

The Sage of Modern Judaism: The Golden Country and The Reintegration of Other Judaisms

Jews in Canada

Jews have lived in Canada for more than 250 years, with the first recorded Jew settling in Trois-Rivières, Quebec, in 1760 (by comparison there had already been Jews in what would become the US by 1650). Jews from Europe participated in the settlement of the Americas, but were legally barred from residence in New France, where immigration was restricted to Catholics. Jews settled in the British colonies to the south and after the incorporation of New France into the British Empire began also to settle in Lower Canada. By 1768, the number of Jews in Montréal had grown to the point where they decided to establish Canada's first synagogue, Shearith Israel.

By the late 18th century Jews had also settled in Québec City and other parts of Lower Canada. The Hart family were prominent in the area of Trois-Rivières; Ezekiel Hart was elected to the legislature of Lower Canada in 1807 but was denied his seat on the basis of his religion. In 1832, 26 years before Great Britain, Quebec became the first jurisdiction in the British Empire to accord full rights to Jews.

The 1871 census reports a community of over a hundred Jews had settled in British Columbia when it joined Confederation. British Columbia's first delegation to the House of Commons included Henry Nathan, the first Jewish Canadian MP. Congregation Emanu-el in British Columbia is the oldest continually used synagogue in the province, established in 1863.

By the time the outbreak of WWI curbed immigration, there were over 100, 000 Jewish Canadians. Jews worked as retailers and wholesalers, many beginning as pedlars and working their way up to established businesses. Jews also provided much of the labour for urban sweatshops. Jewish merchants spread out to small towns, adding synagogues to the places of worship found in rural Canada. Eleven Jewish farm colonies were founded in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, assisted by the Jewish Colonization Society.

Despite the efforts of Jewish agencies such as the Canadian Jewish Congress, few Jewish refugees were admitted to Canada during the Holocaust, a result of the infamous “none is too many” policy. Between 1933 and 1948, only 5,000 Jewish refugees were admitted to Canada, the lowest number of any Western country. At the same time, 17, 000 Jewish Canadians responded to the call to arms in WWII and served in the armed forces.

With a growing economy in need of workers, and perhaps on the basis of the experience of the War itself, Canada opened its doors to immigrants soon after the end of WWII. About 40,000 survivors of the Holocaust came in the late 1940s, seeking a place where they might have a chance at rebuilding their lives.

During the postwar period, Jews became more fully integrated into Canadian life. Human rights legislation, which began to be introduced in Canada in the late 1940s, removed discriminatory practices. The introduction in 1971 of the federal policy of multiculturalism legitimated cultural pluralism within Canada, having widespread benefits for Jews and many others. Between the 1950s and now many Jews moved from North Africa, The Middle East, and the USSR due to discrimination, as well because of attraction to Canada.

Canada is now home to the 5th-largest Jewish community in the world - following the US, Israel, the former USSR and France. The current population is around 391,000.

Jews in The US

Jewish migration to the United States increased dramatically in the early 1880s as a result of persecution and economic difficulties in parts of Eastern Europe. Most of these new immigrants were Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews, most of whom arrived from the poor communities of Eastern Europe. Over 2,000,000 Jews landed between the late 19th century and 1924, when the Immigration Act of 1924 restricted immigration. On the whole, though, Jewish immigration to the US has been massive. At one time the population of New York was 25% Jewish; these days it is still 9%, approaching the level of Jewish populations in some pre-Holocaust European cities. Metropolitan Miami also has a Jewish population of 9%. Currently the two largest urban populations of Jews are Tel Aviv and New York.

Although the story of Jews in North America is rightfully viewed as one of the most successful mass immigrations in history- over the span of time Jews were markedly successful at adapting and thriving- some aspects of the story are little known today.

Jews and Gangsters

Contrary to stereotypes, the North American Jews of the early 20th century- first or second generation immigrants- were generally poor and poorly integrated in society, much like many struggling immigrant and minority communities around the world today. The inability to easily

enter and flourish in respectable professions led to Jews taking up other possibilities. On the one hand this accounts for the rush of Jews into artistic and entertainment work: comedy, music, film, and comic books. On the other hand, as well as working in low paying factory and trades jobs we filled the ranks of criminal and disdained professions such as pimping, prostitution, abortion provision, gambling, pornography and even organized crime.

