# Changing World, Changing Judaism: What's Next for Organized Jewish Life in America


Jessica Yve Gross

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
Adar, 5772 • February, 2012

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for rabbinic ordination.

*For the days of My people shall be as long as the days of a tree, My chosen ones shall outlive the work of their hands.*

*- Isaiah 65:22*

# *For my two grandmothers: Flo and Rose*

*One in this world and one in the world to come*

*A woman of valor, seek her out; she is to be valued above rubies.*
*She opens her hand to those in need and extends her help to the poor.*
*Adorned with strength and dignity, she faces the future cheerfully.*
*Her speech is wise; the law of kindness is on her lips.*
*Those who love her rise up with praise and call her blessed.*
*"Many have done well, but you surpass them all."*
*Charm is deceptive and beauty short-lived, but a woman loyal to God has truly earned praise.*
*Honor her for all of her offerings; her life proclaims her praise.*

Proverbs 31

# Table of Contents:

# Give Thanks:

*How can a person of flesh and blood follow God? ... God, from the very beginning of creation, was occupied before all else with planting, as it is written, "And first of all God planted a Garden in Eden [Genesis 2:8] Therefore ... occupy yourselves first and foremost with planting.*
(*Leviticus Rabbah* 25:3)

This thesis is the final harvest of one season as I prepare to sow seeds for the next. The project a culmination of six long and fruitful years at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. My teachers and mentors have challenged and supported me every step of the way and for that I am forever grateful. These wise sages have encouraged me to dig deep, to plant seeds and to tend to them as they grow until they reach maturity and produce fruits. I especially want to acknowledge my childhood rabbi, Amy Schwartzman. Her guidance continues to nurture me along this bountiful journey.

In regards to this particular project I wish to thank numerous people. First and foremost, Dr. Steven Windmueller who has been a mentor throughout my time at HUC-JIR and served as my advisor for this thesis. He has worked diligently to provide me with information and helped me to shape ideas so that I can make a valuable contribution to the dialogue on issues facing American Judaism as it relates to the individual and community today. His wife, Michelle has also contributed her love and support, not only during this project but throughout my time in Los Angeles. Rabbi Richard Levy has been my rabbi. Without his wisdom and guidance I would not be prepared to serve the Jewish people. He has helped me to remain true to myself and encouraged me to engage in my relationship with God every step of the way. Dr. Leah Hochman has been a mentor and a friend. She has challenged me academically and always pushed me in the direction of excellence. Rabbi Stephanie Kolin has sacredly agitated me and has helped to strengthen me as a builder of relationships and community. Professor Jeremy Caplan has offered me encouragement as both a teacher and a friend, reminding me to bless up when the work is tough and the days long.

I call Rabbi Dan Medwin my "creativity *chevruta.*" When we met at age 14 I could not have guessed the tremendous impact our creative ruminations would have on my journey. I stand in awe and anticipation when I imagine the work we will do together throughout our careers. Jakir Manela and the Kayam Farm family have provided the fertile fields in which nothing is too big to imagine and no task impossible to accomplish.

Numerous people shared their time and thoughts with me as they relate to the topic of this paper. They include Rabbi Jonathan Stein, Dale Glasser, Rabbi Elliott Dorff, Erica Katske, Ruby Cymrot-Wu, Morris Panitz, Bruce Philips, Joel Gereboff, Rabbi Ruth Sohn, Rabbi Ken Chasan, Shawn Landres, Ronnie Conn, Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller, Rabbi Noa Kushner, Rabbi Camille Angel, Sue Markowitz, Ben Greenwald, Jordan Zukerberg,

Jackie Gambone, Beth Markowitz, Julie Balotin, Mark Dressin, Sheryl Title, Maura and Ari Feingold, Jesse Pugach, Liza Kaplansky, Joanna Kent Katz, Rabbi Lydia Bloom Medwin, Todd Silverman, Rabbi Joel Nickerson and Rabbi Joshua Ladon along with each of the talented women I will be ordained with this May. Their thoughts bring the data to life and represent but a fraction of the team needed to do the work ahead of us.

My family, inherited and chosen, is the inspiration and support for all that I do. My uncle, Michael, helped me to organize my research into the early forms of a paper. My father, Mark, lent his critical eye and open heart to the paper as it neared completion. I was blessed to share the thesis process with his partner, Billy, whose MFA thesis process encouraged my creativity and inspired many thoughts. My mom, Terry, and my sister, Lindsey, always give me the gift of loving support and understanding. This is true of my *chevrei;* a most spectacular forest made of diverse species with new saplings born each day. I am blessed by the grove in which I grow.

This paper comes to completion not just due to the wisdom and support from people but from the many places in which I worked on it. For that I wish to acknowledge the power of space – Central Coffee, Coffee Bazaar, the BJE library at the Jewish Community High School of the Bay and the HUC library, Southwest and US Airways, LAX, SFO, BWI, NWK, Kayam Farm, 537 Central and Milly's.

Finally, I wish to honor the memory of two beloved women who died during the span of this project. Debbie Friedman gave the gift of music to the Jewish people and to me personally. She remains a model of a Jew committed to creativity and innovation rooted in Torah. And, my grandmother, Rose, who reunited with my grandfather in the world to come almost 73 years to the date they met in this world. Of all the places I carried my books in order to work on this paper, I most treasure the week spent in Florida and the gift of being the last family member to sit by her side.

All of this and more nourish the soil that gives life to the pages ahead. When we plant seeds and create we do so in the image of God. Every day I offer thanks for the gift of life and the freedom to choose a path filled with bounty and abundance. May that blessing continue to grow over the years, with roots firmly planted in the ground and branches constantly reaching towards the heavens. *Cen yehi ratzon.*

## Ode to Trees:

The tree is a sustaining metaphor in Judaism. A tree stands at the center in the Garden of Eden, perhaps the first metaphor authored by Adam and Eve. The Torah, referred to as a tree of life; it's teaching an illumination of meaning and happiness. The first Psalm reads that the happiness of the individual is likened to "a tree planted besides the streams of water, which yields fruit in its season, whose foliage never fades and whatever it produces thrives."[1] Isaiah 11:1 -10 imagines redemption will grow as a new shoot out of an old stump; a time still to come that will give birth to the wisdom, truth and reverence we have not yet realized.

Trees thrive as individuals and in community. The Redwood tree, which is part of the Sequoia family, is the oldest and tallest in North America. While each one is awe inspiring on its own they exist because they stand in groves nourished by neighboring organisms in order to maintain a healthy ecosystem. The 400-year-old Parson's tree that stands in Armstrong Woods in Guerneville, California is a stunning example. Its neighbors and community feed the beauty and longevity and support the tree to pillar into the heavens.

