic events of the last war had virtually obliterated all Jewish communal existence. Finally, the year brought widespread evidence of an intensification of Jewish religious and cultural life, partly under the stimulus of the events which culminated in the establishment of Israel, and partly as a reflection of that general stabilization of economic and social conditions which characterized Jewish life during the period under review.

The cluster of events which culminated in the establishment of Israel on May 15, 1948, occupied the forefront of interest not only of the overwhelming proportion of Jews, but also of millions of non-Jews, and, on occasion, almost monopolized the attention of international diplomacy. The tense situation which prevailed at the opening of the year and which led
to the submission of the Palestine problem to the United Nations for final solution; the work of the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP), appointed to investigate anew this perhaps most investigated of problems; the hearings before the committee; its deliberations and final recommendation that Palestine be partitioned into independent Arab and Jewish states joined by an economic union; the highly dramatic proceedings before the United Nations culminating in the vote for partition—all this was the subject of world-wide scrutiny. Violent repercussions in Palestine then followed immediately, and the failure on the part of the great powers to pursue promptly and vigorously the aims laid down in the resolution—Great Britain refusing to co-operate with the United Nations and assist in the implementation of any proposal unless it was freely accepted by both Jews and Arabs—which, under the circumstances, was asking for the impossible. The United States government vacillated, shifting from acceptance of partition to a proposal of temporary trusteeship, finally to give a startlingly prompt de facto recognition of Israel within minutes after the Tel Aviv proclamation of Israeli independence. The fighting in Palestine developed into a full-fledged war between the emergency Jewish military forces and the regular armies of the neighboring Arab states, in the course of which the amazing vigor and military effectiveness of the erstwhile semi-military underground forces in Israel first halted and then routed the invading Arabs. Finally, the newly emerging Israeli government consolidated its power with remarkable speed to organize most of the essential services of government—an achievement made all the more remarkable by the fact that it was accomplished in the midst of war and the total mobilization of manpower for purposes of defense. This complex of events commanded the intense interest of Jews everywhere and absorbed the individual and organizational efforts of the most active elements in Jewish life.

This intense preoccupation with Palestine and Israel was a measure of the significance which contemporary Jews attached to the establishment of the Jewish state. Only the
future years, however, will reveal the full significance of Israel as a permanent haven for Jews who for one reason or another may be compelled or may desire to leave their established homes in other countries. Only the future can reveal the full impact of an independent Israel on the political and social status of the Jews outside of Israel, on the relations between the Jews and Gentiles and, more specifically, on the nature and course of anti-Semitism—a phenomenon attributed by some to the political "homelessness" of the Jewish people. Still to be guessed at is the full spiritual, cultural and religious impact of a politically independent, nationally disciplined, socially dynamic and spiritually creative Jewish community of Israel upon the widely scattered, loosely connected and, of necessity, nationally and culturally heterogeneous Jewish communities all over the world.

Whatever its distant implications, the existence of Israel was already making itself felt in Jewish life in 1948. Israel had already become the most important center of Jewish migration. It was estimated that between May 15 and September 1, approximately 45,000 Jews found their way into Israel, and that the rate of immigration at the time of writing was well over 10,000 per month. While the ultimate absorptive capacity of the country could not be determined at this time, it was reasonable to expect that the rate of roughly 120,000 per year could be maintained for a period of approximately five years. The establishment of Israel thus made it possible at last to look forward to the liquidation of the problem of displaced Jews in Germany within two years' time, and to the absorption of additional hundreds of thousands of Jews who, while not technically displaced, were nevertheless anxious to start a new life in Israel.

Apart from this immediate practical significance, the establishment of Israel had already contributed to the strengthening of Jewish morale, so profoundly shaken by the catastrophe the Jewish people suffered in the last war. Israel exerted a unifying effect on Jewish life, particularly in countries with a culturally heterogeneous Jewish population. In many countries the issue of Israel brought together rep-
resentatives of Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities. In Western Europe, notably in France, Israel provided a common meeting ground for the native and Eastern-European elements in the Jewish community. In the United States, except for the small group organized in the American Council for Judaism, the issue of Israel brought together more of American Jewry than perhaps any other issue in recent years.