A little-known chapter of Jewish American history concerns the Jewish gangsters of the 1920s and 1930s. Some of them had brief gangster careers, using organized crime as a way to get ahead financially, and then dropping out of the game once they had amassed a reasonably large sum of money. A notable feature of Jewish gangsters is the fact that most of their children did not follow in their footsteps- Jewish gangsters generally made sure their children had legitimate professions. Some did become entrenched, however, swept up in the speakeasy movement during Prohibition, they continued to make money off of bootlegged liquor, prostitution rings, gambling, racketeering, and loan sharking.

Three of the best known Jewish gangsters were Bugsy Siegel, Louis “Lepke” Buchalter, and Meyer Lansky. Their roots lay in the ethnic neighborhoods of the Lower East Side; Brownsville, Brooklyn; Maxwell Street in Chicago; and Boyle Heights in Los Angeles. Louis Lepke Buchalter (1897-1944) was nicknamed “Lepkele” (little Louis) by his mother. J. Edgar Hoover called him “the most dangerous criminal in the United States.” Born on the Lower East Side, where his family lived in a crowded flat over a small hardware store owned by his father, Louis was the only one of 11 children to embark on a life of crime. One brother became a rabbi, another a dentist, and a third a pharmacist.... But Buchalter commanded an army of gangsters who extorted millions of dollars from victims. Their weapons were destructive acids, bludgeons,

blackjacks, knives, fire, icepicks, and guns. For a fee Buchalter protected bosses from strikers and unionization of their shops by intimidating workers and using strong-arm tactics. He also forced unions to do his bidding by installing his own business agents or by creating rival unions.

The few who failed to heed the gang's orders or who dared to go to the police with their stories suffered "destruction, acid throwing, mayhem and murder." In the same way that he gained control over the unions through terror, Buchalter moved into legitimate business. Those who tried to fight him found their plants wrecked or their stocks ruined by a special Buchalter task force. When a manufacturer surrendered, Buchalter would place his men in the factory as managers, foremen, and bookkeepers. In his private life, however, like a movie gangster, Buchalter was a devoted family man who rarely drank or gambled, and who reportedly never raised his voice.

In 1934 Buchalter helped to organize the "Syndicate." It converted the scattered, unconnected mobs in New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and other cities into a smooth-working, tightly-bound business. It was Lepke who campaigned for a special enforcement group to keep the peace and ensure that the Syndicate's decisions were carried out. Sometimes referred to as Murder Inc, this group of killers was made up primarily of Jews from Brooklyn. They became the "official" execution squad for the Syndicate.

In 1941 Lepke was indicted for the killing of Joseph Rosen, a garment trucker whom Lepke had driven out of business. Buchalter was the only top underworld figure of his generation to be tried, convicted and executed for murder. He died at Sing Sing on March 4, 1944.

Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel (1905-1947) was the archetypal movie mobster: handsome, ambitious and ruthless. A petty thief and muscleman who rose to become a crime boss, he “rose” to become a member of the East Coast crime syndicate’s board of directors at the age of 28.

Siegel established organized crime in California and opened Las Vegas for the mob. He recognized the tremendous opportunities for profit from legalized casino gambling in Nevada and with Syndicate help built the Flamingo Hotel. After it was built, however, he tried to keep most of the profits for himself. This cost him his life. On a June evening in 1947 someone shot him fatally as he sat in the apartment of his girlfriend, Virginia Hill.

Gangsters and Nazis

The 1930s in America were a period of rampant anti-Semitism, particularly in the Midwest. Father Charles Coughlin, Detroit’s “Radio Priest,” openly called for Jews to be driven from positions of responsibility, if not from the country itself. Organized Brown Shirts in New York and Silver Shirts in Minneapolis both outraged and terrorized American Jewry. While the older and more respectable Jewish organizations pondered a response that would not alienate non-Jewish supporters, others — including rabbis — asked the gangsters to break up American Nazi rallies.