A tree's health depends on its ability to weather internal and external circumstances. Trees grow not only in groves, but also in families and generations. Four hundred year old elders reach high into the sky, while as many as 5 or 6 adolescent trees can be found surrounding it. Still another generation of saplings, barely rooted, grows just outside the circle of the adolescent generation, blending in with the ferns and mosses that stick low to the ground of a Redwood forest.

[1] Psalm 1:3, JPS translation

The elder tree protects the younger generation and ironically itself by preventing them from taking over their role of tallest tree in the forest. However, at the moment that the eldest tree falls, naturally or not, this next generation shoots up and grows into its new role and sequentially, the youngest generation starts to grow and new saplings are born.

Until this generational shift takes place, the various generations of trees occupy their place in this chain. When this shift takes place, they all move with ease into their new roles, new shapes and new status in the forest. This process takes place internally unless external factors come into play, disrupting this natural process. Trees are cut down for homes, heat and development ignorant of or lacking care for, the effect on the entire system and risk of extinction. The effect on weather patterns. The effect on health in the forest and out of it. The effect on the tree, the individual, the grove, the community. One change in the system with profound affects on the whole.

The health of these trees and their forests is analogous to Judaism and Jewish life. Just as these forests stand at a crossroads in their own sustenance and viability, so too, does Jewish life and identity in 21st century America. The health of the ecosystem and external challenges raise questions about resiliency and adaptability while aiming for rootedness and long life for both the tree and the American Jew in the world today.

## **Introduction:**

At the Union for Reform Judaism Biennial held in Washington, DC in December 2011, incoming URJ President, Rabbi Richard Jacobs addressed nearly 6,000 attendees. Jacobs said, “We are poised at one of the most critical and dramatic crossroads in all of Jewish history. If we stay put and leave things as they are we will have failed the test of

Jewish leadership." He followed by committing the Reform movement and its leadership to "move forward with strength, with creativity with innovation and commitment."[2]

The 21st century introduces an era that challenges basic assumptions upon which American religious life has previously been organized. Changing trends in demographics, how people organize themselves and build community get to the very heart of the foundations upon which most membership-based organizations are built. There is no membership-based organization, especially in the landscape of American religion that is exempt from the questions. How do we retain members? How can we seek out new members? What makes us compelling and necessary? Do the membership models from the past remain our best options for growing viable institutions today?

Questions of membership in American Jewish institutions require seasoned and new leadership. We need professionals and volunteers willing to ask questions about what Judaism means in today's world. What defines individual and community in the 21st century? Are we willing to experiment with various methods that seek to strengthen the relationship between the two? All of this must be considered in a milieu where what works today will need updating or reimagining in order to encounter the horizon of tomorrow.

Jewish tradition contains an arsenal of wisdom. Ideas that can inform the conversation, that require the creativity and innovation Jacobs spoke about as it relates to the private and public stages of Jewish life will be a priority. The grace with which today's leadership and institutions grapple with the wisdom of the tradition will be the offshoots from which new realities of organized Jewish life in America will spring forth.

2. http://urj.org/biennial11/webcast/sunday/

This paper considers what we already know about changing trends in American culture, its effects on religious identity formation and implications for community-based organizations that depend on a strong member base in order to thrive. Contained within is a grove of material to build this thesis. Multiple research methods, including community studies, popular and scholarly literature, traditional Jewish texts, focus groups, interviews, formal and informal conversations about the value of Jewish tradition and Jewish community in 21st century America all inform the ideas that follow. The final component of this paper outlines suggestions and proposals to consider when making decisions optimistically about how to engage Jews amidst the backdrop of 21st century American values and culture.

This paper is a summation of a year of formal research and attempts to answer the burning questions that have motivated my Jewish journey from as long as I can remember: What is special about Judaism and why should I care? It is not finished in that it is a fraction of the data available. It is a primer for those wishing to consider the issues. However, the conclusions and suggestions offered reflect the research and content relevant to this work.

Additionally, I opted to focus on two geographic areas - Baltimore, Maryland and San Francisco, California. It is my belief that my "Tale of Two Cities" will illustrate the areas in which general conclusions might apply universally and where context and situation lead to different paths forward. No single solution will work in all places and close examination of contributing factors can only offer crucial insights to the topic.

Finally, my rabbinic thesis seeks to bring together a host of information presented in the midst of transition rather than with conclusion. The suggestions and proposals

offered in the final sections of the paper are based on current happenings and findings relevant to community life, identity formation and the American Jewish community. These suggestions grow out of what is currently taking place around us. Hopefully they will help us imagine the possibilities of what can happen if we continue cultivating new possibilities for American Jewish life today.

## Rooted in Text and Tradition

The story of the Jewish people is filled with dramatic tension. The tradition and its relationship to the greater world and the ideas and values introduced often presents paradox. Every generation is challenged to understand how these ideas and values remain resonant and relevant. The test of each generation is to strike a balance between change and commitment in order for Judaism to remain important to its adherents. This commitment helps to ensure the essence of this process results in a product that remains inherently Jewish.

This paper will explore the tensions that emerge for the progressive American Jew and how that affects one's Jewish identity formation. Attention will be paid to the story of American society and culture since World War II and the impact on attitudes towards belonging and membership to an organized community. The individual experience is important. In order to grapple with the growing disconnect between the number of people who identify as spiritually or religiously inclined but resist formal affiliation within Jewish community must be addressed.

The topics of individual feelings of belonging and issues of membership in organized Jewish life are priority. We are at a juncture when every organization

must ask how to be both relevant in what it provides and how to engage people. The story of the 21st century American Jew mirrors the story of the 21st century American.

The United States is home to a society of people committed to individualism, first and foremost. Religious affiliation and civic engagement are declining. Traditional norms that once went unchallenged have become the source of skepticism in the span of recent generations. The result is a new understanding of the relationship between individual and community. New ideas for how one conceives of community and the opportunities they provide individuals to connect with something beyond one's self are today's new focus.

Any organization that relies on participants feeling intimately connected to their cause and their community must consider these rapid changes in society. If institutional life is to remain relevant and healthy in order to meet the needs of its constituency, it must understand the existing tensions through which members must navigate. Providing compelling reasons for why their organization is worthy of support in a market where choice is abundant is of paramount importance for survival.

This paper addresses five components. First, a discussion on how Jewish text and key moments in Jewish narrative and history can mold our experiences. Second, I consider the changes in American culture and society since World War II and how those changes impacted the American Jews' decisions on time, energy and money. This summary will illustrate the tensions that emerged in the individual and the community.