But the picture was not without its shadows. As was to be expected, the negative attitude of Great Britain aroused intense bitterness among Jews in Palestine and elsewhere; an antagonism which in turn caused a resentment among the British that was reflected in an increase of anti-Jewish feeling in that country, which had been notably free from anti-Semitism in modern times. To a lesser extent, the same situation prevailed in the Dominions and other parts of the British Empire. Far more serious, however, was the effect of the Jewish-Arab conflict on the status of the approximately 900,000 Jews in countries with Arab populations, and more particularly on the status of the approximately 250,000 Jews in Arab-dominated countries. The situation of the Jews in Iraq, Syria and Egypt rapidly deteriorated during the period under review. Unless there was a drastic reversal of events, the position of Jews in that corner of the world could become untenable. Frantic appeals for immediate aid had already reached the Joint Distribution Committee and other Jewish organizations, and emergency aid had been sent to the stricken areas. Emergency aid, however, was at best a palliative, and unless there would be prompt peaceful settlement between Jews and Arabs, the Israeli government might have to consider the speedy mass evacuation and transfer into Israel of many Arabic Jews.

Events in Jewish life in other lands during 1947–48 lacked the drama and pathos associated with Israel. Generally speaking, the year 5708 saw the continuation of the same trends which were already clearly discernible during the previous year. The economic rehabilitation of Jews in Europe continued, proceeding fastest in the countries of Western Europe where conditions were most favorable to Jewish
readjustment. Shortages of skilled manpower facilitated the economic absorption not only of the native and long-established Jews, but also of many newcomers from Eastern Europe who found their way into Western Europe—mainly into France. The measure of economic recovery was reflected in the gradually diminishing dependence of Jewish communities in France, Belgium, Holland and Italy upon relief from overseas, and in the increasing amounts raised in these countries not only for their own welfare needs, but also for the various funds to aid Israel. Barring a war, a depression or any unpredictable disruption, the economic position of Jews in this area could be expected to return to normal.

The situation was less clear in Eastern Europe, where the progress of Jewish economic rehabilitation had been made more complex by at least three factors:

First, the countries were devastated and Jewish life damaged to an extent unmatched in Western Europe. Second, these countries were engaged in the twofold venture of economic reconstruction and the building of a collectivist society. There was a marked acceleration of measures aiming at the nationalization of all economic life, which created special difficulties for the Jews, who had been closely associated with private enterprise. Third, the spiritual milieu within which the Jews were trying to readjust themselves had been on the whole less favorable than that of Western Europe. The age-old anti-Semitic tradition in Poland, Hungary and Rumania, immensely reinforced during the German occupation by Nazi propaganda, was still deeply rooted in vast segments of society. The antagonism toward Jews in these countries was further aggravated by the fact that individual Jews occupied rather prominent positions in the Communist-dominated governments, a fact which was a standing source of resentment to large segments of the population. While the leaders of the governments of these countries were firmly committed to a policy of complete equality, and on occasion took vigorous measures to combat overt manifestations of anti-Semitism, there was nevertheless a deep-seated social antagonism to the Jews, which added to their insecurity in Eastern Europe.
Nevertheless, there was substantial economic recovery among Jews in Eastern Europe. Large numbers were employed in government-owned industry and public services, and an increasing number of Jews found new economic existence in producers' co-operatives, a form of economic enterprise looked upon with favor by the national governments of these countries. During the past year there was a marked economic improvement in the condition of the Jews in Poland, where, with the aid of funds supplied by the JDC and the assistance of the government, an impressive network of over 200 producers' co-operatives provided sustenance to over 15,000 Polish Jews. There was some improvement in Hungary, too, where a similar co-operative program had been initiated in 1947.

In Rumania, on the other hand, the situation deteriorated during 1947-48. The drastic currency stabilization reforms and the increasing tempo of nationalization in 1947 undermined the economic position of many Jews. Tens of thousands of Rumanian Jews who during 1945 and 1946 had returned to their pre-war trades and occupations and had made a substantial measure of economic recovery, were forced out of their economic positions. This deterioration of their status was promptly reflected in the increased flight of Jews from Rumania in the spring and summer of 1947, and resulted in the displacement of a large number of Rumanian Jews who remained in the country. It was estimated that 40–50,000 Jews required retraining before they could be absorbed under the new conditions of the Rumanian economy. Here again the local Jewish organizations, aided by JDC and ORT, initiated an expanded program of vocational training and the organization of producers' co-operatives as the best means of adjusting Rumanian Jews to the requirements of the new economic system.