New York State judge Nathan Perlman personally contacted Meyer Lansky and asked him to disrupt the Nazi rallies, provided that Lansky’s henchmen stopped short of killing anyone. Lansky accepted all of Perlman’s terms except for one: he would take no money for the work. Lansky later observed, “I was a Jew and felt for those Jews in Europe who were suffering. They were my brothers.” For months, Lansky’s workmen effectively broke up one Nazi rally after

another. As Rockaway notes, “Nazi arms, legs, and ribs were broken, and skulls were cracked, but no one died.” Lansky recalled breaking up a Brown Shirt rally in the Yorkville section of Manhattan:

The stage was decorated with a swastika and a picture of Hitler. The speakers started ranting. There were only 15 of us, but we went into action. We ... threw some of them out the windows...most of the Nazis panicked and ran out.

In Minneapolis, William Dudley Pelley organized a Silver Shirt Legion to “rescue” America from an imaginary Jewish-Communist conspiracy. Minneapolis gangster David Berman confronted Pelley’s Silver Shirts on behalf of the Minneapolis Jewish community. Berman learned that Silver Shirts were mounting a rally at a nearby Elks’ Lodge. When the Nazi leader called for all the “Jew bastards” in the city to be expelled, Berman and his associates burst in to the room and started cracking heads. After ten minutes, they had emptied the hall. His suit covered in blood, Berman took the microphone and announced, “This is a warning. Anybody who says anything against Jews gets the same treatment. Only next time it will be worse.” After Berman broke up two more rallies, there were no more public Silver Shirt meetings in Minneapolis.

Actions like these, as well as other violent responses to popular Nazism, are generally seen as having helped to restrain American extremism in the 1930s. Their legacy is called on today by the Antifa, violent anti-fascist protesters in Canada and the US who similarly confront and fight neo-Nazis, raising interesting- and difficult- moral questions about human society should respond to those who embrace evil ideologies.

Jews and Jokes

As academic Ruth Wisse has written, “Jewish humour rolls cheerfully off the tongue, like French cuisine and Turkish baths.” In the 70s, *Time Magazine* estimated that the proportion of Jewish professionals in the US comedy scene ran as 75%. Jews currently make up 2.2 % of the US population, and then it was perhaps a little more, 3%, 4%? That means you were 20 times more likely to spot a Jew in a group of comics as you were in the average street scene. Part of the explanation for this may be the generally positive view of humour in Judaism and the presence of irony and wit throughout Jewish sacred literature. Another explanation may be the ease with which a people of words took up using humorous language and wordplay to deal with their suffering. Perhaps for both of these reasons, Jews have long been associated with humour, as this centuries old European joke shows:

When you tell a joke to a peasant, he laughs three times, once when you tell it to him, the second time when you explain it to him, and the third time when he understands it. The landowner laughs twice: once when you tell it to him and again when you explain it, because he never understands it. The policeman laughs only once when you tell it to him, because he doesn't let you explain it so he never understands it. When you tell a Jew a joke, he says, “I've heard it before. And I can tell it better.”

A particular characteristic of Jewish humour, historically, is its focus on making fun of Jews themselves. “I don't know”, said Freud, “whether there are many other instances of a people making fun to such a degree of its own character.” Freud said this, of course, in his book on jokes, maybe the first serious treatments of humour in modern scientific literature.

Granted, many Jewish jokes actually play on the perceived differences between Jews and gentiles, and sometimes this is to the detriment of the gentiles, but very often it isn't. Here is one recent typical example of this: *Four hikers are climbing in the Alps, a Frenchman, a German, an Irishman, and a Jew.*

Oh am I thirsty, exclaims the Frenchman, I must have wine.

Am I thirsty! Says the German, I must have beer.

Am I thirsty! Says the Irishman, I must have whisky.

Am I thirsty! Says the Jew. I must have diabetes.

This joke is funny, and like other Jewish jokes tells us something about ourselves: we are anxious, and we are ready to believe that at any moment things could go very wrong. With our history, who could blame us?

To quote Ruth Wisse again, "Both the mystic and the comedian aspire to get the better of the world."

We see characteristic themes of Jewish humour: self-deprecation, challenges to authority, moral critique, antisemitism, riffs off of Jewish peculiarities, and perhaps the biggest category: releases of the tensions, contradictions, and sufferings of Jewish life.

