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A PLACE TO GROW:

THE SYNAGOGUE AS A HUMAN GROWTH CENTER

by David E. Fass

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters and
Ordination

Referee, Prof. Norman Mirsky

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

Cincinnati, Ohio

1973

Dedication:

   To my wife, Marian, who understands
   so many things directly, like love
   and kindness, and whose feelings run
   so deep that she can share them with
   me, even without words, even at a
   distance...

   To my daughter, Melinda, whose pounding
   on the door of my study was a constant
   reminder of one of my life's greatest
   joys: the smile of a loving child...

   My work is first of all for them.

Thesis Abstract

A Place to Grow: The Synagogue as a Human Growth Center

This work is an attempt to explore the current
identity crisis of American Jewry. Because Jews are so
deeply involved in the most advanced and future-oriented
sectors of American society, an analysis of American
identity on this frontier is presented. The conclusion is
that a time of transition is at hand, aggravated by severe
overshifts away from the necessary components of community,
engagement, and dependence.

Erik Erikson's work is used in an analysis of identity
as a structure of both individuals and groups. Then an
examination of American Jewish identity is made on the
basis of both historical progression and Erikson's model.
The growth and development of American Jewish identity is
traced from the period of the East-European migration to the
present, with particular emphasis on the workings of
identification with the State of Israel as an important
identity component.

The current Jewish identity crisis is explored
theoretically and through the use of the Fein and Lenn
reports. Conclusions include the realization that a viable
new identity is not immediately forthcoming. What is most
needed is a means of providing a sense of community to deal
with the pain that identity loss involves, as well as to
provide a climate in which new formulations have a chance
to grow.

The production of such a climate depends upon an orientation that provides understanding and insight. Further, the use of cells, workshops, and temporary systems are explored as being the forms of small group settings in which Jews can begin the work of developing a viable Jewish identity for the future.

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This paper is about Jewish identity in America. Although our primary concern is with Reform Judaism, we will touch as well on the totality of Jewish experience in this country.

In dealing with identity we find that we are dealing with the future. We desire to know where we have been, and where we are now, that we may know where we are going. And it is not the far future that we are dealing with, but rather the future that is near at hand, and in many places, may already have arrived. In a land as complex as ours, and as geographically diverse, rates of change also differ greatly. What is current in Los Angeles may be yet two years hence in Milwaukee. Ideas that are now appearing in journals of predictive sociology, and in theses like this one, may in fact be the reality of our life style in five or ten years.

We may wait patiently and let the future overtake us, responding to change rather than creating it. I, for one, do not wish to do this. The attempt here is to create the future, to shape it, to make it be what we would want it to be. To do so we need knowledge, understanding, analysis. "Without this perspective, however distorted, we have no chance at all to will and shape our future; we can only back into it."[1]

A good deal of that perspective depends on finding out what is currently going on with Jewish identity in America. Two recent studies have attempted to provide some of the data. One was commissioned by the Central Conference of

American Rabbis, and the other by the Union of American
Hebrew Congregations. A recent book, America's Jews by
Marshall Sklare (as well as other works by the same author)
has added to our knowledge of contemporary Jewish studies.
Yet, by Sklare's own admission at a lecture in February,
1973 at the Hebrew Union College, even his latest work is
the merest opening chapter in a total sociology of the
American Jew.

Our data and resources, then, in the field of
contemporary Jewish studies, are relatively meager. While
the work of preparing a thorough American Jewish sociology
goes on, there is another avenue we would explore. We will
use an analysis of American identity to explore the meaning
of being a Jew in America. The use of this tool provides
many valuable insights, and much understanding. If we can
better understand the convergence of American identity and
Jewish identity, we will be better able to deal with the
divergences between the two.

A. Jews and the Frontier

Up to, and including the present, Jews are more
involved with the frontier aspects of American society than
any other group. By frontier we mean vectors, trends, and
tendencies. We call "frontier" those elements of the
present that are operative for small groups of the elite
and which, with reasonable certainty, can be predicted to be
the direction toward which the mainstream of American

society will soon move. We find that with most, if not all of these trends, Jews are in the vanguard:

1. American society is moving toward a service as opposed to a labor orientation. More and more people are employed in white-collar as opposed to blue-collar jobs than ever before. In 1956, for the first time in our history, over half the workers in America held white-collar jobs.[2]

The statistics for Jews exaggerate this trend. Whereas in 1960 approximately half the adult male population remained in blue-collar jobs,[3] the figure for adult male Jews was somewhere around fifteen per cent.[4] The remaining eighty-five per cent of the Jewish males held white-collar jobs in various categories: professional, managers and proprietors, clerical, sales.

2. Within the white-collar work force, the trend is toward that category termed "professional." The fastest growing sector of the work force are the professionals.[5]

Here too, Jews show this trend far more strongly than does the general population. In 1960, professionals made up about twenty-two per cent of the Jewish adult male working population, while the figure for the general population was about thirteen per cent.[6] This has happened with great speed, in the space of one or at most, two generations. "The speed with which Jews have been moving toward professional occupations is apparent from the fact that only two per cent of male Jewish family heads age sixty-five and over are professionals."[7]

3. Large urban centers, with their closely allied suburbs, are growing in size and population density. The urban population doubles every eleven years.[8]

Over ninety-five per cent of American Jews live in urban centers.[9]

4. In terms of education, the trend is clearly toward universal college education. The state of California already has committed itself to this ideal. Larger and larger numbers of both men and women are receiving college and graduate school degrees.

The Jews have surpassed all other groups in both the rate and the amount of their educational achievements. Only now is the gap beginning to close, yet it may cease to exist only at some point in the future.[10]

Although statistics are not as readily available, it seems safe to say that this pattern holds true for other aspects of the frontier. Jews are involved, out of all proportion to their numbers, in the counter-culture, the humanistic social sciences, and the media. In all probability, Jews are caught up in the increasing mobility that is sweeping the country. Especially in the professional sectors of the economy, people are re-locating more times, and more often, than ever before.[11]

This "frontier" aspect has far-reaching consequences. The abrupt transitions it entails effect identity. If we would understand much of what American Jews are currently undergoing, we need to know more about identity on the frontier.

The way in which we view the current situation is vital. Options run the gamut from wild-eyed optimism to equally wild-eyed pessimism. Are we currently going through a period of growth and evolution? Are we in a period of transition from an older economic order based on scarcity to a new one based on abundance? Are we experiencing a revolution, propelling us toward a future so different from what we have now that we cannot even conceptualize it? Is the world really falling apart around us?

B. The Shape of the Technological Frontier

By any reckoning, change is the major aspect of the current situation. Change includes such things as: rampant innovation in all areas of life; rapid obsolescence of products, knowledge, and techniques; acceleration in the pace of life; increased diversity of information input; increased diversity of experience, activity, and life style; decreased time-lag between product-conception and marketing of the finished article, etc. Alvin Toffler, writing in Future Shock, is, I think, correct in identifying the quantity and quality of change as the single most important factor of our current age.

Among those who view this situation with great optimism is Ellis Rivkin. Not only are we in an era of unprecedented change and expansion, but this period of radical technological innovation is to remain with us

permanently:

> In contrast to the technological break-
> through in steam, steel, and electricity,
> the atomic, computer, and aero-space
> technologies are characterized by an
> infra-structure and inner dynamic that
> breeds permanent revolution.[12]

This permanent revolution, of course, breeds radically new values. There is some danger that there may be a violent backlash from the right against them. There have already been enough clashes of this type to give some credence to the danger. Yet, contends Rivkin, the economic growth on which our wealth and prosperity are based will not stand for a great deal of such repression. Small amounts of backlash are apt to occur at points of friction between the old and the new. Yet in the long run, freedom to innovate is an economic necessity. Its lack will quite literally impoverish us:

> Whereas a static, repetitive capitalism
> might not only settle for, but even
> encourage a conservative mentality,
> changing and developing capitalism has
> no alternative but to engender radical
> criticism, even of capitalism itself.[13]

The basic issue between the old values and the newly emerging ones is economic. There is a basic difference in orientation, in perception. The old values are based largely on scarcity of material goods, while the new values are "based on the assumption that important human needs are easily satisfied and that the resources for doing so are plentiful."[14]

This type of economic optimism sees technology and developing capitalism, with its attendant innovation, as

capable of providing an end to material scarcity on a
national, and probably international scale in the forseeable
future. Current discomforts, both personal and organizational,
are to be explained in two ways:

1) Developing, innovating sectors of the economy are
hampered by vested interests, entrenched enclaves, and
conservative, special interest groups, just as mercantile
capitalism was similarly hampered at its inception by the
feudal political structure of Europe.

2) Real wealth is at an all-time high, producing
dissatisfaction based on a system of rising expectations.
It is only now that the poor are not as poor as they
once were, and now that possibilities for ending poverty
are visible that impatience has so greatly risen. The
optimist claims that abundance is almost here, if not for
us, then for our children, and if not for them, then
certainly for our grandchildren.

This changed orientation, from scarcity to abundance,
is even now producing sweeping changes in industry,
organizations, and personal life. The research of current
social scientists indicates than an authoritarian,
bureaucratic organization is best suited to tasks of a
relatively simple nature under conditions of relative
stability. But for the more complex tasks, under rapidly
changing conditions that now exist, a more egalitarian,
decentralized system is required.[15]

The "organization man" has given way to the "pro-
fessional man" who owes his primary allegiance not to

the company, but rather to the standards of his profession and to himself.[16] The professional man spends a good deal of his working hours as a member of a "task force" with professionals from other disciplines. Such task forces are not permanent companies, nor even permanent divisions of a given organization. They come together, exist for a time while working on a specified project, and then disband. They may cut across industry lines as varied skills are needed for a particular job.

In such a setting, professional standards and interpersonal requirements assume paramount importance. The degree of innovation and creativity that is increasingly required in modern industry makes this a necessity. Unhappy men cannot work well with others, and certainly have difficulty being innovative.[17] As more and more work is done by such "temporary systems" the importance of this human dimension is likely to increase. More and more, economic necessities are likely to support the satisfaction of a large range of personal needs in the job setting.

In addition to producing new emphasis on a more human work environment, the technological frontier requires new learnings and new behaviors to take advantage of its wealth-producing possibilities. In order to more fully satisfy their human needs in a temporary system, people will have to learn:

1. How to get love, love, lose love.
2. How to enter groups and leave them.
3. What roles are satisfying and how to attain them.
4. To widen the repertory of feelings and

                roles available to the individual.
5.   To cope more readily with ambiguity.
6.   To perceive what is new, and plan a
       strategy to comprehend it.
7.   To develop a sense of one's uniqueness.[18]

It is obvious that our current level of technology is the impetus for such changes, for such new learnings. It is likewise obvious that traditional societies are held back from change in part by their maladaptive structures such as the taboo against eating beef in India. But what, if any, are the structures in our society that produce change?

In examining the issue of evolution and innovation, Philip Slater finds that:

> ...evolution (biological as well as cultural) proceeds in a kind of leapfrog fashion: bold new advances do not typically occur in those groups currently in the vanguard of development. The advanced cultures and advantaged groups are too embroiled in the success of their current modus operandi to be available for new departures. It is those societies (or those groups within a society) which have nothing to lose by change - nothing invested in today - that can exploit the radically new opportunity.[19]

It is upon this type of analysis that Slater and Bennis base much of their optimism. Indeed, a whole chapter of their book is titled "Democracy is Inevitable."[20] If our technological success depends on a high level of innovation, and if innovation depends on "reserves" uncommitted to the status quo and with nothing to lose by taking radical new chances, then the whole thing depends on a democratic structure that enables them to do so. If the power to stifle innovation were exercised, the end result

would be stagnation and poverty. It is only a democratic structure that provides the climate to allow this leapfrog process of change to take place. What Rivkin called freedom as a necessary component in the innovative process, Bennis and Slater call democracy.