There was no basic change in the economic conditions of the Jewish displaced persons in Germany, Austria and Italy. With the formal termination of the activities of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association in June, 1947, a new agency—the Preparatory Commission for the Inter-
national Refugee Organization (PCIRO), assumed responsibility for offering basic assistance to the DP population. The transition from UNRRA to PCIRO involved no drastic material change. The maintenance given by PCIRO was still quite inadequate, and JDC continued to provide assistance in the form of supplementary feeding, helped to maintain a comprehensive educational system, including vocational schools, and fostered a network of industrial workshops in which DPs produced commodities for their own consumption. The purpose of the workshops was not merely to increase the stock of commodities for distribution, but also to maintain the skills and morale of able-bodied persons who had not known normal life for years.

Except for some 18,000 Rumanian Jews who fled into Austria and then into Germany in the spring and summer of 1947 and experienced serious hardships, the living conditions of the DP population were not unsatisfactory. There was little evidence of malnutrition and, on the whole, they were fairly well clothed. They continued, however, to live under rather congested conditions. Though their material existence was adequate, they continued to chafe under the abnormal conditions of camp life. The DPs were mainly preoccupied with the question of when they could resume normal lives in new countries. To the displaced Jews Israel was an immediate and personal issue; their morale was closely dependent on the happenings in Israel. Unfortunately, the interpretation of the terms of the truce barring the immigration of men of military age to Israel prevented the immediate transfer of many thousands of DPs. Some 11 to 12,000 Jews were still detained, for similar reasons, in Cyprus.

There was likewise no marked change in the economy of Jews living in countries outside of the areas directly affected by the last war. The sustained high level of economic activities in the United States, Canada, South Africa and countries of South America spelled proportionate prosperity for their Jewish residents. The strength of their economic position in these countries was reflected in the intensification of fund raising for local and overseas needs, the most am-
bitious undertaking being the $250,000,000 United Jewish
Appeal Campaign for 1948 launched in the United States
in December, 1947.

The sustained high plateau of economic activity in the
New World and the continued progress towards recovery in
the countries of the Old, exerted a stabilizing influence on
general social conditions and, with it, a normalizing effect on
the status of the Jew throughout the world. Except for the
Arab area, where the essentially political conflict over Israel
seriously affected the Jew, there were no important overt
anti-Jewish manifestations. Even the Nationalist party in
South Africa, which had a long and vigorous anti-Semitic
tradition and recently won political power, assured its Jewish
citizens that it contemplated no departure from the principle
of legal equality enjoyed by Jews in that part of the world.
Indeed, events of the past year confirmed the belief that
the world was witnessing a gradual return to the pattern
of Jewish-Gentile relationships which prevailed during the
pre-Hitler period. This pattern was marked by the formal
and official sanction of political and legal equality of the
Jew, qualified and prescribed by varying degrees of social,
extra-legal pressures and disabilities.

Actual conditions, of course, varied from area to area.
Thus, in Eastern Europe, where the tradition of anti-Semitism
had been deep-rooted and was particularly strong among the
elements new in opposition, the new Communist-led govern-
ments pursued a vigorous policy of combating overt anti-
Semitic manifestations, both on the grounds of principle and
of expediency in fighting the opposition. In the Western
world, the principles of legal and political equality were
firmly secured. True to the democratic tradition of freedom
of thought and expression, however, there was a reluctance
to use direct governmental and legislative processes in com-
mating the anti-Semitic actions of private individuals and
groups. In these countries greater reliance was placed on the
voluntary action of individuals and groups in the mobilization
of democratic and liberal sentiments for the fight against all
forms of racial and religious discrimination. During the past
year numerous Jewish organizations worked independently or jointly with non-Jewish groups in rallying liberal forces against anti-Semitism. A notable event was the conference of Christian and Jewish organizations which met in 1947 in Switzerland and recommended the establishment of the International Conference of Christians and Jews.

In the United States the fight against discrimination was dramatically highlighted by the report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights. The report did not confine itself to a general affirmation of equal rights for all, but detailed a specific set of legislative measures and other recommendations aimed at giving body and substance to the formal constitutional sanctions. The year was marked by a growing general awareness of the democratic significance of the fight against discrimination. There was more evidence during the past year of wider participation of civic groups in the struggle against discrimination. It may have been significant that for the first time the movie industry ventured to produce and exhibit films which clearly traced the corrosive effects of religious and racial discrimination. On the debit side of the ledger, however, one must note the ungenerous, almost niggardly attitude of the United States Congress in admitting displaced persons to the United States. This attitude was made more regrettable by the meticulous care taken by the legislators in so framing the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 as to keep to a minimum the number of qualifying Jewish displaced persons.