Humour continued to be used as a means of psychological survival under the Nazis, and diarists from the ghettos and camps have preserved some of their jokes. A grim example: *Don't worry so much about not starving. So the Germans will have a little less soap!*

The situation of Jews under other fascist governments was also dire. Another joke from the time takes on the fascist Trinity of the time, playing off of Jewish code names for Hitler (Horowitz), Mussolini (Moyshele) and Stalin (Shtolener):

A bomb explodes at a meeting of Horowitz, Moyshele, and Shtolener. Who survives?

Mankind.

In the United States, meanwhile, Jews were discovering an unprecedented level of safety, freedom, and even respect. Jews flooded into the arts, particularly the spoken word arts like literature, songwriting, screenplays, and comedy. Many Jewish comedians got their start in the famous Borsht Belt: Woody Allen, Billy Crystal, Milton Berle, Henny Youngman, Lenny Bruce, Jack Benny, Mel Brooks, Sid Caesar, Rodney Dangerfield, Danny Kaye, Alan King, Jerry Lewis, Jackie Mason, Carl Reiner, Joan Rivers, Don Rickles, Jerry Stiller, The Three Stooges.

The Borscht Belt Style often involved self-deprecating humour, jokes about the mundane aggravations of modern life, and also for some of the comics jokes about anti-semitism and Jewish-Gentile relations.

Others took on anti-semitism. Lenny Bruce:

The other day a Catholic kid called me a Christ-killer. I said to him, 'You know, you're right, I confess, we did it. It was my uncle Morty. We have him in the basement.'

Lenny Bruce (1925-1966) was a classic example of the Jewish comic. Bruce was not only a funny comic, but pushed new ground in terms of social critique, breaking mainstream boundaries, and even critiquing and playing with the nature of language itself. In some ways all

of late 20th century comedy is a footnote to Lenny Bruce (and what isn't follows either Jerry Lewis or Seinfeld).

The BBS style- wordplay, self-deprecation, complaints, observations about everyday life, and also pushing the envelope politically and in terms of obscenity, had a huge impact on American humour, and many aspects are carried on by several Jewish comics today such as Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David.

As Jewish comedy grew, Jewish comics were free both to use American life as a fertile source of material and to explore all the aspects of Jewish identity. Many North American jokes riff off of signature aspects of the Jewish experience: the tightness (and inescapability) of the Jewish family; the legendary Jewish mother, for instance. One short snapper goes:

A psychotherapist calls in the mother of his teenage patient. "Mrs. Goldberg", he says, "Your son has an Oedipus complex."

"Oedipus, Smoedipus", she says, "As long as he loves his mother."

Others focus on stereotypical Jewish professions, like the doctor or the psychiatrist. Some even combine jokes about psychoanalysis with jokes about motherhood, of which I'm sure you've heard a few. One such fusion joke goes as follows:

A psychologist tells his patient, after many years of therapy, that he no longer needs treatment. The patient is terrified, and the therapist reassures him that if he needs him he can call him. Two weeks later the patient calls him. "Last night I had a terrible dream that you were my mother", he says.

“Then what did you do?” , asks the therapist.

“Well, I analyzed it for a while like you had taught me.”

“And then what?”

“I went downstairs for breakfast.”

“What did you have?”

“Coffee.”

“You call that breakfast?”

In the making fun of Jews category is a joke Jerry Seinfeld recently said was his favorite Jewish joke:

Two gentile business people run into each other on the street.

“How's business?” Asks one.

“Great,” says the other.

Comedy aside, Jews have made a big impact in other non-professions as well, such as movie making, comic books, literature and music. In the 1990s Marlon Brando got in hotwater when he said the Jews controlled Hollywood. Later that week Saturday Night Live (created by a Jew) aired a skit that showed a newscaster saying, “Earlier this week Marlon Brando angered several Jewish groups with his statement that Jews control Hollywood.” After pausing for boos from the audience he said, “They have announced that he is fired.”

The creation of comic books and its signature characters was dominated by Jews, most famously Superman and the many characters Stan Lee and Jack (Jacob) Kirby created at Marvel, such as Spiderman and many others. Like comedy and organized crime, there was no quota for how many Jews could write comics.

Another key contribution has been in the field of social justice work. The (**very partial**) list of Jewish feminists, for example, shows their importance: Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, Judith Butler, Naomi Wolf, Shulamith Firestone, Susannah Heschel, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Starhawk and Eve Ensler are just a few examples. Steinem was fundamental to the feminist mainstream of the 60s and 70s; Firestone to the radical wing of the 70s. Heschel has played a major role in bringing feminism into the Jewish religious sphere. Starhawk is perhaps the most important spiritual eco-feminist of the 20th century; Ensler is a pioneer in the feminism of the body.