The third component will consider the different ways these tensions take shape based on the places where Jews live today. Using Baltimore, Maryland and San Francisco, California as examples, I will explore the demographics and personal anecdotes that help to show the tensions individual Jews and Jewish communities currently face. The final section will include three proposals for alternative models for organized Jewish life. These recommendations seek to respond to tensions that emerge between individual and community, from competing values and technological advances that demand new foundational norms.

This topic is overwhelming. One academic paper cannot address all of the issues affecting belonging and membership. Therefore, my intention is to focus on a fraction of the topic that is vital to the crossroads the American Jew stands at today. This paper does not seek to address the considerations traditional institutions such as synagogues and Jewish community centers ought to consider in order to address recent trends and shifts. Rather, this paper focuses on the 50% of the greater American Jewish community that does not currently affiliate in an ongoing structured fashion.

The synagogue will always be an important center for Jewish life but how one defines community and opportunities to engage is not tied to the synagogue. Alternative approaches and incentives must be addressed in order to allow for exploration of one's Jewish identity. We must understand the issues that Americans, specifically Jewish Americans face. We must seek new models of engagement. We must shift our thinking from disinterest to being committed. We begin by grounding

ourselves in some key Jewish sources relevant to the discussion of individual and community and the tensions we currently face.

## We Know "It Takes a Village" But What Does That Mean?

There is an inexhaustible number of sources in Jewish tradition that provide insight on the relationship between individual and community and how we are to understand our role in the unfolding story of the Jewish people. In Pirkei Avot 2:4, Rabbi Hillel says:

"Do not separate yourself from the community. Do not believe in yourself until the day you die. Do not judge another until you have stood in his place. Do not say something that is not readily understood in the belief that it will ultimately be understood. And do not say 'when I free myself of my concerns, I will study,' for perhaps you will never free yourself."

The first line suggests something we already know; a person's relationship with his community is of primary importance within the Jewish scope. The wisdom to follow cautions an individual that he should not stand too firmly on personal principle and that he should be careful in passing judgment. The text also suggests that we should be careful to assume that others will understand our intention without explanation that could help avoid harmful misinterpretation. Finally, the text suggests that we cannot assume there will be time to learn the ways and ideas of tradition. If we are serious about the role that Torah and Jewish tradition plays in our lives we will have to make time for it within the challenges of today's schedules.

If we agree that "it takes a village" we can look to Jewish tradition to provide specific suggestions inform how we might understand the role of the individual as he fits into the communal whole. The two texts to follow give light to questions

about the relationship between the individual and his community, the role of God and the purpose of one's life as it relates to the self, the community and the Divine.

## What The Rabbis Can Teach Us About Membership, Building Walls and the Faith in God

Chapter 1, Mishnah 5 of Tractate Baba Batra reads:

"We compel him to build a gatehouse and a door to the courtyard. R. Shimon b. Gamliel says, not every courtyard needs a gatehouse. We compel him to build a wall, double doors, and a bolt for the city. R Shimon b. Gamliel says, not every city needs a wall. How long must a person be in a city to be considered as the residents of the city? Twelve months. If he bought a residence there, he is immediately considered as the residents of the city."

In the following paragraphs, we will look at the Mishnah and some of the Talmudic discussions that emerge from the statement above. Pinchas Kehati comments that, "the mishnah teaches us that all the joint owners of a courtyard must contribute towards the essential expenses of the courtyard, so to must the residents of the city bear a burden of its essential expenditures."[3] This text invites a closer look at the different ways that individuals become responsible to one another. Furthermore, it is one definition of the relationship between the individual and the community and the relationship between those who dwell within the walls of a space and those outside the walls.

In Tractate Baba Batra of the Babylonian Talmud, the rabbis discuss one definition for membership to the community. There is a conversation about who is responsible for helping to build the walls of the city. They acknowledge someone as a member of the community after he has resided in the town for twelve months;

[3] Pinhas Kehati, *Mishnah Seder Nezikin Vol. 2* (Jerusalem: Maor Wallach Press, 1994), 8.

anytime less than that makes him only an inhabitant of the town.[4] The difference in status is significant in determining both a person's responsibilities and the benefit he can derive from communal resources.

The statement, made in Baba Batra 1, Mishnah 5 is crucial as commitment of time and finances contribute to the rabbis' definition of membership within the community. Someone who has lived in the town for less than twelve months is not responsible to help with all the community's financial needs, but he is expected to increase his contribution as time moves closer to the twelve month mark.

The definition is meant to clarify when it comes to expectations of shared responsibility. The rabbis are concerned with what constitutes membership and raise a previously cited mishnah that reads:

"[A man must reside in a town] thirty days to become liable for contributing to the soup kitchen, three months for the charity box, six months for the clothing fund, nine months for the burial fund and twelve months for contributing to the repair of the town walls."[5]

This is a definition of who is and who is not a member.

We encounter a dynamic understanding of what it means to be a community member and the increasing expectation of one's obligation as it develops over time. This is not as simple as one day you are not a member, the next day you are. Rather, it is a process of gaining responsibility and access as time passes.

Another insight to learn from this text is the responsibility on both the individual and the community. An individual is not expected to contribute to all aspects of the community at once. We can infer that this is because the shorter

[4] Baba Batra 8a, Talmud Bavli
[5] Baba Batra Mishnah Chapter 1, Mishnah 5

period of time that a person lives in a community, the less likely they might be to take advantage of every community resource available. A correlation exists between when a person is expected to contribute early on and when he will benefit from the variety of resources available. Rashi notes that these are larger expenses and therefore a newer inhabitant of the community need not contribute from the start.[6]

A person becomes a full member of the community after twelve months time, marked by contributions that pay for repair of the city walls. Any inhabitant of the city, full member or not, has responsibilities to contribute to the community. We learn from this that membership is not black and white. We learn that an individual's responsibility changes over the course of time.

If we drill down into the discussion about obligation, we encounter another value and the rabbis understanding of who is and who is not responsible for maintaining the repair of the city walls. The text reads, "R. Assi further said in the name of R. Johanan: All are required to contribute to the repair of the walls, including orphans, but not the rabbis, because the rabbis do not require protection."[7] One wonders why the orphans are responsible and the rabbis are not.

In Jewish texts, the orphan is one member of the community that comes to symbolize those most in need of communal protection. Without parents, an orphan is not likely to have access to the resources needed to provide for him. This includes land inheritance, a mentor to ensure he finds someone to marry and dealing with insecurity of one's heritage. Without a parent, their wellbeing depends on their

[6] Rashi notes on Baba Batra
[7] Baba Batra 8a

community. In this text, the orphan signals a highly vulnerable demographic, most in need of protection.