Where are the uncommitted reserves to come from? They are the young, who are part of what Slater calls the "democratic family:"

> ...the democratic family is the most potent expression of democracy, and a necessary condition for its survival. For the young are, by their very nature, uncommitted. They constitute the only group that can perpetually renew its lack of commitment as its elder members are siphoned off into the ranks of the committed.[21]

If change is constant, as it seems to be in our society, reasons Slater, it must derive this quality of constancy from factors that are themselves relatively stable. The relatively stable characteristics of the democratic family that maintain its character over time are:

1. The social distance between parent and child is relatively small.
2. The exercise of parental authority is relatively mild.
3. The child tends not to be seen as a mere possession of the parents, without independent legal status.[22]

Yet the democratic family did not always exist. It was preceeded by a far more authoritarian family structure which was the reverse of the three characteristics above. How was the transition accomplished?

If there is a severe crisis with which the traditional

wisdom of the family is unable to cope, it becomes, for a time, invalidated as a source of authority. Parents recognize that they do not in fact know how to cope with the crisis, and children know that this is the case. Yet we would expect equilibrium and parental authority to return, if only in the next generation, rather than a permanent invalidation of the authoritarian family and a transition to the democratic family. However, if there are several crises in succession, or if crisis (i.e., change) becomes the norm, what then? "Change then becomes an expectation, tradition irrelevant, and the democratic family obtains a foothold."[23]

In the historical American situation, this is exactly what happened. Faced with one frontier situation after another, the traditional wisdom of the past was largely irrelevant to each succeeding generation. Slater contends that the democratic family, therefore, existed in America almost from the outset.[24]

The breakdown of traditional wisdom carried with it the consequence of raising the susceptibility of the child to the socialization of his immediate (non-family) environment. The child takes his cues from the crisis itself and from his own age-mates, rather than from the family. At the same time, parents question their own values, for they see their children adapting to the changing environment in ways they are not able to.[25]

It is the democratic family, then, that provides the values and the sense of identity, for people who will have

to deal, one way or another, with rapid change. The amount
of change we have around us is a tribute to how well it has
done its task. An optimistic view, such as Rivkin's,
contends that the individuals thus produced are now engaged
in bringing "global capitalism" to the ends of the earth.
And it is only global capitalism, of all the economic
systems that the world has ever known, that carries within
its dialectic a thrust toward peace, prosperity, and an
economically based concern with the fullest realization of
each and every human potential.[26]

C. The Costs of the Frontier

Rampant innovation is not without its costs. As
permanence is removed from many areas of life, we leave
ourselves open to feelings of meaninglessness and
alienation.[27] This places additional strains on those
areas to which we have traditionally looked for constancy:
marriage and the family.[28]

In fact, it is the democratic family itself that
produces a situation that stretches people almost to the
breaking point, and in the view of some, beyond. A kind of
tension develops, in which values learned as a child, values
learned in the warmth and freedom of the democratic family,
produce needs that are severely frustrated by the "adult"
world. The way this process works is that:

> ...children are taught a set of values in
> earliest childhood - cooperation, sharing,
> equalitarianism - which they begin to unlearn

as they enter school wherein competition,
invidiousness, status differentiation,
and ethnocentrism prevail. By the time
they enter adult life children are ex-
pected to have largely abandoned the value
assumptions with which their social lives
began. But for affluent, protected, middle-
class children this process is slowed down,
while intellectual development is speeded
up, so that the earlier childhood values can
become integrated into a conscious, adult
value system centered around social justice.
The same is true of other characteristics
of childhood: spontaneity, hedonism, cander,
playfulness, use of the senses for pleasure
rather than utility, and so on. The
protective, child-oriented, middle-class
family allows the child to preserve some of
these qualities longer than is possible
under more austere conditions, and his
intellectual precocity makes it possible
for him to integrate them into an ideo-
logical system with which he can confront
the corrosive, life-abusing tendencies of
the old culture.[29]

This can cause great difficulties, as a person

experiences a child-centered environment for much of his

early life and then, as an adult, finds himself in a world

that is either antagonistic or at best neutral to many of

his most dearly cherished beliefs. In this situation we

have the source of much of the turmoil and rebellion

currently tearing at the fabric of society. The children of

the "Spockian" generation have now grown up to find themselves

with longings for things that the culture is as yet unwilling

or unable to provide. Given their upbringing, it is no

wonder that they tend to view a society not concerned with

the subjective quality of human life as blatantly insane.

It is this same situation, though, that provides the

impetus for much radical change at all levels of American

society. Large numbers of adolescents, youths, and young

adults, by definition uncommitted to the status quo, are at the same time committed to a set of humanistic values that demand social involvement. They demand also a way of satisfying longings for community, engagement, and dependence, among other things, and are at odds with the older values on almost every point:

> There are an almost infinite number of polarities by means of which one can differentiate between the two cultures. The old culture, when forced to choose, tends to give preference to property rights over personal rights, technological requirements over human needs, competition over cooperation, violence over sexuality, concentration over distribution, the producer over the consumer, means over ends, secrecy over openness, social forms over personal expression, striving over gratification, Oedipal love over communal love, and so on. The new counter-culture tends to reverse all of these priorities.[30]

It seems, then, to Slater and to others as well, that the stage is set for a massive confrontation between the old culture and the new. Battles and skirmishes have already been fought at Kent State, People's Park, in Harlem and Watts, and many other places. To many, it must seem as if this war between the old and the new is the most widespread, and perhaps the greatest cost of the current age.

Yet both young and old are assailed by change and all that this entails. Toffler argues that unless we somehow learn to control the accelerating rate at which change is occuring in our world, we are all headed for a "massive adaptational breakdown."[31]

People no longer are sure of who they are. They feel that their very identities are under attack. In a very real

sense, argue Bennis and Slater, the affirmation from the
world around us on which stable identities depend is being
eroded at an ever-quickening rate. As our skills and
knowledge become obsolete sooner and sooner we feel that
we, as people, have become outmoded and worthless, and a
feeling of futility and alienation sets in.[32]

Charles Reich traces this process in The Greening of
America. The primary factor is that there is a large
discrepancy between the realities of our society and our
beliefs about them.[33] When this discrepancy is perceived,
a kind of paralysis sets in. The individual feels that he
does not understand what is going on around him. He lacks
an adequate consciousness, or identity, on which to base his
present actions and future plans. In addition, elaborate
defense structures develop in the attempt to maintain some
medicum of identity continuity. So susceptible do many
people become that an attack on a single identity component
calls the entire structure into question. The person then
responds with the entire arsenal of defensive behavior:
rigidity, vacillation, belligerence, and all the rest.[34]

We noted earlier that the values of parents in a
democratic family are always open to question, due to the
successful response of the children to situations in which
the parents can be of little help. This openness on the part
of the parents involves parents learning from their children.
There is thus a strong inter-relationship between parents and
children, made all the stronger by the fact that in a
democratic family the socialization process goes both ways:

children raise their parents just as parents raise their children. It is important to keep this in mind, for it helps to explain, in what follows, how parents participate in a radical critique of American society, along with their children.

Slater, too, noticed something similar. He was struck by the intensity of the negative reaction on the part of may adults when faced with the counterculture. To explain this, he made use of the psychological dictum that "traits and their opposites always coexist if the traits are of any intensity."[35] Slater finds, in the intensity of negative reaction to the counterculture, an equally strong attraction for what that movement represents.

The strength of this attraction is due, at least in part, to the fact that all Americans have desparate longings for community, engagement, and dependence. American society, however, frustrates both the expression and the satisfaction of these needs. As Slater defines them:

> 1. Community is the wish to live in trust and fraternal cooperation with one's fellows in a total and visible collective entity.
> 2. Engagement is the wish to come directly to grips with social and interpersonal problems and to confront on equal terms an environment which is not composed of ego-extensions.
> 3. Dependence is the wish to share responsibility for the control of one's impulses and the direction of one's life.[36]

The very same needs produce different behavior in the young and the old. The young are angry at the culture, fear they are being taken, and are likely to believe that there

are a group of men, somewhere, who can right the wrongs,
yet who, out of either stupidity or malevolence or both, do
not. The old are appalled at "new morality" and new life
styles, hair, beads, nomadism. They too, are angry, and
feel that their life styles are threatened, that their
world is threatened. They are also clear about who the
enemy is: the young. The old dare not admit, even to
themselves, how deeply they too desire community, engagement,
and dependence, for they have spent years formulating
identities based on the opposites: individualism,
detachment, and independence. Indeed, this negation has
been the case for several generations now. For our wealth
we have paid dearly, by denying parts of ourselves. And now
that the time has become ripe for taking back what we have
given away, many people are unable to do more than scream,
louder and louder, that they do not really want it, anyway.

Slater attempts to analyze these three areas, and
their opposites. He finds a longing, a nostalgia, a desire
for a sense of community. This longing is to be found
largely in the mass media: in films and songs that reject
current realities in favor of a more desirable fantasy
world.[37] American reality, the reality that is being
rejected, is one of often severe competition. It is
interesting to note that one of the meanings of
"collaboration" carries distinct criminal overtones.

With regard to engagement, Slater contends that:

> This nation was settled and continuously
> re-populated by people who were not
> personally successful in confronting the

social conditions obtaining in their
mother country, but fled these conditions
in the hope of a better life.[38]

If a first major aspect of American identity is an ever-
shift toward competition at the expense of community, a
second is an overshift toward avoidance or detachment from
social problems at the expense of engagement.[39]

The third major aspect is an overshift toward
independence. Slater finds that "American independence
training is severe relative to most of the rest of the
world."[40]

These overshifts are in large measure tied up with
the technological success we have enjoyed - though how
enjoyable it was is open to question at this point. The
independent, competitive, detached American in effect
dreamed dreams which made him rich. As Slater puts it,
"technology is materialized fantasy."[41]

Instead of operating in a real world of actual social
issues and concrete people, solitary Americans learned to:

...interact largely with extensions of
our own egos...Every struggle is a struggle
with ourselves, because there is a little
piece of ourselves in everything we encounter -
houses, clothes, cars, cities, machines, even
our foods.[42]

Slater's contention is that the major motivation for
our technological achievements is the fantasy fulfillment
of the repressed desires for dependence, community, and
engagement. Yet, since the innovation that makes us rich
would cease (theoretically) if the desires were satisfied in
reality, they can only be met in fantasy. This has two

distint advantages: fantasy can never really be satisfying, and it is subject to infinite embellishment and extension. The epitome of this is advertising, which has raised mythology, slogan-making, and sexual fantasy to a high art. In our society, this "art" is pervasive:

> Our society is presently founded on over-stimulation - on the generation of needs and desires which cannot directly be gratified, but which ensure a great deal of striving and buying in an effort to gratify them. Much if not most of this stimulation is sexual - erotic delights are implicitly attached to almost every product that can be bought in America today, at least by adults. The goal of commercial America, therefore, is to maximize sexual stimulation and minimize sexual availability - in this way an infinite number of products can be inserted in the resulting gap. [43]

It is entirely possible that Slater had himself a good chuckle over how well his last sentence copied the style of modern advertising with its quality of double entendre. At any rate, he has painted a far different picture of American society than the optimism we encountered in the preceeding section. For Slater, our wealth has been purchased at great cost to ourselves. To produce continued high motivation we have become alienated and manipulated. We have done so with such a passion that an evolutionary return to a more normal balance of identity components does not seem to be in the offing. Slater indicates that we are to have the burst dam of revolution which calls forth a horrible, and probably victorious wave of repression. This despair is mirrored by the subtitle Slater chose for his book: "American Culture at the Breaking Point."