Jewish political activists have also had a significant impact on North American history. The two most influential popular theorists of the Left in the last thirty years- Naomi Klein and Noam Chomsky, are both Jewish. There was heavy involvement in the Union movement and Civil Rights movement (for Women, African Americans and LGBTQ people). Jews have generally been a progressive political force (voting 68-70% democrat in the US, for example), and have been very active in pro-immigrant and refugee organizations.

Other Judaisms

At the end of the 19th century, 80 percent of the world's 10 million Jews lived in the Ashkenazi world. Prejudice, legal discrimination, and violence motivated Jews to leave in increasing numbers, mostly to North America. Hence Ashkenazi Jews dominate our consciousness. Second

to that Sephardic Jews from Spain and North Africa, who are descendants of the Jews forced to flee Spain in 1492, have long been a minority among Jews which have struggled for recognition. Other Jewish communities have finally also achieved more visibility in recent decades. Here we'll look at some examples.

Mizrahi Jews

Mizrahim are descendants of local Jewish communities in the Middle East. They include descendants of Babylonian Jews from modern Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, Syrian Jews, Georgian Jews, Mountain Jews from Dagestan and Azerbaijan, Persian Jews from Iran, Bukharan Jews from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It also includes Maghrebi Jews from Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Morocco who lived in North Africa prior to the arrival of Sephardim from Spain.

Mizrahi Jews have the oldest roots of any Jewish community, going back to the earliest communities formed outside of Palestine. The Mizrahi Jews lived in those communities, preserving their ancient cultures while absorbing new developments from the more recent Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities. Most Mizrahi Jewish communities were destroyed or greatly reduced in the 1950s and 60s when Arab countries became inhospitable to Jews due to anger over the creation of the modern state of Israel. 850,000 Mizrahi Jews emigrated to the new country. In Israel today, Mizrahi Jews have a strong presence- in 2005 61% of Israeli Jews were of full or partial Mizrahi ancestry. Mizrahi Jews have struggled quite a bit in Israeli society, however, due to discrimination from the more powerful Ashkenazi elite. The creation of the state of Israel was an Ashkenazi-led project and Jews of colour from more “backward” countries have

faced systemic racism in Israel from its founding until today. Mizrahim in Israel still have lower levels of education and wealth compared to Ashkenazim. The Ashkenazi-dominated official Rabbinate of Israel also does not recognize Mizrahim as a distinct community with its own authorities, instead viewing them as under the jurisdiction of Sephardic Rabbis despite the historical distinction between the two streams of Judaism.

As well as preserving older Jewish traditions and Judeo-Arabic literature, Mizrahim have their own unique art, culinary traditions, and cultural norms with great internal richness and diversity. Sadly the combination of the destruction of their historic communities and their integration into Ashkenazi-Sephardic culture in Israel has meant the loss of much of their own traditions.

Yemenite (Temani) Jews

Yemeni Jews or **Teimanim** are Jews who live, or once lived, in Yemen. Between June 1949 and September 1950, the overwhelming majority of Yemen's Jewish population was transported to Israel in Operation Magic Carpet.

Archaeological records referring to Judaism in Yemen start to appear in 110 BCE. One tradition suggests that King Solomon sent Jews to Yemen to prospect for gold and silver with which to adorn his Temple in Jerusalem. It is said that under the prophet Jeremiah some 75,000 Jews, including priests and Levites, traveled to Yemen.

The Jews of Yemen were sometimes powerful, and thus sadly Yemenite history provides the second known instance of a Jewish leader forcing non-Jews to convert to Judaism (the other being John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean leader during the second Temple period who forced the Edomites to convert under threat of death). Yusuf Asar' Attar was a Jewish tribal leader who warred against non-Jewish tribes and offered Christians of a nearby village, Najr, the choice of conversion or death- when they refused to convert he massacred 22,000 of them, a deed he later boasted of on stone inscriptions.