On the other hand, we have the rabbis who enjoy not only physical protection from the services they provide but also spiritual protection. Here we see the interplay between the values that emerge from one's dealings in this world and those that emerge from a relationship with God. This combination shaped one's experience and matriculation into the world. The rabbis do not need to contribute to the building of the city's physical protection from evil and harm because they are protected more wholly as a result of faith in God.

Faith and relationship with God play a significant role in this text. According to the rabbis, "The general principle is that even orphans have to contribute for any public service from which they derive benefit."[8] The expectation is clear. Those who stand to benefit from community resources are responsible to make contributions to the community funds. Despite the fact that the rabbis may live within the city walls, their logic leads them to conclude that they do not derive benefit from the protection the walls provide because they are protected by a higher source.

There is a disconnect between those who say they believe in God and those who participate as formal members in Jewish community. The text suggests that the protection offered to those who service God. A creative read of this text leads one to conclude that a meaningful relationship to God does not necessarily have to occur within enclosed walls.

---

[8] Baba Batra 8a

This same text also sets up a difficult distinction between members of the community and what is expected of them. The rabbis appear let off the hook when it comes to contributing to the most expensive aspects of communal life. Those most likely to face struggle are still expected to contribute in order to benefit from the community's resources.

Two things are clear: there is a relationship between the individual and the community. The individual becomes a community member over time. A relationship with God offers a different and important protection that does not depend on physical walls.

The rabbis are also concerned with the barriers created by the doors built for a new home and who can and cannot access the inside. The Gemara raises questions about access by arguing away a series of scenarios:

"[To the building of a porter's lodge.] This would seem to show that a porter's lodge is an improvement: yet how can this be, seeing that there was a certain pious man with whom Elijah used to converse until he made a porter's lodge, after which he did not converse with him any more. There is no contradiction, in the one case we supposed the lodge to be inside [the courtyard], in the other outside. Or if you like I can say that in both cases we supposed the lodge to be outside, and still here is no difficulty, because in the once case there is a door and in the other there is no door. Or again we may supposed that in both cases there is a door, and sill there is no difficulty, because in the one case there is a latch and the other there is no latch. Or again I may say that in both cases there is a latch and still there is no difficulty, because in the once case the latch is inside and in the other outside."[9]

The rabbis want to explain why building a home, which one would intuit to be an improvement, would result in the severed relationship between the pious man and Elijah the prophet.

[9] Baba Batra 7b

The main issue is about accessibility. A commentary in the Soncino translation of the Babylonian Talmud, suggests that, "the lodge prevented the cries of the poor men from being heard within the courtyard."[10] The rabbis are concerned with the values suggested by the location of the lodge, the presence of a door, if the door has a latch and if so who has access to the key.

The rabbis take multiple steps to argue away the barriers presented by the building and arrive at the final question of who controls locking and unlocking the door. The Soncino commentary speaks to the significance of the latch: "If the latch is inside the poor man cannot open the door with it, and so cannot make his voice heard."[11]

Elijah is most commonly known as the prophet who champions for the poor. The break in the relationship between the pious man and the prophet suggests that the building of the home presented a barrier that prevented the poor from being heard or seen by the man who constructed it. We can infer that this barrier was not desirable to Elijah because it would create undesirable distance between the poor and the privileged.

Again, this text speaks of the relationship to the poor and the privileged members of a community. We can extend this to provide insights on the role that barriers play in creating silos within a community and how these obstructions might discourage potential members. This paper will look at contemporary barriers and their implications on participation in organized Jewish life. The values that the rabbis have for a community in which all of the community has access to one

[10] Epstein, 30
[11] Epstein, 30

another cannot be overlooked. It provides for interpretation of how we consider barriers that divide the population, ultimately leading to a fractured sense of belonging and inaccessibility.

## What the Hasidim Can Teach Us About An Individual's Relationship to Her Community and God According to Martin Buber

In The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism, Martin Buber argues that,

"conflict-situations between [one's self] and others are nothing but the effects of conflict-situations in his own soul…[A person] should try to overcome this inner conflict, so that afterwards he may go out to his fellow-men and enter into new, transformed relationships with them."[12]

Buber argues, "The origin of all conflict between me and my fellow-men is that I do not say what I mean, and that I do not do what I say."[13] Buber suggests that internal and external conflict is intimately related and that the origin of all conflict is a failure to align one's thoughts, speech and actions.

Martin Buber recognized the isolating experience of the individual search for meaning. He writes that, "a divine spark lives in every thing and every being, but each such spark is enclosed by an isolating shell."[14] The purpose of a person's life, according to Buber, is the ongoing effort to reunite the divine spark inside of each individual with God. One's ability to do this depends on the following process: "he must find his own self, not the trivial ego of the egotistic individual, but the deeper self of the person living in relationship to the world."[15] Thus, a three-way

---

[12] Martin Buber, *The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism.* (New York: The Citadel Press, 2006), 24.
[13] ibid, 25
[14] Buber, 4
[15] Buber, 26

relationship is required – the relationship an individual has with himself, the one he has with others and the one he cultivates with God.

Such a task can seem difficult for the person who desires to emerge from the narrow places of isolation and arrive in meaningful relationship with others and with the Divine. The fear that one does not know the particular path to travel in order to do this can be great. Through the use of Hasidic story, Buber suggests that there is not one particular way, but many ways for a person to fulfill his purpose.

The goal of an individual should not be to mimic the path of others. Buber writes:

"The great and holy deeds done by others are examples for us, since they show, in a concrete manner, what greatness and holiness is, but they are not models that we should copy. However small our achievements may be in comparison with those of our forefathers, they have their real value in that we bring them about in our own way and by our own efforts."[16]

He does not suggest that there is only one way for an individual to go on a path that will lead him into relationship with God, but he cites R. Eliezer in order to suggest that our task is, "not [to] be occupied with yourself but with the world."[17]

It is not natural, suggests Buber, to orient one's self to reach beyond the ego and to strive for something greater. And yet, Buber suggests that the deep, internal struggles a person faces in his life is because of the misguided belief that in caring for one's self he will arrive at real meaning and fulfillment. For Buber, the person who is mistaken to believe that his situation is hopeless and unchangeable must realize that change is possible. In fact, such change is necessary because "only with

[16] Buber, 11
[17] Buber, 29

a united soul will be able [to do the work of building relationship so] that it becomes not a patchwork but, work all of a piece."[18]

Before moving on, let us unpack some of what we have learned to this point. Martin Buber suggests that the purpose of an individual is to navigate through his own conflict, that which arises from the failure to match one's thoughts, speech and actions, in order that he can enter into meaningful relationship with others, and thus with God. He suggests that in order to do this, a person must embark on a journey that does not seek to satisfy the individual ego and self, alone but considers one's purpose in the context of a greater whole.