D. American Identity

It is interesting to note that the same Philip
Slater who is so pessimistic in Pursuit of Loneliness is
the co-author of a fairly optimistic work which we have
also cited: The Temporary Society. To be sure, Slater
poses some strong criticisms in the latter work, yet his
pessimism seems to be missing. Even though the
publication date of "Pursuit" links the book to the height
of the Vietnam madness, the fact still remains that in his
work Slater moves about on the optimism-pessimism spectrum.
He is certainly not the only one among us to swing, first
one way and then the other, trying to carve out a firm
ground of understanding in a time of rapid change.

As we try to understand Slater's movement along this
spectrum we come up against the larger issue of how we are
going to view our current situation - with optimism or with
pessimism? Can Rivkin and Slater both be talking about the
same society, the one with such glowing hope, the other
with such dark despair? Is there a wider schema that
embraces both?

Erik Erikson suggests one which seems to work. He
asserts that there is, in any age, a dominant class of
"specialists." These are the people in charge, those who
"know what they are doing." There is also a group of
"universalists," those who "mean what they are saying."
The "identity possibilities of an age" are largely
determined by the interplay between the two.[44]

Rivkin, and Slater as well in some of his earlier
work, are speaking as "specialists." Much of the optimism
is based on the quality of knowing what one is doing. In
his later work, Slater is speaking as a universalist. The
intensity, the criticism, and the despair come largely from
this stance.

Erikson's novel insight is to affirm that both are not
only necessary, but are aspects of a totality that simply
does not exist without both sides. For what we have been
talking about is American identity, and identity itself
can be spoken of only in terms of polarities. This in turn
is based on the psychological truism that Slater himself
cited: traits and their opposites coexist. If we speak of
identities, we speak of polarizations.

It is therefore not strange to find both the optimism
of the specialists and the pessimism of the universalists
staring us in the face when we discuss American identity,
for this is one of the polarities with which we have to
contend. As Erikson puts it:

> The possibility of a true polarization
> of the new specialized-technological
> identity and the universalist-humanist
> one must be allowed for the simple
> reason that such a polarization is the
> mark of the over-all identity of any
> period.[45]

At first glance it might seem odd to speak of an
American, or Jewish, identity, as if they existed in some
Platonic realm. What is meant is certainly not any sort of
mystical "national consciousness" but rather something
very concrete.

The actual expression of an individual identity is
in large measure due to socio-cultural factors. A given
society provides one range of possibilities for concrete
identity expression while foreclosing others. An American
identity is the unique set of ways human structures gain
expression in this particular society.

What is most characteristic of American identity is
polarization:

> ...whatever one may come to consider a
> truly American trait can be shown to have
> its equally characteristic opposite.
> ...one may begin rather than end with the
> proposition that a nation's identity is
> derived from the ways in which history has,
> as it were, counterpointed certain
> potentialities; the ways in which it lifts
> this counterpoint to a unique style of
> civilization, or lets it disintegrate into
> mere contradiction.[46]

In keeping with its size and youth, America is a land
of sweeping identity possibilities, as well as the better
known opportunities. A well-functioning American identity,
on an individual level, would involve being able to deal
with the wide range of alternatives without being either
overwhelmed by the range of choice, or ever-shifted without
freedom toward one end of the spectrum or the other. What
is involved is a state of dynamic tension, in which the
individual is oriented at some point along the many
spectrums in which he is a participant. When this orientation
is lost, divergent alternatives collapse into contradiction,
and there is identity confusion and much emotional pain.

American identity is based in large measure on the
American historical experience. Change is a salient factor

of that experience. As one writer puts it:

> Historians are fond of pointing out that
> Americans have always lived under expand-
> ing conditions - first the frontier, then
> successive waves of immigration, now a
> runaway technology. [47]

This historical experience produced a series of
crises. A crisis, as Erikson defines it, is:

> ...a necessary turning point, a crucial
> moment, when development must move one way
> or another, marshaling resources of growth,
> recovery, and further differentiation. [48]

The size of the country, the rapid changes demanded by
successive crises, the invalidation of parental authority,
the rise of the democratic family, the socialization of the
young largely by their age-mates - all these factors tended
to aggravate the range and number of polarities that had to
be dealt with. The major response to this rather confusing
situation was a kind of wait-and-see attitude, a tentativeness,
a detachment, a lack of committment. There is little sense in
making irrevocable committments when it has been your experience
that the situation will, in all probability, change drastically
in the near future. Instead of committment, American identity
involved a lack of committment; the ability to hold oneself in
readiness, to take advantage of radical new opportunities that
were always cropping up.

Erikson's term for this is "tentativeness." As he sees it:

> ...the functioning American, as the heir
> of a history of extreme contrasts and
> abrupt changes, bases his final ego
> identity on some tentative combination
> of dynamic polarities such as migratory
> and sedentary, individualistic and
> standardized, competitive and co-

operative, pious and free-thinking,
responsible and cynical, etc.[49]

When this quality of tentativeness and the wide range of
polarities to which it responds are brought to consciousness,
ideology develops. A real ideology, though, must reflect
the actual emotional processes that underlie it, so:

> To leave his choices open, the American,
> on the whole, lives with two sets of
> "truths": a set of religious principles or
> religiously pronounced political principles
> of a highly puritan quality, and a set of
> shifting slogans, which indicate what, at
> a given time, one may get away with on the
> basis of a hunch, a mood, or a notion.[50]

American identity, then, requires a rather difficult
response on the ideological level. The more difficult our
situation is to conceptualize, the more such conceptuali-
zations rely on old, basic, traditional values. By a strange
paradox, the attempt to perceive our situation of rapid
change with some clarity in turn supports many traditional
beliefs:

> ...the fact is that the values associated
> with indefinite progress, just because it
> strains orientation as well as imagination,
> are often tied to unbelievably old-
> fashioned ideas.[51]

Part of the American mythology thus engendered involves
a child-like faith that no matter how bad things get, we will
always somehow be taken care of. Just as we have always, in
the past, successfully responded to constant crisis, so we
will continue to do so in the future. We need not always
feel responsible, though, for doing it ourselves, for we will
be "saved in the nick of time;"

> ...technological expansion can be seen as

> the due reward of generations of hard-
> working Americans...There is always
> hope (a hope that has become an important
> part of an implicit American ideology)
> that in regard to any possible built-in
> evil in the very nature of super-machines,
> appropriate brakes and corrections will
> be invented in the nick of time, without
> any undue investment of strenuously new
> principles.[52]

It is mythology of this sort that gives evidence of
weaknesses and unresolved conflicts in the American
identity formulation. If, and when, such ideology becomes
unbelievable to significant numbers of people, the dynamic
tension of polarities collapses into confusion. Energy that
was previously free for work and experimental manipulation
of the external world is now no longer available as all
resources are pressed into the service of the defense of the
ego against what is felt as an onslaught of disintegration.

There are mechanisms in our identity structure to
prevent this sort of regression from taking place. The
first component of such a mechanism is the ideal of freedom.
From the very onset of American history:

> ...the post revolutionary man...was
> possessed with the idea of freedom from
> any man's autocracy and haunted by the
> fear that the nostalgia for some home-
> land and the surrender to some king could
> ever make him give in to political
> slavery.[53]

The lure of nostalgia is strong. Especially in times
of crisis, a return to a more authoritarian way of life
becomes an option. The current Jesus Freak and Jewish neo-
Orthodox movements are just such responses. They are a way
of ending the anxiety caused by constant crisis through

surrender to an external authority and through a regression
to an earlier stage of development.

A certain amount of nostalgia and regression is
constantly with us, in music, in folk stories, in myths,
rituals, and prayers.[54] To protect against all nostalgia
is too difficult to be functional, so some outlet remains.
The American is trained in a way that tends:

> ...to make a child slightly nostalgic
> and yet faithful, autonomous and yet
> reliable, individualistic and yet
> predictable.[55]

The family is of course the seat of such training. On
the early American frontier the problem of regression was
particularly acute. Life was so harsh and so painful that
more than a minimal amount of regression would quickly
become a negative survival characteristic. This posed
particular problems for women, for they were largely in
charge of the socialization of the young. In many locales
there were no schools so that it was the mother who conveyed
whatever formal education the child was to have. As such,
it was she who was the transmitter of values and ideology.

Largely through what Eriksen calls "an instinctive
power of adaptation" the frontier mother perceived the
changing and harsh circumstances in which her children were
to grow up, and tried to "avoid weakening potential
frontiersmen by protective maternalism."[56]

As historical circumstances changed, such attitudes on
the part of the mother began to be perceived negatively.
Mother was seen as cold, rejecting. Again, by an almost

instinctive process of adaptation, American women
responded to more settled areas by becoming more child-
centered, warmer, and less fearful of the more protective
forms of maternalism.

If the mother's activity was largely directed toward
home and family, father's was directed toward the world
outside. He was busy creating a life for himself and his
loved ones. Mostly alone, and through his own efforts,
the father labored, so that he came to feel that he was
responsible for all that his family had.

Both the male and the female spent much of their adult
lives acting in ways that they did not learn as children.
As change intensified, this came to be a common American
experience: childhood did not teach you the skills needed
as an adult. In terms of work, the male, according to
Eriksen, becomes the "self-made man" and the female becomes
the "self-made personality."[57]

Time and circumstance reinforced this, and the attribute
of being self-made in terms of work and personality came to
be a major identity component for Americans of both sexes.
The self-made person is in a relatively advantageous
position with respect to adapting to crises of ideology. We
came to feel that we were personally responsible for whatever
ideology we believed in. If ideology faltered, we had a
mechanism for correcting it.

With increased societal complexity the interplay
between self and culture becomes more complex as well. A
deeper analysis of American identity requires that we separate

the two, if only for purposes of understanding. For:

> ...we deal with a process "located"
> in the core of the individual and yet
> also in the core of his communal
> structure, a process which establishes,
> in fact, the identity of these two
> identities.[58]

If this sounds confusing to us, it was equally so to
Eriksen himself. In his work on identity he found that:

> The more one writes about this subject,
> the more the word becomes a term for
> something as unfathomable as it is all-
> pervasive. One can only explore it by
> establishing its indispensability in
> various contexts.[59]

Eriksen attempted to separate the two. The identity
that is located in the core of the communal structure he
called "group identity" and viewed it as "a group's basic
way of organizing experience."[60] The visible part of group
identity, and hence a synonym for it, is ideology.

