

More Jewish refugees are coming to the United States than are going to Israel.

That is a troubling fact. After all, was not Israel established as the land of refuge for oppressed Jews? And does not the embattled land of Israel *need* incoming Jews?

There are policy questions involved. Should American Jewry discourage Jewish refugees from coming to this country? Should we do so by cutting down on the funds and services that we make available? Should we look down on these refugees as "lesser Jews" because they came to this country instead of to Israel? Should we devise special programs to "Judaize" these refugees -- and to urge them to take aliyah from here to Israel? Or should we just shave the funds we send to Israel, in order to apply them to the services needed by Jewish refugees to America? These questions need to be faced squarely, but with perspective.

It is true that, statistically, the United States has received more Jewish refugees than any country in history, including Israel. In a little more than three decades, around the turn of the century, about one-third of the Jews in Eastern Europe came to America.

That should not be surprising. As a political entity, the United States was the first "non-ethnic" nation. It was established by refugees for refugees, and there was plenty of room. It was an unprecedented haven for Jews.

However, in a real sense, Israel has been and remains *the* land of refuge for Jews. It is *the* land in which all Jews can find refuge, if they cannot find it elsewhere.

The fact is that America stopped being a land of unlimited refuge with the passage of the restrictive immigration laws of the 1920s. It is one of the tragic chapters in history that so many Jewish refugees could not get into this country in the 1930s. And in the years immediately following World War II, there was only Israel as a refuge for most of the European survivors, and for the million Jews who came from Arab countries.

Most of them *wanted* to go to Israel -- because of what it is and what it stood for after Hitler. But the point is that they had no choice. There was no other place to which they could go, including the United States. American policy has become more liberal with respect to political refugees, but it is still ultimately limited. All Jewish refugees can go to Israel as a *right*; many Jewish refugees can now come to America as a *privilege* -- but it is a privilege which can be removed at any time, especially in the face of massive numbers.

In short, the most recent years have seen more Jews coming to America than to Israel, but America is still not *the* place of refuge for Jews; it is just a favored place of refuge for relatively small numbers in relatively favorable times.

Should those who come to America as a favored place in such circumstances be treated with neglect or with contempt? They come to America for the same reason our ancestors did. They come for the same reason that well over a quarter of a million Israelis have come to America and for the same reason that over 30 thousand Soviet Jews came to America last year. Why are there today more Israelis coming to America than there are Americans going to Israel? Why are there more Soviet Jews coming to America than going to Israel? There is simply more opportunity and comfort in the United States than there is in Israel under current conditions. And we are simply not in a position to punish those who come to this country for that reason.

What Needs to Be Done?

In short, we must welcome and provide service for those needy Jewish refugees from countries like the Soviet Union and Iran. At the same time, we have to provide the highest level of support for Israel -- for the reason, among others, that Israel remains *the* fundamental place of refuge for all Jews. There is no contradiction between those two goals. We can stint on neither, even though they seem to present a double responsibility. It is a double responsibility which is naturally ours because we are living in conditions of higher opportunity and comfort.