Change can be difficult and a person who cannot imagine the possibilities of change can become dismayed and confused. This feeling can result in despair and lead one to feel that real change is impossible and enduring conflict is inevitable. A fear of the inability to do the work to unite one's soul with God, and a sense of wholeness, will result in a fractured existence; internally and externally.

This may seem depressing but Buber suggests that the recognition of one's ability to overcome this fate is the start of a journey towards transformation of the self and, by extension, the world.[19] He encourages a person to overcome the tendency to compare himself to others and to realize that such an outlook perpetuates the tendency to see the self, and not the world, as the ends to which he aspires. He channels Rabbi Bunam, a Hasidic teacher, who says the task of a person is three-fold: "not to look furtively outside yourselves, not to look furtively into

[18] Buber, 20
[19] Buber, 29

others, and not to aim at yourselves."[20] Here, we see a suggestion for where we are to aim our focus – not so far outside ourselves that we fail to see the role we play in our lives, not in competition with others and not with our own personal gain as the end.

For Buber, it is the ability to channel one's focus and move in a direction of unification that leads to transformation. We will explore the tension between the increasing isolation of individuals and the tendency to bear the weight of the world alone. Such is a product of a society that places tremendous value on the individual. But, this Jewish view that the individual's purpose is ultimately to be in relationship with others and with God, may challenge that the individual is sole priority. The text suggests this belief contributes to the individual's conflict in the physical and spiritual world.

Buber's work recognizes the individual. While the purpose of every person might be to work to remove his conflicts for the purpose of removing conflict in the greater world, he celebrates the possibility that "each one of us in his own way shall devise something new in the light of teachings and service, and do what has not yet been done."[21] This is suggested by the maggid of Zlotchov.[22] This individuality is important in any discussion on the contemporary American Jewish experience.

It is important to recall that Jewish tradition honors the individual in relation to his community. I mentioned earlier that a relationship with God is also

[20] Buber, 32.
[21] Buber, 21
[22] Buber, 12

important. The following text suggests that perhaps the best way to be in relationship with God is for an individual to be the greatest version of himself.

"Rabbi Zusya of Hanipoli was an 18th century Hasidic rabbi and a revered teacher. There is a story of a conversation he had with his students when he was old and had taken ill. He began to weep until one of his students asked, rabbi, why do you weep? Surely if anyone has assured a place in the kingdom of heaven it is you!" The rabbi turned his head towards his beloved students and began to speak softly: "If, my children, when I stand before the heavenly court, I am asked, "Zusya, why were you not a Moses?" I shall have no hesitation affirming, "I was not born a Moses." If they ask me, "Why then, were you not an Elijah?" I shall speak with confidence, "Neither am I Elijah." I weep, friends, because there is only one question I fear to be asked, "Why were you not Zusya?""[23]

This text teaches two things. First, each person has a unique role to play in the world and should not spend all his time comparing himself to others. We already learned that Buber believes this is a distraction.

Second, this text invites us to consider the role that God might have in shaping our time in the world. It is difficult for some to define clearly their belief in God. Even today a significant number of Jews affirm a relatively strong belief that God does exist. According to Rabbi Zusya, the important questions we must ask are:

- Are we living to our fullest potential?
- Are we prepared to defend our answer to a Higher power?

We should not compare ourselves to our ancestors who laid the cornerstones for Jewish history and tradition. Our primary task should be to live the fullest version of our own lives informed by Jewish values and today's circumstances. If we can anticipate this possibility when one day we might be asked, "Why were you not

[23] Buber, 13

Zusya?" Our answers are the decisions we make in our lives as reflected by the current times and our unique experience in the world.

If we take the ideas presented in Buber's Way of Man, in conjunction with Rabbi Zusya's question, are we living our life to its fullest potential? We can imagine what a balanced relationship between individual and community might look like; one that includes a space for the Divine. The conclusion of Buber's Way of Man, is as follows:

'God dwells wherever man lets him in.' This is the ultimate purpose: to let God in. But we can let him in only where we really stand, where we live, where we live a true life. If we maintain holy intercourse in the little world entrusted to us, if we help the holy spiritual substance to accomplish itself in that section of Creation in which we are living, then we are establishing, in this our place, a dwelling for the Divine presence.[24]

Buber recognizes the vastness of the task – to let God in – and sees the opportunity to do so. This is determined by the unique circumstances of a person's experience that can only take place in one individual lifetime.

**On One Foot: How These Sources Inform the Discussion to Follow**

Pirkei Avot teaches that we cannot isolate ourselves from the community. We should not judge others without the experience of standing in their shoes. And, we must make time to learn Torah. If we wait on the assumption that there will be time in the future we are likely to miss the opportunity to learn wisdom the tradition can offer today.

The Talmudic text in Tractate Baba Batra offers a definition for membership to the community. It invites the reader to consider the difference between the protection offered by physical walls and the protection that results from a

[24] Buber, 38

relationship with God. We are confronted with questions about barriers and access for different demographics of the community.

Buber presents us with a model of concentric circles in which conflict can arise and be resolved. There is a relationship between the individual, the community and God that can lead to struggle or towards wholeness. A person's sense of self can lead him towards isolation or connectedness. The direction to which one orients himself can lead him service his ego or to service God. The impact on the self, the community and the universe depends on efforts to align our thoughts, our speech and our action. This alignment has the power to reduce conflict in all three areas and ultimately to transform the entire universe.

The charges set forth by these texts are not simple. They give rise to various tensions. In order for a person to be part of the community, he must be willing to compromise some of his self-interest in order to enter into real relationship. A presence of walls and doors can provide comfort to some and exclude others. The desire to reach to something greater can require a person to make decisions differently than if he were only concerned with himself. Tension is inherent in these texts and also a driving force in the Jewish narrative.

## Tension Is Inherent in Jewish Experience

The presence of tension invites the possibility for transformation. Transformation allows for ongoing evolution. The greater the tension, the greater the intensity, the greater opportunity to transform. I have chosen to explore four crucial moments in the Jewish narrative that highlight the opportunities that can emerge when tensions run high.

## Choice

In Genesis, Chapter 2, God creates man and woman and places them in the Garden of Eden, granting permission to partake of everything except for the tree of knowledge.[25] The tension is introduced between good and evil by the statement, "the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die." Just a few passages later, Eve encounters a serpent that questions the seriousness of God's statement. The serpent approaches Eve and says, "You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine-beings who know good and bad."[26] The first statement, the one made by God, introduces the tension between good and evil. The second, by the serpent, introduces the tension between what Eve thinks she knows and what she might learn. This tests the boundaries bestowed upon her.