The identity that is located in the core of the
individual is termed "ego identity" and is a sense of self
esteem which:

> ...gradually grows into a conviction
> that the ego is capable of integrating
> effective steps toward a tangible
> collective future, that it is developing
> into a well-organized ego within a
> social reality.[61]

The interplay between the two identities may be seen
in a statement made by Charles Reich, who uses the term
"consciousness" to encompass the totality:

> Consciousness, as we are using the
> term, is...a total configuration in any
> given individual, which makes up his
> whole perception of reality, his whole
> world view.[62]

Eriksen tee recegnizes that the existence and
functioning of the ege identity is dependent on its inter-
change with the external werld:

> The sense of ege identity, then, is the
> accrued cenfidence that the inner same-
> ness and continuity prepared in the past
> are matched by the sameness and continuity
> of ene's meaning for ethers...[63]

There are, then, deep-seated feelings of self-esteem
and continuity that require suppert from the external
envirenment for their preper expressien. The ege-identity
needs suppert frem the greup identity. Te say the same
thing in slightly different terms, the ege needs ideelegical
suppert.[64]

When such suppert is available, the tetality of the
identity structure may be said te be in balance, or in a
state of dynamic tensien. The result of this is the freeing
of a fleed of creative energy. Just such a situatien can be
ebserved with the kibbutz mevement in Israel. Eriksen
mentiens it as:

> ...ene example of a medern ideelegical
> actuality which en the basis of what
> leeked like utepian ideals freed unknewn
> energies in yeuths whe censidered them-
> selves as of ene "peeple" and created a
> greup ideal of pervading significance.[65]

Judaism is an ideelegy, as are ether religiens, and
hence religiens have a pewer te reach deeply inte the core
of the individual. Even fer Freud, being a Jew previded a
"deep cemmunality knewn enly te these whe shared in it, and
enly expressible in werds mere mythical than cenceptual."[66]

Ideelegies, hewever, are mere eften than net relative

to each other. For Freud, the assumption of a Jewish
identity served to emancipate him from a wider, non-Jewish
one. In general, assumption of one strong identity means
removal from other identity possibilities.[67]

This points in the direction of several negative
aspects of identity formation. There is always the danger
of prejudice and persecution should this mechanism of
delineating groups from each other proceed too far. This
danger is still with us because historically, identity
also performed the function of affirming for one group its
superiority over others:

> Man as a species has survived by
> being divided into what I have called
> pseudo-species. First each horde or
> tribe, but then also every religious
> association has become the human
> species, considering all the others a
> freakish and gratuitous invention of
> some irrelevant deity. To reinforce
> the illusion of being chosen, every
> tribe recognizes a creation of its
> own, a mythology and later a history:
> thus was loyalty to a particular
> ecology and morality secured. One
> never quite knew how all the other
> tribes came to be, but since they did
> exist, they were at least useful as a
> screen of projection for the negative
> identities which were the necessary,
> if most uncomfortable, counterpart of
> the positive ones. This projection,
> in conjunction with their territoriality,
> gave men reason to slaughter one another
> in majorem gloriam. If, then, identity
> can be said to be a "good thing" in
> human evolution - because good things are
> those which seem to have been necessary
> for what, indeed, has survived - we should
> not ever look the fact that this system
> of mortal divisions has been vastly over-
> burdened with the function of reaffirming
> for each pseudo-species its superiority
> over all others.[68]

The claiming of superiority over all others, and the
use of others as a projection screen for the negative
aspects of one's own identity is, of course, aggravated by
crisis situations. It is at this point that passive
prejudice may become active harassment and persecution.

Times of crisis often call for unusually severe and
rigid responses. When one's identity is felt to be under
attack, extreme measures are used to defend it. People
seem to have a desire to have any identity at all, even a
difficult or negative one, rather than remain or become
"undefined." The extreme response Erikson calls "totalism."
It is a:

> ...Gestalt in which an absolute boundary
> is emphasized: given a certain arbitrary
> delineation, nothing that belongs inside
> must be left outside, nothing that must
> be outside can be tolerated inside. A
> totality is as absolutely inclusive as it
> is utterly exclusive.[69]

The opposite of totalism is "wholeness" which:

> ...emphasizes a sound, organic, progressive
> mutuality between diversified functions and
> parts within an entirety, the boundaries of
> which are open and fluid.[70]

Wholeness is the state of successful identity function.
Totalism is a defensive posture, taken when the person feels
his identity to be under attack. It is an attempt to mark
off and defend certain specified areas. It is basically a
desparate act, designed to fend off severe identity
dissolution. When a sense of wholeness is lost, totalism
is often the response.

Totalism is also the background of the "backlash" that

is so feared in our own age. It is related to prejudice in
that the rigid boundary that must be maintained usually
requires minute and arbitrary distinctions. But most
dangerous of all, totalism in the individual ego is directly
related to totalitarianism on the level of group ideology.

We would expect that totalism, an emergency response,
would end once the emergency is over. Yet if the person
perceives a constant state of emergency, or perceives no
meaningful way out of the behavior he is currently locked
into, the temporary situation becomes more or less permanent.
This has happened in the near historical past. It also
happens to each individual at an important point in his
development: during the identity crisis of adolescence.[71]

It is in adolescence that ideology becomes essential
for the development of the ego. It serves to simplify and
organize experience in such a way that the maturing
individual may more easily see where there may be a place
for him and his unique capacities:

> ...without an ideological simplification
> of the universe the adolescent ego cannot
> organize experience according to its
> specific capacities and its expanding
> involvement.[72]

Among the functions that ideology performs for the
adolescent ego are included its ability to offer:

> (1) a simplified perspective of the future
> which encompasses all foreseeable time
> and thus counteracts individual "time
> confusion;
> (2) some strongly felt correspondence
> between the inner world of ideals and
> evils and the social world with its goals
> and dangers;
> (3) an opportunity for exhibiting some

uniformity of appearance and behavior
counteracting individual identity-
consciousness;
(4) inducement to a collective experi-
mentation with roles and techniques
which help overcome a sense of inhibition
and personal guilt;
(5) introduction into the ethos of the
prevailing technology and thus into
sanctioned and regulated competition;
(6) a geographic-historical world image
as a framework for the young individual's
budding identity;
(7) a rationale for a sexual way of life
compatible with a convincing system of
principles; and
(8) submission to leaders who as super-
human figures or "big brothers" are above
the ambivalence of the parent-child
relation.73

The complexity of this situation is in a sense
aided by the socio-economic structure of American society.
The young individual is required to remain uncommitted,
tentative, for social, economic, and psychological reasons.
Erikson's term for this period of time is "moratorium."74
It is a period of trial and error that takes place before
the stakes have gotten too high, and before final choices
must be made. It is likewise the period in which the
results of all the testing are to be integrated.

At this stage, recognition and affirmation from
significant others is essential to the maturing individual.
The person needs to see that others as well perceive him as
growing up and as coming to join their ranks.75 It is this
recognition that alleviates much of the pain of being in
severe identity-flux.

This recognition has great power for good or ill. The
need for it is so pervasive that the adolescent will often

"wear" the label that is given him, and further confirm its validity by his subsequent actions. Hope for the eventual successful identity formation of many young people lies in the refusal to label him delinquent, drug addict, homosexual, psychotic.[76]

This process of handing out labels often helps create a true delinquent, where before there was only a defiant youth, trying a negative identity out of desperation because no positive one seemed open to him:

> Such vindictive choices of a negative identity represent, of course, a desperate attempt at regaining some mastery in a situation in which the positive identity elements cancel each other out.[77]

Adolescence is one stage in the developmental cycle of each individual. Erikson views it as the fifth stage in the "epigenetic" cycle. It is during this stage that the major business of the developing person is to deal with the polarity of identity vs. role confusion.[78] At this stage of life, the totalism-wholeness issue is most likely to be expressed in terms of ideology.

The real root of totalism and wholeness, and of religion, lies in the very first stage of human development: basic trust vs. basic mistrust. It is religion, of all human institutions, that is primarily concerned with this first and most basic conflict:

> There can be no question but that it is organized religion which systematizes and socializes the first and deepest conflict in life: it combines the dim images of each individual's first providers into collective images of primeval superhuman protectors; it makes comprehensible the

> vague discomfort of basic mistrust by
> giving it a metaphysical reality in the
> form of defined Evil; and it offers to
> man by way of rituals a periodic coll-
> ective restitution of trust which in
> mature adults ripens to a combination
> of faith and realism.[79]

The root of both religion and identity is that early
encounter of "mutual trustworthiness and recognition"
between mother and infant that produces a sense of hallowed
presence the need for which remains basic in man."[80]

It is this sense of hallowed presence and basic trust
that grows into what human beings call faith. As with other
deep feelings within us, faith too needs to find some means
of institutionalized expression. It is prayer and ritual
that accomplish this:

> In prayer man assures a superhuman
> power that, in spite of everything, he
> has remained trustworthy, and asks for
> a sign that he now may also continue to
> trust his deity...Higher forms of
> religion and ritual clearly address
> themselves to the nostalgic remnant in
> each individual of his expulsion from
> the paradise of wholeness which once
> gave liberal provision, but which,
> alas, was lost, leaving forever an
> undefinable sense of evil division,
> potential malevolence, and deep
> nostalgia. Religion restores, at
> regular intervals and through rituals,
> significantly connected with the
> important crises of the life cycle and
> the turning points of the yearly cycle,
> a new sense of wholeness, of things
> rebound.[81]

The resolution of a life crisis involves the balancing
of polarities in dynamic tension. This produces free energy
and attendant feelings of well-being. The continuation of
religion as an adult enterprise is one indication that this

process is never complete, but is a life-long one, in
which periodic re-affirmations and re-resolutions are
necessary. As religion continues to function:

> ...each generation brings to these
> institutions the remnants of infantile
> needs and youthful fervor and receives
> from them - as long as they, indeed,
> manage to maintain their institutional
> vitality - a specific reinforcement of
> childlike vitality.[82]

The ability of religion to provide individuals and
groups with a new sense of wholeness at periodic intervals
is a major aspect of the continued existence of hope:

> When religion loses its actual power
> of presence, it would seem, an age must
> find other forms of joint reverence for
> life which derive vitality from a shared
> world image. For only a reasonably
> coherent world provides the faith which
> is transmitted by the mothers to the
> infants in a way conducive to the vital
> strength of hope, that is, the enduring
> predisposition to believe in the attain-
> ability of primal wishes in spite of the
> anarchic urges and rages of dependency.[83]

In our age religion seems to have lost both its
institutional vitality and its power of presence. The
shared world image that once sustained us is open to
question and disbelief on many fronts.

This is particularly acute in Reform Judaism, for two
reasons. First, Reform Jews are particularly involved with
the more liberal and future-oriented segments of our society -
those sectors where traditional wisdom is most under attack.
Second, Reform Judaism is founded on the premise that the
traditional Jewish world image is man's own creation, and
therefore not binding (or compelling) for any of us. Alvin

Reines focuses on this issue in terms of religious
authority. He asserts that in Western religions at least,
religious authority functioned according to the following
schema:

1. There is a God who has created the
   universe;
2. By the very act of creation, He has
   authority over everything He has
   created;
3. God therefore has authority over
   mankind;
4. Exercising His authority, God has
   issued commandments that mankind is
   to obey;
5. God has made known to X ecclesiastical
   body, through revelation or tradition
   or both, what these commandments are;
6. God has also, through revelation or
   tradition, delegated elements of His
   authority over mankind to X
   ecclesiastical body;
7. Therefore, inasmuch as X ecclesiastical
   body acts in the name of God, mankind is
   enjoined to surrender certain portions
   of self-authority to it and to obey the
   commandments that issue from it.[84]

Reines argues that the existence or nature of God is
not the issue. The root of the matter is: are the
revelations really God's word, to be obeyed on that
authority? Reform Judaism, says Reines, simply does not
subscribe to the system of revelation on which this system
of religious authority is based.[85]

Although this particular philosophic schema is not
widely known, its effects are nonetheless pervasively felt.
When scientific method and religious revelation clash, it
is to the former that the authority of truth is imputed.
Many people have come to see that the books of revelation
were written by men, as mortal and as fallible as we.