The generally improved economic and political conditions also provided a more favorable background for expanded Jewish cultural, educational and religious activities in most communities. Development in these fields, to be sure, was not of a spectacular nature. Wherever Jews lived they continued to support existing institutions and build new synagogues, schools and other agencies of cultural and religious expression. Underlying these external manifestations there was evidence of spiritual stock-taking and groping for new forms of Jewish living under the conditions of the postwar world. In the countries of Eastern Europe, the Jews faced the task of
reconciling the emphasis on cultural and religious differentiation basic to the idea of Jewish survival with the external pressure for secularization in the spiritual sphere, and cultural and political conformity in the social. On the whole, it appeared to be a losing struggle. Under the steady impact of tightening Communist control, the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe were gradually but relentlessly co-ordinated to fit into the pattern of a monolithic society.

In Western Europe, Jewish cultural activities continued on two different planes. The native Jewish population, culturally identified with the dominant group, viewed its Jewishness as one of a religious identification whose symbols were the synagogue and the religious school. On the other hand, those of Eastern-European background who had migrated to Western Europe, now reinforced by the influx of some tens of thousands of additional Eastern-European Jews, expressed their Jewishness through the more secularized institutions of the Jewish or Yiddish school, affiliation with Jewish social and fraternal organizations and related activities.

In the United States, the events in religious and cultural spheres during the past year confirmed the general trends which had been discernible during recent years. The impact of the last decade, from the profound shock caused by the rise of Hitlerism to the tragedy of the war years; the loss of vital Jewish European cultural centers, and a consequent awareness of the new role of American Jewry; last but not least, the exhilarating effect of Israel—all these resulted in a more intensive cultivation of the spiritual life. Events during the past year offered impressive evidence of the quickened tempo and broadened scope of the cultural and religious life of American Jews. This was reflected in the growing literature aimed at doctrinal clarification that appeared under the auspices of the three main religious groupings: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. It was further reflected in the increase in the number of congregations, in expanded synagogue membership, in campaigns to increase synagogue attendance and in the sustained efforts of Jewish religious leaders to instil greater zeal and assure wider observance
of religious practices among their respective membership. Leading theological schools expanded beyond the confines of theological training to include professional training for educational and communal leadership.

The National Jewish Welfare Board, after having viewed itself through a survey of its activities prepared by Oscar Janowsky under the auspices of a commission headed by Salo Baron, embarked upon an expanded program of activities with emphasis on the all-embracing Jewish cultural and recreational activities of the Jewish center, as distinguished from the purely religious emphasis of the synagogue. The stress on Jewish aspects of the Center program recommended by the survey and the lively comment which the recommendations, both favorable and unfavorable, aroused, testified to the spiritual awareness of American Jewry. The establishment of the Training Bureau for Jewish Communal Service, prompted by the urgent need for communal leaders with a broad Jewish background, was also indicative of the growing feeling of communal responsibility of American Jewry. Another significant cultural event was the opening of the doors of Brandeis University at Waltham, Mass., to the first group of registrants in the fall of 1948—the first attempt in the United States to provide non-sectarian higher learning under secular Jewish auspices. While the bulk of Jewish cultural activity was carried on in the English language, the Yiddish element also attempted to expand the scope of Yiddish cultural and educational institutions. A World Congress for Jewish Culture was to be held in the fall of 1948 in New York City, at which delegates from many countries were to formulate an ambitious program of long-range cultural activities. Finally, the increased sense of awareness which marked Jewish life in recent years was also reflected in the impressive literary output of Jewish books and publications in English, Hebrew and Yiddish.

Viewed in an historical perspective, the past year constituted a milestone in Jewish history. Viewed against the background of tragic war years which saw the extermination of one-third of world and two-thirds of European Jewry, and
against the background of the immediate post-war years when
the salvation of the pitiful remnant hung in precarious
balance, the events of the year—the establishment of Israel,
and the relative consolidation of Jewish life elsewhere—were
a source of distinct encouragement. They justified a spirit of
cautious optimism and enabled Jews to face coming events
with renewed faith in the recuperative powers and vitality
of the Jewish people.