Eve decides to eat the forbidden fruit. According to the Torah, the course of history is changed. Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden. Their purpose, forever changed; that they should have to work tirelessly to produce food,[27] that human conflict will arise in every generation,[28] and that women should bare the pain of labor[29] because it was Eve who crossed the boundaries delineated by God.

Eve is presented with a choice. Her choice results in consequences that impact the course of humanity for all time. Eve could have listened to God's instructions but her curiosity tempted by an alternative path led her to consume the fruit and face the new reality that followed. The power of choice is optimum, the

[25] Genesis 2:15
[26] Genesis 3:4
[27] Genesis 3:17
[28] Genesis 3:15
[29] Genesis 3:16

serpent's agitation in tension with God's instructions. The tension she encountered was one between good and evil. Surely every human can speak to a situation when they are presented with a choice that plays to the tension between what someone is supposed to do and what he wants to do.

## Systems and Power

In Exodus, Chapter 5, Moshe appears before Pharaoh and requests that the people should be allowed to go out into the desert to worship God as part of a festival celebration.[30] Pharoah denies the request and, in turn, commands the taskmasters to make the work for the Israelite people more difficult. Such is the experience of the Israelites until God brings plagues upon Egypt and leads the Israelite people to the desert and to their freedom.

The next time in the narrative where the Israelites are builders is when they begin to construct the *mishkan*.[31] What happens in between is the receiving of the Ten Commandments, providing the guidelines to instruct the Israelite community how to organize itself. Before the instructions are given for how to build the *mishkan*, God instructs the Israelite people to heed the commandment to honor the seventh day as a day of rest. Building a holy site in which they will worship God does not trump the commandment that one day a week they should cease from their productivity and observe a day of rejuvenating rest.[32]

Two tensions emerge from this section of the Torah narrative. The first is the tension between Pharaoh's system of power in contrast to God's. Pharaoh's system

[30] Exodus 5:1
[31] The tabernacle in which the Israelite people worshipped God while wandering in the desert.
[32] Exodus 35:2

valued productivity in order to benefit his own power and prestige. God's system valued productivity for the sake of strengthening covenant and relationship among people and to the Divine. The former disregarded the individual experience in the process of strengthening power. The latter depended on covenant and collective contribution in order to reach the Promised Land.

A second tension emerges between productivity and rest. The Torah seems to acknowledge the tension between wanting to construct the *mishkan* and the value of Shabbat. Here, the tension between stop and go is introduced. The Torah values the construction of a beautiful and physical structure, where the Israelites can make offerings to God but simultaneously values the necessary day of rest. This breaks up the productivity but allows space for a day of complete rest, echoing the schedule in which God created the world.

In some ways, the tensions are the same. Both raise issues in regard to how time is spent. One focuses on the value of time as decided by a physical power, the other imposed by a divine power. The tension between productivity and rest are highlighted by both situations. The dominant value in each speaks to a different tension; desire verses demand, Pharaoh verses God. Here we see two conceptions for organizing society and where power lies.

The values that inform one system seek to strengthen some at the expense of others. The values that inform the other seek to strengthen the society as a whole. It should not be understated, that surely there must have been tension to navigate as the Israelites transitioned from one system to the next. The proof of this lies in the story of the Golden Calf. We now consider another time in which tension

emerges as a result of transition and the ability of a group of leaders to make sustaining change.

## Change

The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. was not the first time the conception of Jewish practice changed. It was perhaps the most dramatic. The Temple laid in ruins and with it a sacrificial system that had served as the foundation for Israelites to act out their covenant with God. Had it not been for the foresight of specific demographics in imagining alternative ways of engaging with Jewish ideas and values, it is possible that the story of the Jewish people could have ended along with this destruction.

But this was not the case. Because leaders were able to imagine an alternative system the groundwork had been laid to make a case for how Judaism was to continue without a Temple. A tension between the fear and possibility that comes with making changes to tradition emerges now.

On the one hand, the move to rabbinic Judaism created an entirely new system of leaders and redefined the relationship between the individual and the community. Many have said the altar in the Holy of Holies came to be replaced with a new altar: the kitchen table.[33] This comment points to the changing role of the individual in relationship to the community albeit mitigated by the leadership of the rabbis.

On the other hand the rabbis were devoutly committed to the values and ideas of Jewish tradition. They sought to ensure that the foundation upon which this

[33] Mary L. Zamore, *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic.* (New York: CCAR Press, 2011), 49.

new system operated was resonant with an authentic extension of previous forms of Jewish practice. Innovation would strengthen the link between generations, not sever it.

Here, the tension of significant change is introduced. The success of the rabbis is clear. The foundation that emerged for Jewish practice, most commonly known as rabbinic Judaism began. It is the system that informs Jewish practice until today. Change is one way that tensions arise. Tensions also arise from historical events that permanently change reality moving forward.

## History

The Holocaust is perhaps one of the most difficult tensions of all. If questions about God and the terms God promised as part of the covenant with the Jewish people existed prior to the Holocaust, then the mass extermination of Jews is one of Judaism's sustaining mysteries.

Every Jew was touched by the Holocaust. American Jews recall stories of perished loved ones and navigating through dangerous escapes. As Jews, the experience of the Holocaust was personal and a disaster to which American Jews continue to feel intimately affected by. As Americans, there also exists a narrative of emerging as the victors. It was the United States who led the liberation, overcoming German ruling powers and providing refuge for many remaining with nowhere to go after the atrocities of the Final Solution became known worldwide. This tension is where we begin another story; one that gives rise to the tensions American Jews engage with by being both American and Jewish. The Holocaust again brings up the

tension between freedom and captivity; pride in identity at the same time that identity is a death sentence.

There are other tensions. The tensions emerge in conflicting answers to real questions. Why be Jewish in a post-Holocaust world? Does one have an obligation to Jewish tradition because of the horrors previous generations endured? Should commitments be built on that of memory? Are there other motivations to engage Jewishly that emerge in a time when creativity and imagination is dynamic and embraced?

Within these tensions, we begin to look at the American Jewish experience since the end of World War II. What has remained the same and what has changed? How has the relationships between individual Jewish identity and his relationship to the greater Jewish community evolved? What challenges and opportunities confront us today as we consider our history in America from World War II until now?

## A Recap of Recent American History
## The 1950s: Out In Public and At Home With TV

The end of World War II allowed for American energy to shift from international focus back to life on domestic soil. In Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Robert Putnam writes, "World War II occasioned a massive outpouring of patriotism and collective solidarity."[34] He continues by saying that, "At war's end those energies were redirected to community life."[35] The investment of time, money and emotion that had been consumed by events on the world stage now able to be directed to matters at home.

[34] Putnam, 54
[35] ibid.