Equally large numbers have learned of the work of Freud and other modern psychologists, and have come to believe that man created God, rather than the other way around. This belief that God is man's projection of what originates deep within himself further erodes the possibility of strong belief in the traditional religious world-view. Further, it puts mankind in the awesome and frightening position of having to create for himself whatever meaning is to exist in his life:

> ...it is part of today's consolidation
> that man re-internalizes the eternal
> Identity whom he had projected on the
> (now, in principle, conquerable)
> heavens, and tries to remake himself
> in the blueprint of a manufactured
> identity.[86]

This effort is not only difficult, but carries within it many dangers, from "backlash" to totalitarianism. At the same time, it cannot be avoided, for there is no going back to simpler times. There are, of course, some who will try. At the moment, there are groups of people actively seeking authoritarian religious structures rather than face the pain of freedom.

For many others as well the world does not seem coherent. There is no feeling that primal wishes may be attained, but rather that a conspiracy is afoot to thwart their satisfaction.

There is much pain to be faced. Large groups of people who were once specialists, members of the elite, are now universalists, members of the masses. Even larger numbers of people can no longer identify with the conventional wisdom, as the pace of change renders much of their own

activity disturbing and incomprehensible. In such a
climate various aspects of negative identity are apt to
reappear, for that which "was banished beyond the periphery
is apt to reappear in the center."[87] Many of the "anarchic
urges and rages of dependency" are already reappearing in
our inter-generational turmoil. Gone is the wholeness, the
sense of community. With their leaving, many of the
polarities that they held in dynamic balance are collapsing
into confusion. The polarities themselves are becoming
mutually exclusive forces at war within the individual and
the society. A state of emergency exists in which a
defensive posture is often taken. Totalism comes to the
fore, particularly when sensitive areas are probed.

American Reform Jewry, and probably all other religious
denominations as well, is going through a period of identity
crisis. Judaism no longer does for us what it once did.
Its necessary function of releasing vital energy at periodic
intervals is greatly impaired. At this crucial moment, what
is our response going to be? Will we move in the direction
of greater wholeness, or greater totalism?

Perhaps on some commune at this very moment a group of
second-generation flower children are working on a sense of
reverence for life that can be shared by large numbers of
people. Perhaps in some university study a scholar is
working out an ideological formulation of present-day
America in which we can all participate. Are we going to
wait and see, wait until they are finished? Or are we going
to get to work on our own identities? The nature of our

response is crucial.

E. American Jewish Identity

According to our definition of "crisis" as a necessary
turning point, there is indeed a current crisis in Jewish
identity. The last time changes of such sweeping
magnitude were required by the collapse of the prevailing
system was about two thousand years ago, during the time of
turmoil that spawned both Pharisaic Judaism and the
beginnings of Christianity.

As is the case with the general American identity
crisis, the range of opinions is exceedingly wide, from
bright optimism to dark despair. An individual's response
to the present also depends in large measure on where he
feels himself to be on the spectrum of recent Jewish
experience in America. It is only by gaining some under-
standing of a process that has included several generations
and approximately the last ninety years that we can come to
understand the varying responses of the people caught up in it.

The onset of this process was the mass immigration of
Eastern European Jews to America in the 1880's. The
transition of these people from shtetl to American urban
life is a prime example of the transition from authoritarian
to democratic family structure.[88] The crisis that invali-
dated previous parental authority was the immigration itself.
For many Jews alive today, this entire period is an actual
memory.

In a previous section we documented the socio-
economic success of these immigrant settlers and their
children. Here we want to take a look at the growth and
development of their identities, to show how identity
components of the European experience prepared the Jews
for successful entry into American society.

Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice probably did more than
any other work to bring home to large groups of people the
emasculation of the male role in a persecuted minority
group. As with the Blacks in America, so with the Jews of
the Shtetl. The Jew was prohibited from owning land, and
excluded from most of the available occupations of the day.
It became the women who were the real breadwinners, and it
was they who had contact with the market place. The male
role was inverted, so that a negative situation became a
positive one. The Jews made it a positive male attribute
not to work, and decreed that learning was a far more
important occupation than any other. The highest status
of all in the ghetto, male or female, was conferred on the
man who devoted his entire life to a study of the holy
books.[89]

This emphasis on learning served the immigrant Jews
well. By lucky accident, they happened to arrive in
America at a time when the economic sphere had just begun
to realize that increased profits required more and more
education. The shock of immigration tended to invalidate
much of the emphasis on learning traditional religious
material. Yet, at the conscious, ideological level, the

high esteem in which education itself was held remained. In a sense, learning "became diluted with practicality."[90] The Jews viewed the system of free, compulsory education as a God-send, and became educated with a vengeance. The American Jew, through education, was quickly on his way toward the frontier.

The issue of vengeance is an important one for the understanding of American Jewish identity. In a very real sense, "making it" became a kind of revenge, and a kind of just reward for the centuries of persecution. The high value placed on education explains just the conscious level of American Jewish identity, the very tip of the iceberg. For the rest, we must go into processes that are largely unconscious, though nonetheless operative.

The great explorer of the unconscious, Sigmund Freud, recognized at least a sense of one-upmanship in his own Jewish identity. Speaking before the B'nai B'rith in Vienna in 1926, he asserted that:

> Because I was a Jew I found myself free
> from many prejudices which restricted
> others in the use of their intellect;
> and as a Jew I was prepared to join the
> opposition, and to do without agreement
> with the "compact majority".[91]

This type of statement indicates that is is somehow a privilege to belong to an oppressed group, and that such belonging carries with it hidden rewards and ultimate victory over the oppressors. Max Weber recognized this as the typical stance of a "pariah people" of which Jews are the prime example. He defined pariah people as:

> ...a distinctive hereditary social
> group lacking autonomous political
> organization and characterized by
> prohibitions against commensality
> and intermarriage originally founded
> upon magical, tabooistic, and ritual
> injunctions. Two additional traits
> of a pariah people are political and
> social disprivilege and a far-
> reaching distinctiveness in economic
> functioning.[92]

Weber clearly identifies the inversion of persecution

into the promise of ultimate victory with an unconscious

desire for vengeance. His technical term for the process

is resentment, or, ressentiment:

> The factor of resentment (ressent-
> iment) thus achieved importance in the
> Jewish ethical salvation religion...
> Resentment is a concomitant of that
> particular religious ethic of the dis-
> privileged which...teaches that unequal
> distribution of mundane goods is caused
> by the sinfulness and the illegality of
> the privileged, and that sooner or later
> God's wrath will overtake them. In this
> theodicy of the disprivileged, the
> moralistic quest serves as a device for
> compensating a conscious or unconscious
> desire for vengeance. ...Once a con-
> ception of compensation has arisen,
> suffering may take on the quality of
> the religiously meritorious, in view of
> the belief that it brings in its wake
> great hopes of future compensation.[93]

The revenge of the Jewish immigrants, then, took the

form of rapid economic success in America. This success

took an unusual form, however. Immigrant males entered the

proletariat. This was to be expected. Yet, contrary to

most expectations, most Jewish families remained in the

proletariat for only one generation! It seemed that fathers

had one goal in mind: to provide their children with the

opportunity, largely through education, of entering directly

into the middle class. For the most part they were success-
ful, and this was accomplished in the span of one generation.

Several things were at work to produce this anomaly.
At the very deepest level, there was a strong identification
with the oppressor on the part of the oppressed, so that
the immigrant Jews aspired (for their children, if not
for themselves) to rise to the very top. These people
were not interested in partial revenge. They insisted on
nothing less than total role reversal, and for the most
part, they got it.

The European experience contributed to this. The
prohibitions against owning land served to concentrate the
Jews in towns and cities and to give them an urban rather
than a rural orientation. They arrived in America, there-
fore, with few of the usual peasant values of the vast
majority of their non-Jewish countrymen.[94]

This lack of commitment to peasant values, together
with the desire for revenge and the identification with the
oppressor, enabled a leap-frog effect to operate. For the
peasant immigrant, the next step, and often the only
conceivable step, was entry into the class of blue-collar
workers. For the Jew, already urbanized, this was at best
a temporary (and the more temporary the better!) way-
station in the quest for something better. The sights
were set on the middle and upper middle class. Only there
could most Jews feel they had truly "arrived."

Revenge, then, is the first major component of modern
American Jewish identity. Arrival is the second. Somewhere

in the net tee distant future was a haven, a golden age of
economic success and cultural respect, a realm of salvation
that was only the Jew's just compensation for so many
years of suffering. It is paradoxical but true that both
revenge and arrival remained successful motivating aspects
of American Jewish identity only as long as they were
relatively incomplete.

For quite some time this remained the case. Jewish
ghettoes had by this time (around the onset of World War I)
become, in many cities, Jewish communities. Translating
the two major components of Jewish identity into more
traditional religious terms, vengeance may be termed
"redemption" and arrival may be termed "salvation." The
atmosphere of these Jewish communities was as permeated by
both of these as it was by the smell of chicken soup. For
here was an environment that was overwhelmingly Jewish.
The Jews lived together, worked together, schooled together,
and prayed together. Every aspect of the life experience
was Jewish.[95]

Since, however, both salvation and redemption took so
many of their cues from the non-Jewish American elite, a
certain tension was maintained. Sklare views this as a
"retentivist" orientation: a desire to maintain a viable
ethnic identity. There was thus the conflict of remaining
separate from the general culture at the same time that one
was pursuing greater (economic) integration within it.[96]

The first World War raised another major issue for
American Jewish identity: defense. This included net only

the activities of such organizations as the Joint
Distribution Committee, but the entire Zionist movement as
well. Defense took on the two-fold aspect of providing
for Jews suffering from the effects of the war, and looking
toward a permanent Jewish haven in Israel. The major
quality of all such activity was, of course, that of a
response to an emergency situation.

The Depression provided further impetus to emergency
response. Although most Jews recovered, a note of anxiety
had been added to the high hopes of salvation in America,
just as the war had made clear the vulnerability and inter-
connectedness of world-wide Jewry. The entire generation
of American Jews who experienced the Depression as part of
their childhood experience learned that it was necessary to
defend oneself against economic disaster, for what had
happened once could happen again.

If anything, the defense posture served as reinforce-
ment for the striving for economic success. At the time,
the most logical expression of that striving was in
education. The ultimate aim was to graduate with a college
degree, and even more so, with a degree from a professional
school.

This generation of educated young American Jews was
just about to begin reaping the rewards of their labors when
again disaster struck: World War II.

The holocaust and its aftermath had far-reaching effects
on American Jewish identity. The haunting ghost of two
thousand years of persecution was raised again, as were

attendant feelings of helplessness, shame, rage, and guilt.
These feelings were so strong that they were not, in fact,
dealt with immediately. They were sublimated, channeled,
as American Jews busied themselves with mourning the dead,
picking up the pieces, aiding the survivors, and founding
the State of Israel.

Jewish optimism was sorely shaken, and the immediate
war that followed the founding of Israel did not help.
Indeed, the state of emergency never seemed to end. There
was, in this formulation, little room for redemption. To
even think of revenge was to raise issues and feelings of
such depth and magnitude that handling them became extremely
difficult.

The holocaust also served to sever the salvation aspect
from all but its economic roots. Although the post-war
period saw an increase in the founding of new congregations,
the older optimistic striving for salvation had received a
blow from which it would not recover. The new congregations
were required by migration patterns as much as by anything
else, as young Jews moved to the suburbs to raise their
families.

Religion, the traditional ground of Jewish salvation
systems, had taken on aspects of defense. Being a member
of a minority group that at the same time has acquired both
high social and geographic mobility creates special identity
problems. Changes in neighborhood and social class means
changes in support systems as well. This is likely to take
place in fact before it is actually perceived. The first

realization that a radical identity shift has indeed taken place is apt to be a painful one.[97]

Religion was pressed into service to help alleviate this pain of shifting identities. As the problem became more and more complex, ritual and ceremony were more and more used to confirm the status of people as members of the Jewish community. Since identity transmission was a particularly difficult issue, this process is most in evidence with the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies.[98]

Along with these identity problems, though, the economic success of American Jews was, if anything, increased. Jews reaped the benefits of post war booms, expanded governmental employment, and the increased use of educational qualifications in industry.