Whatever Jewish power existed in Yemen was eclipsed by the arrival of Islam, under which Jews became a tolerated “people of the book.” In the 16th century a Messianic claimant named Hayim bin Yahya Habhush arose and organized a military force around himself which was crushed by the Sultan, who killed Habhush and his followers, as well as destroying some Jewish communities as a form of collective punishment. From the 16th century to the early 18th century, Teimanim experienced substantial persecution from Muslim rulers including discriminatory laws, forced expulsions, and systems of control and humiliation. Things improved with the generally more liberal government of the Ottoman Empire, and Jewish life again began to flourish. During the 19th century Temanim were intensely messianic, with three “messiahs” arising, Shukr Kuhayl I (1861–65), Shukr Kuhayl II (1868–75) and Joseph Abdallah (1888–93).

Temanim read the Torah together with its Aramaic translation (targum), a custom other Jews dropped many centuries ago. They have preserved a much older pronunciation of Hebrew, one scholars say is probably closer to the way it was pronounced in Biblical times. Their tallitot are more like mexican ponchos with tzitzit affixed to the heavily embroidered corners, and can be

worn all day. They do not have chairs in their synagogues but pray standing, sitting on the floor, or doing full body prostrations. They do not use siddurim, instead praying from memory, and their prayer service is much shorter. They also consider Maimonides to be the ultimate halakhic authority and follow his rulings instead of those of more recent Rabbis.

In Israel Temanim have faced considerable discrimination and were pressured to adopt the prevailing Ashkenazi customs, as well as facing systemic and informal forms of racism as have other dark-skinned, non-European Jews. There is a group of Temani activists who have been alleging, since the 1950s, that the Israeli government took around a thousand Temani babies from their mothers and gave them to Ashkenazi parents to adopt, lying to the mothers that the children had died. This issue has been extremely controversial in Israel, with the truth of the claims still not clear. Early Israel was quite friendly to “experiments in social engineering” such as intentionally changing population demographics, so some find the story believable. During the 1950s the Israeli government placed Yemeni youth in “re-education camps” in order to secularize them and integrate them into “modern” Israeli culture, and measures included cutting off their peyos (sidelocks) and forbidding aspects of their religious observance.

In recent years efforts have been made to embrace Yemenite culture in Israel. Temanim figure prominently in the music industry and there has been a growing fascination with their ancient customs, Temani Hebrew, and Judeo-Arabic culture.

Beta Israel

Beta Israel also known as Ethiopian Jews are Jews whose community developed and lived for centuries in the area of the Kingdom of Aksum and the Ethiopian Empire that is currently divided between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Most of these peoples have emigrated to Israel since the late 20th century. After Halakhic and constitutional discussions, Israeli officials decided, in 1977, that the Israeli Law of Return applied to the Beta Israel. The Israeli and American governments mounted *aliyah* operations to transport the people to Israel. These activities included Operation Solomon, in which the largest single airlift of people in history was carried out.

The Ethiopian history described in the *Kebra Nagast* relates that Ethiopians are descendants of Israelite tribes who came to Ethiopia with Menelik I, alleged to be the son of King [Solomon](#) and the Queen of Sheba (or Makeda, in the legend) (see 1 Kings 10:1–13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1–12).

The *Kebra Nagast* asserts that the Beta Israel are descended from a battalion of men of Judah who fled southward down the Arabian coastal lands from Judea after the breakup of the Kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms in the 10th century BCE (while King Rehoboam reigned over Judah).

Most of the Beta Israel consider the *Kebra Nagast* to be legend. Many Beta Israel believe that they are descended from the tribe of Dan. Most reject the "Solomonic" and "Queen of Sheba" legends of the Aksumites. The language of the Beta Israel is Ge'ez, an Ethiopian tongue they share with Ethiopian Christians. The Beta Israel have many unique customs, many of which are closer to Biblical laws than Talmudic laws. Their version of the fundamental Torah is not the Chumash (five books) but the Octateuch (Eight Books) which is the Chumash plus Joshua,

Judges and Ruth. They have unique holiday customs, wedding customs, and forms of spiritual authority.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Beta Israel were required to undergo a modified conversion ceremony involving immersion in a mikveh, a declaration accepting Rabbinic law, and, for men, a "symbolic recircumcision". Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira later waived the "symbolic recircumcision" demand, which is only required when the halakhic doubt is significant. More recently, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar has ruled that descendants of Ethiopian Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity are "unquestionably Jews in every respect". With the consent of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Rabbi Amar ruled that it is forbidden to question the Jewishness of this community. Genetic studies of the Beta Israel suggest that they are indigenous to Africa in their origins and are unlikely to have emigrated from ancient Israel. How there came to be an African community with a well developed form of Torah based Judaism of its own with little or no genetic connection to ancient Jews remains a mystery.