Jonathan Sarna writes, in American Judaism: A History:

"with the war over, the nation as a whole turned increasingly towards religion – a response, some believed, to wartime horrors and to the postwar threat from "godless" Communism. For Jews, the majority of whom had arrived in the United States prior to the rampage of National Socialism, the aftermath of World War II was an occasion for pride and patriotism; they celebrated their American identity."[36]

As mentioned previously, these Jews were also intimately and deeply connected to the pain and destruction that had occurred in Europe.

This period of time gave birth to a time of Jewish communal growth mirroring a trend in religious engagement. In part, this is due to the massive movement to the suburbs, which characterizes the decade and a half immediately following World War II. Sarna cites a statistic in a piece titled, Jews in Suburbia, which claims that "between 1945 and 1965, about a third of all American Jews left the big cities and established themselves in suburbs."[37] Another estimate suggests that, "America's suburban Jewish population more than doubled in the 1950s, with Jews suburbanizing at a rate of almost four times that of their non-Jewish neighbors."[38] The move to suburbia plays a significant role in the tensions that emerge in American society during the second half of the 20th century. These tensions include various commitments and how they compete for one's time, money and energy.

Sarna writes, "For Jews, the migration to the suburbs posed particular challenges." He says, "Outside the protective womb of the urban Jewish subculture, Judaism could no longer be absorbed, like sunshine, from the surrounding

[36] Not universally, there was also a spike in Jewish American Communism.
[37] Sarna, 282
[38] ibid.

atmosphere."[39] Prior to suburban migration, Jews, like other ethnic groups were largely concentrated in neighborhoods that reflected the ethnic and religious traditions from which the residents originally emigrated. Putnam writes:

"The American suburbs experienced their greatest growth in this time. While "suburbs have been a feature of American life since the mid-nineteenth century, driven in large measure by the revolution of transportation…after World War II widespread car ownership combined with a government subsidized road- and home-building boom accelerated movement to the suburbs, no different in kind from earlier trends, but different in degree."[40]

The center of public and private life is not only expanded but multiplied giving way to a new conception of boundaries that form the framework for where one's life would take place.

As Jews moved into the suburbs, they were met with a diverse array of options for how to participate in community life. Membership and participation in religious institutions is only one option available to the suburban American in the 1950s. The 1950s were grounded in a renewed sense of optimism and patriotism and the opportunities to develop new neighborhoods and community centers were conduits for activity and community engagement.

It should not be surprising that formal membership to multiple kinds of public institutions peaked in the 1950s. Religious participation, as Putnam notes, was closely related "with other forms of civic engagement, like voting, jury service, community projects, talking with neighbors and giving charity."[41] If religious affiliation directly correlates with civic engagement, as Putnam suggests, it should be no wonder that the 1950s is characterized by a swell in both religious

[39] ibid, 283.
[40] Putnam, 208
[41] As quoted in Putnam, 67

participation and other energies devoted to developing the flourishing suburban communities. Parent associations, fraternal clubs and other groups that occasioned social gatherings and forming community relationships serve as examples of this.

Gerald Bubis takes note of the effects of suburban migration on Jewish institutional life in a paper titled, "The Costs of Jewish Living: Revisiting Jewish Involvement and Barriers." He argues the "move of the Jews to the suburbs resulted in a burst of building great synagogues, mostly Reform and Conservative as well as JCC campuses and Jewish camps."[42] The growth and expansion the Jewish community experienced in its institutional offerings during this time will be an important factor when we consider challenges presented by limited resources facing the Jewish community today.

During this time of tremendous energy invested in public life, the introduction of new technologies into the home also molded the changing nature of the American home and community. Public participation was maximized, ironically at the same time when the television set came into the majority of American living rooms. Putnam argues that, "television watching and especially dependence on television for entertainment are closely correlated with civic disengagement."[43] Here, another tension arises, the tension between advances that provide new opportunities for personal engagement that result in the decline of civic engagement.

---

[42]Gerald B. Bubis, "The Cost of Jewish Living" Revisiting Jewish Involvement and Barriers." For The William Petschek National Jewish Family Center of the American Jewish Committee, 4.
[43] Putnam, 253

The same decade that experienced an all time high in civic engagement and public participation is also the decade, which started with "barely 10 percent of American homes [having] television sets. [By 1959, this increased to] 90 percent…the fastest diffusion of technological innovation ever recorded."[44] The introduction of the television into the American home had profound impact on how people got their news; an increasingly blurred line was drawn between news and entertainment.

The introduction of the television set into the home began a process of increased privatization and individualization that came to define American society in the 21st century. Television in the home afforded more opportunities for individuals to consume news and ideas privately.

In the 1950s while people were still actively involved in public life, the opportunity for private and public intersection was balanced. Still, tension built between the private and the public with increasing technological advance providing more options for private engagement with news and entertainment. These tensions would grew in the decades that followed and technological advance provided more mediums through which these tensions were expressed.

## 1960s and 1970s: Hippies, *Havarot* and Diversity

Still civically minded and engaged, Americans began to organize groups around common interests during the 1960s and 1970s. While in some ways similar to previous activities of engagement, the ways individuals engaged and the places in which they formed community diversified. Communities formed around the pursuit

[44] Putnam, 211

of civil rights. The Hippie movement brought together people of all characters and colors who wanted to challenge cultural norms and societal expectations wrapped up in the suburban experience. This led to two simultaneous processes. The time period gave way to more diversity and therefore more co-mingling at the same time that groups with different value systems became increasingly polarized.

Putnam and Campbell call this the polarization and pluralization in American religion in American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us. They write, "American religion [has changed] over the past half century. Perhaps the most noticeable shift is how American's have become polarized along religious lines."[45] There are more options for where individuals can participate in community. The tensions that emerge from communities with conflicting values become more polarized.

The 1960s and 1970s mark a time of increasing social unrest and frustration among various segments of the American public. The desire and romance of suburbia with the swollen patriotic pride of the 1950s could be argued as a set up to the dissonance and unrest that followed. In this, the first of "three seismic societal shocks" deeply affected the way Americans understood their role in society. In chronological order they include:

a. the sexual revolution of the 1960s[46]
b. the rise of conservative politics and the religious right in the 1970s and 1980s[47]

[45] Putnam and Campbell, 3
[46] ibid, 91
[47] ibid, 100

c. the increasing number of Americans, mostly youth, who become disaffected by religion and opt not to participate in any religious community that gains momentum in the 1990s and 2000s[48]

According to Putnam and Campbell these three moments gave way to the growing perception that religious is inherently intertwined with politics which leads to a growing disinterest among many Americans to affiliate formally with religious institutions.[49] The first of these shocks, the sexual revolution, stretched the sensitive boundary between private and public matters. This is, in part, due to generational shifts: "American attitudes toward premarital sex, for example, have been radically liberalized…because a generation with stricter beliefs was gradually replaced by a later generation with more relaxed norms."[50] The societal issues prided by younger generations are part of our story about changing trends in the culture at large and the tensions that emerge for the individual and community.