The Jewish family remained exceedingly child-centered, creating a warm close environment that held out the hope of an eventual return to a similar Garden of Eden at some point in the future. The production of such aspiration remained in effect even though its eventual realization had been so sorely shaken. The young remained highly motivated. Although many tended to view this family atmosphere as essentially productive of neurosis, I believe Sklare is correct when he says:

> ...the Jewish family constellation has
> not created social problems in the
> general society. In fact it has done just
> the opposite: the Jewish family seems to
> have solved problems rather than caused
> them. And the foremost problem that it
> has solved is that of motivating the young
> toward achievement.[99]

Yet when these motivated youngsters began to grow, in which direction were they to look for affirmation of their Jewish identity? There was the largely defensive American Judaism of all denominations. There was the largely defensive activity of the national Jewish organizations such as the Anti Defamation League. And there was the generative, but also largely defensive Jewish nationalism.

To this essential emptiness of American Jewish identity in the 50's and 60's was added the sweeping ideological re-formulations that the war had postponed. America's young Jews resumed the process of questioning, with a vengeance. They had been promised salvation in their earliest years, yet the world seemed to mock them. They heard nostalgic tales of the "lower east side" yet all around them there were no such enclaves of warmth and community.

To make matters worse, the parents of these youngsters were having difficulty dealing with their own shaken Jewish identities now that they had moved away from the neighborhood environments on which they were based. In spite of increased cultural tolerance, these parents were having a harder and harder time transmitting a sense of Jewish identity to their children.[100] This important task was turned over to the religious school, which had no easier time of it.[101]

One reason for this difficulty was that the schools were attempting to convey a system which was actually at odds with what the children saw their parents doing. The

adults had developed a "new personalism" in which each person was to pick and choose those elements of culture, heritage, and current thought that would make up his Jewish identity.[102] Perhaps because the parents were not really comfortable with this system, it was not taught to the children. Instead, they were taught various systems of Jewish identity which simply were not to be found in the world around them.

For the truth of the matter was that parents and children had started to come up against the massive breakdown of previous systems of Jewish identity. The current breakdown is probably unprecedented over the last two thousand years. One has to go back to the time of the birth of Christianity and the birth of Pharisaic Judaism to find identity reformation of such sweeping magnitude.

Many young Jews alive today had little or no contact with a viable Jewish identity in their own lives. This is a new and unusual situation: large numbers of Jews are unaffiliated. The major component of becoming unaffiliated in such a way as to indicate that being a Jew simply doesn't matter is probably the degree of connection with either a working Jewish identity, or the struggle for one.

Thus we arrive at the present, with Jews in America beginning to feel the effort and the pain required for a major new identity formulation as the old one has become largely unworkable. The tensions have already helped create large numbers of marginal or completely unaffiliated Jews. We do not have much data on them, and there is hope in that

ignorance. We may find out that these people are not lost,
but merely sitting it out for a while, until a more viable
Jewish identity comes into view. I hope that this is the
case.

F. The Jewish Identity Crisis

According to our definition of "crisis" as a necessary
turning point, there can be no doubt that there is currently
a crisis in American Jewish identity. As we have pointed
out, the changes developing are of great magnitude.

Two recent studies, the Fein report and the Lenn report,
have given us data on how the Reform Jewish community is
responding to this identity crisis. The strongest single
issue given by Fein is that our temples have failed to
provide a sense of community.[103] Community is spoken of in
the report as something for which there is a "powerful,
perhaps even desperate longing" the lack of which is apt to
produce a "vague though often pervasive malaise." The
remedy of this lack would provide people with "warmth" and
"intimacy," an end to "segmented and superficial relation-
ships," and "shared emotion and a sense of support."[104]

The same researchers say that community cannot be
created by committee, nor legislated into existence, but is
something that must arise organically.[105] The report even
indicates that community is not necessarily a matter of
close friendships. Sixty per cent of the respondents do not
have many close friends at the temple to which they belong,

and do not perceive this as in any way negative. There was
no correlation between dissatisfaction with the temple and
lack of friends there. In fact, no matter what size the
temple was, the majority of respondents from temples of all
sizes felt that their temple ought to be larger than its
present size.[106]

We would hope that the temple would be a place where a
sense of community had developed, yet this does not seem to
be the case. Sixty-three per cent of the people Fein
interviewed belong to a temple and to no other Jewish
organization, yet the temple is not, for them, an object of
important emotional investment.[107]

The normal response to temple activity is an apathetic
acceptance of things as they are. To join does not
necessarily imply any real degree of participation. The
primary criterion for choosing a temple seems to be the
quality of the rabbi, followed by the belief in its (Reform)
ideology, followed by the quality of the religious school.[108]

The Lenn report also found much discontent. It was the
people who perceived themselves as among the least religious
who were the most critical of the rabbi's role in the
religious school and of his leadership of youth group
activities.[109]

With some degree of justification, we understand "least
religious" here to mean those whose Jewish identity is least
viable. It would seem, then, that some of the pain of being
in a state of identity confusion is vented in the form of
criticism of the rabbi and of his activities, particularly

those that deal with the young and hence touch the sore
spot of identity transmission. There is apt to be a great
deal of this, for a vast majority of congregants do not
consider themselves religious.[110]

The most active lay leadership of our temples are apt
to take a wider view, and their criticism involves blaming
the rabbi for "what is wrong with Reform Judaism."[111] The
rabbis, for their part, report a lack of committment and
large-scale job dissatisfactions. However, only twenty
per cent of the rabbis perceive "a crisis in the Reform
rabbinate" in their own congregations. When the wording of
the question is changed to "a crisis in most Reform congre-
gations" sixty-six per cent of the rabbis are able to
perceive it.[112]

The Fein report serves as a summary of this material in
its conclusion that there is a crisis in ideology whereby
"Jewishness" is not adequately expressed in temple life.[113]
From previous sections, we understand that ideology is
synonymous with group identity. We have also seen that
group identity is the conscious, largely rational component
of processes that begin deep within each individual.

Fein and his associates view things somewhat differ-
ently:

> We are not at all convinced that there is
> a serious crisis in Jewish identity, at
> least among the people we encountered;
> there is a very clear crisis in Jewish
> ideology.
>
> What we find is that people with very
> potent Jewish instincts feel that they
> have no way of supporting these instincts

> intellectually. Indeed, to the degree
> to which people have relatively coherent
> ideological tendencies, these tendencies
> often appear to contradict their Jewish
> instincts. This is a source of sub-
> stantial personal distress, all the more
> so as it is extremely difficult to
> transmit instincts to the young when the
> justification for these instincts has
> been lost, or is uncertain.[114]

Perhaps an example will help to cut through the
differences in the use of terminology. I believe that Fein
is talking about such things as trying to convey to a child
a sense of being a member of the Jewish people, to take one
example. In his guts the parent knows that his destiny is
deeply wrapped up with that of people scattered all over the
face of the earth. Somehow they are inextricably bound.
Yet what rational process can successfully convey this?
Can a parent use nationalism? Even he questions its validity.
Can a parent indicate that it is God's will that we feel this
way? Barely. The point is that many of our deepest longings,
what Fein chose to call instincts, are no longer able to be
discussed in language that makes sense.

However, I still contend that to view ideology as
anything other than the rational component of identity is a
mistake. Be that as it may, there is turmoil, pain, anxiety,
and identity confusion within the American Jewish community.

With all of this, the report indicates an extremely
interesting finding: support of Israel is the top priority
of American Reform Jews.[115] Is this a stable identity
component with a coherent ideology that can serve as the
rallying point for a new and viable formulation? Perhaps,

yet additional data serves to confound the issue. This
data includes two findings:

> 1) Being in favor of Zionism does not
> necessarily follow being in support of
> Israel
> 2) Israel is not seen as the center of
> world Jewry.[116]

We will, of course, deal with these two anomalous
statements a bit later on. But even so, the choice of
support for Israel as the top priority may well indicate
that Israel provides, for American Reform Jews, what our
temples do not: a sense of community and a cogent ideology.

In an imaginary letter from an American Jewish girl
about to settle in Israel, Albert Verspan has collected
most, if not all of the relevant issues. The girl, Debby,
writes to her friend in America, telling her how she felt
during the Six Day War of 1967:

> When Israel won the way it did, I felt
> a surge of relief, then exaltation,
> then pride. I felt ten feet tall.
> These weren't unknown people fighting
> far off in the desert. They were MY
> people. They were bone of my bone.
> They were both heroic and right, and
> they were fighting for me. They were
> saying - and they were speaking for
> me, too - Jews are unwilling to be
> slaughtered anymore. One Masada was
> enough. One Auschwitz was enough.
> Jews have died long enough.[117]

Many of the issues are contained in this one excerpt.
There are the dangers of war, raising Judaism and Jewish
identification to a matter of literal life and death. There
is pride in excellence, backed by a clear morality. There
is a means of dealing with the difficult, negative aspects
of Jewish identity that have been postponed since World War II:

scapegoating, shame, persecution, dependence, impotence, guilt, rage, revenge. These negative aspects are largely replaced with their positive counterparts. Now, Jews do, instead of being done to. They fight back, and they win, because they are right. The suffering of the past is vindicated by the victory of the present. The salvation system that promises eventual victory in return for endurance and survival is likewise vindicated.

Debby's response to the Six Day War actually recapitulates the three-fold Jewish identity that was viable in America not long ago. We found the three major elements to be redemption (vengeance), salvation (arrival, or return to the homeland), and defense. We also showed that the breakdown of this viable identity involved a severe overshift toward defense to the exclusion of almost all else. The victory of the war restores a sense of balance and restores as well the two missing elements of redemption and salvation.

For many American Jews, the Six Day War allowed them to feel pride in being Jewish for perhaps the first time in their lives. Negative identity aspects were suddenly replaced by positive ones, and missing ones suddenly restored. A meaningful tension between polarities was once again in effect, where before there had been only contradiction. The result of this was the freeing of energy for dynamic action. In Debby's case, that action was to volunteer to help out in the aftermath of the war by flying to Israel to do whatever was necessary. Her newly-found energy received much

enthusiastic support:

> The spirit on the plane was fantastic.
> We sang ourselves hoarse, danced the
> hora in the aisles, and carried on as
> if a great miracle had happened. It
> had.[118]

"A great miracle had happened." Is this anything other
than a return to the doctrine of salvation through compen-
sation? Ultimate moral and physical victory over oppression
is the just reward of generations of people who remained
trustworthy, remained Jewish, even though it was terribly
hard to do so.

Suddenly, in Israel, ideological contradictions are
cleared up for Debby. Her American rationality was at odds
with a belief in God. Put in other terms, the American
overshift toward independence made the expression of
dependence needs difficult if not impossible. Any attempt
at the expression of desires for dependence seemed to involve
ideological contradictions. Yet for Debby, her trip restores
the balance:

> I had a chance to visit the occupied
> territories and the Allenby Bridge,
> but the real scene was the Wailing
> Wall. Remember that discussion at
> camp when I agreed with the "God is
> dead" theologian? Well, go figure
> it. I gave out with every prayer I
> could think of...I thanked God as if
> he were sitting up on the wall,
> patting my head.[119]

From an initial position of defiance Debby comes round
to an almost childlike faith. As we found earlier, it is
indeed the function of religion to revitalize the individual
from this reservoir of earliest basic trust, yet American

culture, for largely economic reasons, militates against
this.