The Ethiopian Beta Israel community has faced many challenges: entering a relatively modern country from non-modern, rural, remote regions of Ethiopia; the disruption of long-standing hierarchies and customs within Beta Israel in which elders lead and guide their community; racial prejudice,; and a degree of lingering doubt within a minority of groups regarding the "Jewishness" of Ethiopians. A study published in 2012 found that members of the Beta Israel community earn 30%-40% less than Arab citizens of Israel, who are themselves an under-privileged group. Recently a well-evidenced claim came to light that Israeli doctors in recent years have injected Ethiopian Jewish immigrants with Depo-Provera, a long acting form

of birth control, without their consent, in order to reduce the number of children they would have upon arrival in Israel.

Problems with integration of Ethiopian Jews into Israeli society continue. The community has been complaining for decades about police discrimination and brutality directed towards them, and periodic mass protests and clashes with Israeli police continue to happen. There are also several efforts underway by different Israeli and Jewish organizations to fight discrimination against Ethiopian Jews and to improve their educational levels and economic resources, while the government in general tries to limit further immigration from Africa, including family members of Israelis of African descent.

Abayudaya

The Abayudaya (*Abayudaya* is Luganda for "People of Judah") are a community in eastern Uganda who practice a form of Judaism. They are devout in their practice, keeping kashrut, and observing Shabbat. There are several different villages where the Abayudaya live. Most of these are recognized by the Reform and Conservative movements of Judaism. In June 2016 Rabbi Shlomo Riskin led a Beit Din that performed an Orthodox conversion for the Putti community of Abayudaya.

The group owes its origin to Muganda military leader Semei Kakungulu, who began practicing Judaism after reading the Torah. A community formed around him which was eventually taught

by Jewish visitors, gradually growing in their practice and identification with Judaism. Efforts are ongoing to have the Abayudaya recognized as Jewish by the Israeli state.

India

The **Bene Israel** are a historic community of Jews in India. It has been suggested that it is made up of descendants of one of the disputed Lost Tribes and ancestors who had settled there centuries ago. It is estimated that there were 6,000 Bene Israel in the 1830s; 10,000 at the turn of the 20th century; and in 1948—their peak in India—they numbered 20,000. Since then most of the community has emigrated to Israel.

Between 1948 and 1952, some 2,300 Bene Israel immigrated to Israel. Several rabbis refused to marry Bene Israel to other Jews. As a result of sit-down protests and hunger strikes by Orthodox Jews, the Jewish Agency returned 337 individuals of Bene Israel in several groups to India between 1952 and 1954. Most returned to Israel again after several years.

In 1962, the Indian press reported that European-Jewish authorities in Israel had treated the Bene Israel with racism. Between 1962 and 1964, the Bene Israel community staged protests against the religious policy, and in 1964 the Israeli Rabbinate ruled that the Bene Israel are "full Jews in every respect". The community despite being in Israel for many generations has maintained many of their traditions from India. Jews of Indian origin are generally regarded as Sephardic; they have become well integrated religiously with the Sephardic community in Israel.

Though a small minority, Chinese Jews have had an open presence in the country since the arrival of the first Jewish immigrants during the 8th century CE. Relatively isolated communities of Jews developed through the Tang and Song Dynasties (7th to 13th centuries CE) all the way through the Qing Dynasty (19th century), most notably the Kaifeng Jews.

Most scholars agree that a Jewish community has existed in Kaifeng since the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), though some date their arrival to the Tang Dynasty (618–907), or earlier. Kaifeng, then the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty, was a cosmopolitan city on a branch of the Silk Road. It is surmised that a small community of Sephardic Jews, most likely from Persia or India, or perhaps fleeing the Crusades, arrived either overland or by a sea route, and settled in the city, building a synagogue in 1163.

Chinese Jews based their Jewishness on patrilineal descent. As a result, in Israel they are required to undergo conversion in order to receive Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return.