Debby's newly found ability to express her dependence
needs finds support from many quarters. All around her, the
history of her people is alive. She is only one of thousands
of people praying at the Wailing Wall. The plane ride helps
prepare the groundwork. She is able to drop her stance of
strict independence and "lose" herself in the shared joy of
the volunteers. She thus gains some respite from American
identity components that demand independence and uniqueness.
Instead, Debby comes to depend on her fellow passengers for
a sense of support. Such an experience is felt as liber-
ating, exhilirating. As the balance is restored after an
initial burst of energy, a sense of well-being develops.
The person breathes a sigh of relief, as if a battle has
ended, as if one has come home after a long (internal) exile.

The sense of the lack of community that is caused in
America by the identity overshifts that have occurred is
answered for Debby. On the plane, social distance is
dissolved as the riders hug and dance. She sits next to
a "fat, middle-aged rabbi" yet they are both doing the same
thing: going to Israel to lend a hand. When they arrive,
again there is a sense of meaningful participation in a
community that encompasses the individual and lends authenti-
city to his actions. As Debby puts it, she feels that
"Israelis are moved by a tremendous sense of national purpose."[120]
She feels herself to be a part of that purpose.

The sense of national purpose in Israel is in sharp

contrast to the world Debby left behind. She views
materialistic, upper-middle-class life in America as sterile,
and the alternative of dropping out equally so. She is
disturbed by racial turmoil and the war in Vietnam, and is
unable to discern any sense of national purpose back home
in which she can participate.[121] Life on a kibbutz seems
far more meaningful. In Israel Debby feels a sense of
personal identity, and a sense of participating in and
receiving support from her community that makes even her job
of cleaning the chicken coops a worthwhile activity.

Debby's response to the Israeli experience is in large
measure due to the identity confusion she brought with her
as the result of her upbringing in America. Back home,
Debby was as yet a member of the uncommitted reserves whose
position is sustained by the demands of the American economy.
We have seen some of the costs in terms of alienation that
this situation is liable to create. Debby looks toward the
future and attempts to envision her eventual place in
society.

At the same time, the society is undergoing a particul-
arly violent and rapid period of change. Many aspects of
the future Debby will have to live in simply do not yet
exist, so she cannot possibly identify with them. The
polarities of her life are not in balance, and thus she
undergoes the distress of identity confusion.

The experience of the Six Day War and the trip to
Israel restored many of the balances. The result of this
balancing was the release of a flood of creative energy for

both work and play. Ideology came into harmony with
feelings as a viable identity was restored. For large
numbers of Jews who did not go to Israel following the Six
Day War, and who have no intention of settling there
permanently as Debby did, the process is far more subtle,
and vicarious, though still operative.

Vast numbers of American Jews donate huge sums of
money to Israel. At fund-raising luncheons and dinners they
listen to Israeli emissaries tell of conditions there. Vast
numbers take frequent vacation trips to Israel. Many parents
send their children there for the summer, or for as long as
a year of study during high school or college. Many
American rabbis have spent a good deal of time in residence
in various Israeli cities. Israeli cultural programs are
increasingly available here. Israeli and/or Hebrew speaking
summer camps are more and more numerous. Hebrew is used in
our services, taught in our classrooms, and spoken, however
haltingly, by American tourists. The channels of identifi-
cation are relatively numerous and direct. And of course,
we are all Jews.

In all of this there is the common thread of exposure
to an Israeli society that by its very structure supports a
viable Jewish identity. The work week is arranged according
to Jewish religious custom. The holidays are not Columbus
Day or Easter but Succot and Shavuot. On the Shabbat all
public transportation comes to a halt. Unless you consciously
try to avoid it, you will have kosher fare wherever you dine.
The situation is succinctly put by one person who said to

me something to the effect that: "It's strange to look
around and realize that everyone's Jewish. The police are
Jewish, the cleaning ladies are Jewish, even the whores are
Jewish!"

For many Americans who spend time in Israel the
experience of a culture that supports Jewish identity is an
exhilirating one. Many of the everyday difficulties of being
a Jew in Gentile America seem to fade away. Even the question
"What does it mean to be Jewish" soon loses its meaning, to
be answered merely by looking around you. Such experiences
can make the return to America extremely painful. One such
individual told me that "one cannot really be Jewish in
America. Here, Shabbes is also Saturday, with football,
shopping, dancing lessons for the kids, and a lot of other
chores. But in Israel we could really celebrate Shabbes.
Everything stopped, and we were all Jews together."

For many Americans whose involvement with Israel is not
as intense or as sweeping as Debby's, Israel still provides
answers to the most difficult problems of American Jewish
identity. It does so mainly by supplying the three things
that are most lacking in American identity in general: the
ability to express needs for community, engagement, and
dependence.

Carrying through with Slater's terminology, Israel does
seem to answer the need for community by providing a way to
live in trust and cooperation with one's fellow men. Indeed,
cooperation is essential for the defense against hostile
neighbors, as well as being an ingrained part of the kibbutz

movement. A man has to trust his fellow: to sound the
alarm, to stand competent guard duty, to serve in the army.
The collective entity of the state is also clearly defined,
as are many of its most important policies.

As a small nation, and a new nation, there is still
room for the feeling that one is coming directly to grips
with important social issues. The very fact that the current
Prime Minister, Mrs. Meir, is apt to invite students on an
archeological dig near her home in for tea and cookies is but
one small example of how close can be the contact between an
ordinary individual and those in power. This closeness
serves to enhance the sense of engagement that is so sorely
lacking in America. The armed tension adds to this as well
as even minute, routine, or degrading tasks take on a greater
significance as part of the defense struggle. Also, in a
newly developing nation one is less apt to meet too high a
level of ego extensions, facades, manipulative advertising,
and the like.

The third aspect is the desire for dependence, the
desire to share with others the responsibility for the
control of some of one's impulses and the direction of one's
life. By definition, this is what takes place in a newly
developing nation, particularly one at war. The control of
many impulses must be placed in the hands of others for the
common good. One simple example is the high level of
taxation to which Israelis have subjected themselves in order
to maintain the necessary defense footing. The direction of
one's life is apt to be taken over at any moment by the

army as a new crisis develops.

Central to all of this is Israel's ability to restore a sense of meaningful Jewish identity for many Americans. That it is a restoration and not a re-formulation is a vital point. What happens to many Americans, and what happened to Debby, is that contact with Israel provides an experience of Jewish identity as it used to be in America!

On some level this is recognized. We noted that for all their support, American Jews will not view Israel as the center of world Jewry. They will also not necessarily support Zionism with its committment to settling in Israel. On some level American Jews know that they can derive inspiration from Israel, they can re-experience a viable Jewish identity no longer possible here. But ultimately, there is no going back.

There is no going back because Israel has yet to travel many of the same paths that we in America have experienced. Yet is there any real doubt that this too will happen? If and when it does, Israel will, of course, lose much of its ability to provide even a temporary solution for the identity confusion of American Jews.

The time bomb has already started ticking. The issue of religious freedom for Jews in Israel has been raised ever since the founding of the state. It has still not been resolved. The Orthodox rabbinate rules much of Israel with a firm hand, and severe confrontation between the tradition- alists and the liberals (whose numbers are growing) has been only postponed by the continued state of war. The real time

bomb, then, is peace in the Middle East. Almost everyone
who writes about Israel realizes that much of the character
of the society is due to the war. When that ends, much
will change.

Many of these changes will involve processes similar to
what has occurred in America. When Israel is free to
devote its energies to technological and economic growth,
all the identity problems of the modern state will have to
be faced. Until that time, a slice of the past remains with
us, as a refreshing pool of water in a parched desert. Yet
the time of peace is, I hope, drawing near...

G. Orientation and Response

By this point it should be abundantly clear that to be
a liberal Jew in present-day America is no easy task. We
are, in fact, at a point of crisis, a turning point of great
magnitude. We are, in fact, losing some of our people to
the ranks of the unaffiliated, at the same time that we gain
others through intermarriage. Yet far more important than
numbers is the fact that the quality of liberal Jewish life
is sorely lacking. It lacks a sense of community with all
the comfort and affirmation that provides, and it lacks a
sense of wholeness to provide vitality.

But still there is not much reason to despair. We can
point to the Jewish historical continuum to demonstrate that
time and time again a viable Jewish identity has broken down,
only to regroup and reappear, in new and vital form. When

we look around, do we actually find reasons why this should
not be the case again, why our faith in a new and meaning-
ful Jewish formulation might be unfounded?

No, our experience seems to indicate that our faith is
well-founded. At the same time, we must honestly face a
number of difficult issues. For one thing, though we find
no real barrier to growth, we must assert that Jewish
identity in America is not likely to survive much longer
in its present form. For another, we must admit that for
many of our people, a viable and vital Jewish identity does
not exist at the present time. We must also admit that
during the current period of ideological and identity
ferment it is unlikely that any one person or group of
people will be able to snatch from the future a new identity
formulation. In other words, there is no easy way out. The
pain and the discomfort of identity confusion must be faced.

Our response to this situation of identity crisis is
crucial. The nature of that response will largely be
determined by how we see ourselves in relation to the crisis.
It will largely be determined, in a word, by our orientation.

The first element of a growthful orientation is the
affirmation of change. All things, even our pain, are
temporary, and will change.

The second element is the affirmation of knowledge. We
can indeed understand what is happening to us, and the work
you are now reading is devoted to that end. Only when we
understand can we then change things in our own way, for our
own benefit.

The third element is a committment to growth. We must
face that which is difficult if we are to have any hope of
success. We must face the difficult task of becoming that
which as yet we are not. This is certainly not the easiest
of tasks, yet there is no other way.

When we begin assembling the pieces of the puzzle we
find that the situation of Jewish identity in America is in
many ways analogous to the adolescent identity crisis. A
major aspect of the adolescent's activity, as we have seen,
revolves around the production of a period of moratorium.
During this period much experimenting goes on as a necessary
prelude to later stabilizations.

The same is presently true of the liberal Jewish
community. There is a pervasive climate of experimentation,
ranging from the most Orthodox to the most liberal. We have
also noted that such periods of experiment are uncomfortable,
painful ones. They follow on the breakdown of a childhood
identity and before the formulation of a viable adult one.
The lack of stable identity is deeply felt. At this point
individuals (and communities) are susceptible to totalistic
responses if they are too strenuously assailed by the
necessity of choice. They are likewise susceptible to the
assumption of negative identities rather than be without any
at all.

Keeping in mind that totalism is basically a response
to pain, we recall that the major criticism of Reform
temples was that they failed to provide a sense of community.
Is this sense of community with its sharing, intimacy, support,

and warmth anything other than a means of alleviating some
of the pain of being in a period of identity flux?

Here, then, is the crux of the issue. We must find a
means of dealing with the pain so that energy for growth
can be freed. Without this, most energy remains locked in
the service of defense, and there is no growth.

To produce a climate of growth American Jews must deal
with the negative overshifts that are part of their identities
as Americans. They may do this in existing settings: in
our temples and organizations and families. We must also
include a host of more informal configurations such as
study groups, clubs, chavurot, and other groupings whose style
and content we cannot, as yet, even imagine.

We must first of all deal with the issue of size.
Feelings of impotence in the face of a mass society carry
over into Jewish settings. Slater's term for this issue was
"engagement." People feel powerless to change all of
American culture, all at once. The same thing applies to
Judaism. We must carve out smaller, more intimate enclaves
in which people can work, in which they can come to grips with
important issues.

A necessary counterpart to smaller size is increased
involvement. A setting that merely involves a fraction of
the intellect is no longer sufficient. Our growth climates
must be confluent: they must involve many levels of intellect
and emotion. Perhaps the best way to produce such confluence
is through the use of experiential activity.

Strangely enough, our people are correct when they say

that temples need to be larger. Small settings of high
degrees of experiential activity are apt to require great
pools of resources. A large temple can provide these
resources in terms of population, space, money, staff,
materials. We need to find ways of allowing people to make
more effective use of these resources within the scope of
the larger temple structure.

What might the nature of these small group settings be
like? Neil Keminsky, in a recent thesis, examines a number
of small group approaches and proposes a model of his own.
His proposal calls for "cells" of from ten to fifteen family
units. The cells are to be self-contained entities, each
responsible for its own activity in terms of worship, study,
and social action. There is to be opportunity for a high
degree of involvement, interaction, and concern. The use of
experiential learning techniques is strongly suggested.
Children are to be full rather than junior members.

A congregation might be created by the affiliation of a
limited number of cells. This would provide greater
resources if the hiring of a full-time rabbi were desired,
as well as allowing greater flexibility in programming. The
plan calls for the continued existence of the cells over
time, relatively intact.[122]

Further examples of the use of small group settings
are provided by the Fein report. The researchers used two
workshops, of two days each, in each of the temples they
studied. There was thus a total of four days of workshop
experience in each temple.

The workshops were based on experiential learning techniques developed in the field of humanistic social psychology. It was thought that it was far better to learn by doing than by talking about it, especially since:

> The eventual goal of the process, is, of course, to help people move from what it is they are to what it is they would like to become.[123]

The particular exercises that were developed and used were "intended to help people in the tasks of self-assessment and goal-setting." The committee felt that the best place to begin was with the individual rather than with the institution.[124] We heartily agree.

The concern was with producing a climate of hope and growth, and a collaborative, experiential setting was deemed most appropriate for facilitating this end:

> If a climate of genuine hope is to be generated, it is more likely to grow in an environment which supports the person, especially in his tentative early gropings, than in an adversary climate. Such a supportive environment is encouraged by the shared effort to explore the person's Jewish past, to share in a Jewish present, and to develop together hopes and plans for the future...[125]

The workshop design was "enthusiastically endorsed" by the "large majority (c. 94%)" of the participants. This led the research committee to conclude that:

> ...the chief lesson of the workshops lies in the demonstration that a constituency of support for intensive Jewish experience does exist.[126]

What was not mentioned in the report is that small groups are an extremely powerful lever for change. Indeed,

this point is at the base of much of the theory on which
experiential techniques in small group settings is based.

We have previously encountered the idea of "temporary
systems" as the industrial counterpart to this idea of the
use of small groups. As a mode of general operation it is
already replacing bureaucratic functioning in many areas:

> Adaptive, problem-solving, temporary
> systems of diverse specialists, linked to-
> gether by coordinating and task-evaluating
> executive specialists in an organic flux -
> this is the organization form that will
> gradually replace bureaucracy as we know it.[127]

We would adapt this notion of temporary systems to the
temple setting, to supplement both ongoing small groups such
as cells, as well as periodic, short-term activities such as
workshops. In terms of duration, temporary systems would
fall somewhere in the middle. Such a group would develop
out of organic needs within the environment. Its length of
life is defined either in terms of some block of time, or in
terms of "until what we are working on is completed." The
large temple or organization may then maintain its existence
both as an on-going institution and as the "pool" of people
and resources from which temporary systems emerge, live, live,
work, and die.

When a group disbands, its members once again return
to the pool, to form new groups as the need for them arises,
and then to disband, and re-form again, in a continuing re-
cycling process.[128]

Although industry is currently using temporary systems
in highly task-centered settings, our primary interest here

is in far more "person-centered" ones. Some possible
examples follow:

1) Simple support group - A number of people who are
feeling a lack of communal warmth and support might come
together, perhaps in whole family units. The attempt
would be to develop a small community, derive both emotional
and cognitive benefit therefrom, and then move on to other
things. After all, the feeling of communal support need not
be an all the time thing.

2) Health crisis group - In any large temple setting
there are often a number of families with one member
seriously ill. These families could come together, either
alone or with the rabbi or other professional, for the
specific purpose of aiding each other in dealing with the
health crisis.

3) Family crisis group - Families in crisis have much
to offer each other in dealing with a wide range of problems,
from marital difficulties to a runaway child. Such a group
might provide necessary support for the further step of
seeking longer term help from other professional sources.

4) Jewish identity group - Such a group might seek to
explore issues of Jewish identity through the use of the
exercises in Part II of the Fein report, or in a more un-
structured manner. As members returned to the general popu-
lation, their learnings would in some sense spread throughout
the temple membership.

5) Planning and task groups - The gains of the use of
an experiential small group setting for task and planning

activity have previously been discussed. A group such as
this would make use of what the top industries have found a
valuable tool. Tasks could range from work on a building
fund to evaluation of the religious school. The task-
oriented nature of the group's life cuts down on the develop-
ment of power elites and aids in maximal participation in
temple governence.

6) Generational and interest groupings - Groups with
a wide variety of goals can be set up based on all partici-
pants being male, female, young, old, married, single, etc.

7) Cross groupings - Such groups are particularly
effective for dealing with inter-group issues. Their use
in dealing with racial issues is a striking example.

The list of possibilities is relatively endless. But
all such groups have in common a smallness of size, a high
level of interaction, an experiential climate, and a
visible life-span. Along with whatever productivity emerges
from them, they help deal with the pain of identity flux
through their very structure.

Such groups can answer many of our most pressing needs,
not by providing answers to the difficult issues that
confront us, but rather by providing a climate in which
there is a good possibility that such answers can begin to
develop. They have the added advantage of starting from
where people really are rather than imposing a starting
point from without. It has further been the experience of
those who have used such techniques that they work.

H. Conclusion

We have seen that American Jewry is at a difficult transition point. Previous identity systems that sustained us need to be replaced with new ones, yet these new systems are not yet in evidence. We would hope to use works such as this to provide some measure of understanding of our present situation. It is my firm conviction that only such knowledge and clarity will enable us to say: this is where I think we ought to go, and have a decent chance of getting there.

NOTES

1. Warren G. Bennis and Philip E. Slater, The Temporary Society (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1968), p. x.

2. Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 14.

3. Marshall Sklare, America's Jews (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 64.

4. Ibid., p. 62.

5. Toffler, op. cit., p. 146.

6. Sklare, op. cit., pp. 62-64.

7. Ibid., pp. 66-67.

8. Toffler, op. cit., p. 23.

9. Sklare, op. cit., p. 44.

10. Ibid., pp. 51-60.

11. Toffler, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

12. Ellis Rivkin, "The Age of Permanent Revolution," Dimensions, Fall, 1967.

13. Ibid.

14. Philip Slater, The Pursuit of Loneliness (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 103-104.

15. Bennis and Slater, op. cit., p. 5.

16. Ibid., p. 12.

17. Ibid., pp. 73-75.

18. Ibid., p. 128.

19. Ibid., p. 20.

20. Ibid., pp. 1-19.

21. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

22. Ibid., p. 20.

23. Ibid., p. 24.

24. Ibid., p. 31.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

26. Ellis Rivkin, *The Shaping of Jewish History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 237, 246.

27. Bennis and Slater, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

29. Slater, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

31. Toffler, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

32. Bennis and Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

33. Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 13-14.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

35. Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

44. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968), pp. 35-36.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

46. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1950), p. 285.

47. Bennis and Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

48. Erikson, *Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

49. Erikson, *Childhood*, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Eriksen, _Identity_, _op. cit._, p. 34.

52. _Ibid._.

53. Eriksen, _Childhood_, _op. cit._, p. 295.

54. _Ibid._, p. 300.

55. _Ibid._, p. 305.

56. _Ibid._, p. 292.

57. _Ibid._, p. 294.

58. Eriksen, _Identity_, _op. cit._, p. 22.

59. _Ibid._, p. 9.

60. _Ibid._, p. 46.

61. _Ibid._, p. 49.

62. Reich, _op. cit._, p. 14.

63. Eriksen, _Childhood_, _op. cit._, p. 261.

64. Eriksen, _Identity_, _op. cit._, p. 133.

65. _Ibid._, pp. 194-195.

66. _Ibid._, p. 21.

67. _Ibid._, p. 22.

68. _Ibid._, p. 41.

69. _Ibid._, p. 81.

70. _Ibid._, pp. 80-81.

71. Eriksen, _Childhood_, _op. cit._, pp. 261-263.

72. Eriksen, _Identity_, _op. cit._, p. 27.

73. _Ibid._, pp. 194-195.

74. _Ibid._, p. 128.

75. _Ibid._, p. 156.

76. _Ibid._, p. 132.

77. _Ibid._, p. 176.

78. Eriksen, _Childhood_, _op. cit._, p. 261.

79. Eriksen, _Identity_, _op_. _cit_., p. 83.

80. _Ibid_., p. 105.

81. _Ibid_., p. 83.

82. _Ibid_., pp. 105-106.

83. _Ibid_., p. 106.

84. Alvin J. Reines, _Elements in a Philosophy of Reform Judaism_ (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1968-69), p. 2.

85. _Ibid_.

86. Eriksen, _Identity_, _op_. _cit_., p. 40.

87. _Ibid_., p. 83.

88. Bennis and Slater, _op_. _cit_., pp. 25-27.

89. Mark Zborewski and Elizabeth Herzog, _Life is With People_ (New York: Scheeken Books, 1952), pp. 72-73.

90. Bennis and Slater, _op_. _cit_., p. 26.

91. Quoted by Eriksen in _Identity_, _op_. _cit_., pp. 20-21.

92. Max Weber, _The Sociology of Religion_ (Bosten: Beacon Press, 1922), p. 109.

93. _Ibid_., pp. 110-111.

94. Rivkin, _Shaping_, _op_. _cit_., p. 197.

95. Sklare, _op_. _cit_., pp. 98-99.

96. _Ibid_., p. 5.

97. _Ibid_., p. 66.

98. _Ibid_., p. 26.

99. _Ibid_., p. 73.

100. _Ibid_., p. 99.

101. _Ibid_., pp. 160-161.

102. _Ibid_., p. 113.

103. Leonard J. Fein, et al, _Reform is a Verb_ (New York: Long Range Planning Committee of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1972), pp. 9-10.

104. _Ibid._, pp. 140-141.

105. _Ibid._, p. 148.

106. _Ibid._, p. 78.

107. _Ibid._, p. x.

108. _Ibid._, p. 78.

109. Theodore I. Lenn and Associates, _Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism_ (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1972), p. 395.

110. _Ibid._, p. 396.

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112. _Ibid._, pp. 392, 394.

113. Fein, _op. cit._, pp. 9-10.

114. _Ibid._, p. 142.

115. _Ibid._, p. 10.

116. _Ibid._, pp. 65-73.

117. Albert Vorspan, _Jewish Values and Social Crisis_ (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1968), p. 243.

118. _Ibid._, p. 244.

119. _Ibid._

120. _Ibid._, p. 245.

121. _Ibid._

122. Neil Kominsky, _Cellular Judaism: Blueprint for An Underground Synagogue_ (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1970), pp. 37-53.

123. Fein, Part II, _op. cit._, p. 10.

124. _Ibid._, p. 3.

125. _Ibid._

126. _Ibid._, p. 6.

127. Bennis and Slater, _op. cit._, p. 74.

128. My most immediate source for this idea of the recycling peel is Rabbi Stephen Robbins, Hillel Director at the University of Cincinnati.

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