This revolution questioned possibilities. What was acceptable in the fabric of American life? Values that informed ones position on birth control, abortion and the right for a woman to choose are examples and still remain highly debated issues. These issues usually come laden with value assumptions about the beliefs held by those who stand on any side of the issue. We have come to assume the conservative position to align with the religious right and the more liberal position to be championed among the godless. Such assumptions intensify the process of polarization Putnam and Campbell discuss.

---

[48] ibid, 120
[49] Putnam and Campbell, 3
[50] Putnam and Campbell, 34

Religion and political debates intensified during the 1960s and 1970s. There was more diversity in society and more opportunities to engage relationships on less divisive ground. The Hippie movement welcomed anyone who wanted to escape religious and political institutions that branded conformity, parochialism and rigid frameworks. This movement prided individual expression, outrageous behavior and became a colorful agitator on the stage of the 1960s and 1970s cultural revolution.

One outcome is the opportunity for likeminded people, with shared interests, coming from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, to build a new community. In this milieu, a new opportunity to participate in public life and engage in one's civic responsibility could not only take place outside of the religious institution but could also bring people together to form relationships based on a shared orientation to the future.

Two insights emerge. The first is the expanded notion of where relationships are formed and where community emerges. Previously the grounds for such relationships were dictated either by a shared sense of religious tradition or by the proximity in which people lived to one another. The second is the role that denominationalism plays in expanding the religious tent.

It would be inappropriate to dismiss the role denominationalism plays in this timeline. It would also be incorrect to say that every Jewish institution and organization stood in contrast to the values and ideals prided by these movements. Some great rabbis in the story of American Judaism fought for civil rights. In 1965, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel walked "arm in arm with Martin Luther King and

other black leaders on a civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama."[51] In 1972, Sally Priesand was ordained by the Hebrew Union College as America's first female rabbi, which means the college decided to admit her some 5 ½ years earlier.[52]

An important distinction must be made. Despite the fact that some Jewish organizations made decisions to show that religious values and efforts to combat injustices based on race, sexual preference or gender need not be at odds with one another, the culture change demanded by these decisions may not have been embraced early on. Quite possibly, such environments would be uncomfortable for those who felt marginalized. The work required in order to overcome preconceived notions of what diversity was acceptable according to Jewish tradition surely created an insecure and uncertain environment for those on the margins. How one defined her community and the implication of this became amplified.

I continue to emphasize that the relationship between the individual and the community is perhaps one of the greatest sustaining tensions in Jewish tradition. In this time period, growing individualism is amplified. In Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, the authors argue that

"Americans today separate out their ideas of the self from family, religion, and work, and how they seek lifestyle enclaves to find self-expression missing from the rest of their lives…their forebears left their homes, churches, and careers in order to begin again."[53]

---

[51] Sarna, 437.
[52] Sarna, 438. Rabbi Richard Levy suggested the comment that the decision to admit Priesand is perhaps more significant than the date of her ordination.
[53] Bellah, 75 (full citation here)

This value of the individual at the center has great implications for how one's views any community or institution and her sense of belonging.

As a result,

"hardly any institutions or sector of society was immune from attack, especially youthful attack, and…virtually every major theme in the Sixties controversies would divide Americans for the rest of the century setting the fuse for the so-called culture wars."[54]

Let us consider the impact of this statement vis-à-vis the American Jewish community.

The new focus on particulars with American culture – race, gender, etc – could be seen in American Jewish life as well. Sarna writes, "In the years following 1967, the American Jewish communal agenda as a whole shifted inward, moving 'from universalistic concerns to a preoccupation with Jewish particularism.'"[55] One factor important to mention is in relation to Israel. The Six Day War, which took place in June of 1967, "jolted the American Jewish community from [its] universalistic agenda."[56] According to Sarna, scholars "find that some of the changes attributed to the war [that would consequentially transform contemporary American Jewish life] such as the greater focus on Israel and the Holocaust, began earlier; the war intensified rather than initiated these trends."[57] At the same time many Americans expressed public outrage at the United States decision to go to war in Vietnam, the American Jewish community experienced a period of renewed pride after Israeli's victory over her Arab neighbors in the Six Day War.

---

[54] Putnam and Campbell, 92
[55] Sarna, 318
[56] Sarna, 315
[57] Sarna, 316

When it came to domestic affairs, the period of patriotic unity that defined the 1950s gave way to the maturation of movements that "channeled their feelings of rebelliousness, assertiveness, and alienation from domestic programs aimed at transforming and strengthening American Jewish life."[58] This renewal in attitudes towards Jewish peoplehood and community gave birth to new opportunities for Jewish engagement.

One such movement that emerged during this time was the *havurah* movement, a movement "devoted to fellowship, peace, community and 'a new model of serious Jewish study.'"[59] In addition to its commitment to offer an alternative way to engage with Jewish life and community, the values these groups promoted tended to challenge the "disdaining 'self-satisfied, rich suburbanites' and 'smug institutions'" that organizers of these groups felt characterized the suburban synagogue experience.[60] The *havurah* movement became an option for those who did not wish to fully leave the Jewish community but who craved something that prided values counter cultural to those felt in the more traditional settings in which Jewish community played out.

The *havurah* movement responded to a variety of tensions that arose in this time period. Groups of Jews would come together, mostly in the privacy of homes, for the sake of Jewish ritual, holiday observance and Jewish learning. The opportunity to engage in organized Jewish community, albeit outside the walls of

[58] ibid.
[59] Sarna, 319
[60] ibid.

the traditional Jewish institutions provided an access to engagement for those disconnected from the agenda of the synagogue.

Due to the private and individualized nature of these *havurot*, small groups were formed to cater to the needs and wants of individuals. One positive outcome suggests that Jews who were unable to find a place for themselves in more formal Jewish settings were given the opportunity to engage with others Jews building relationships based on shared values.

What can be deemed a consequence is the contribution of the *havurah* movement towards a more private, and therefore siloed, Jewish experience. Those who could not locate themselves within the fold of more formal Jewish life had options to go elsewhere. If they were unsatisfied with the offerings of the synagogue they could make an exit from institutional life and still participate in some alternative Jewish community. The positive outcome lies in the ability for committed Jews to respond to the movement of people out of organized Jewish life. This provided an alternative, still within the realm of creating Jewish community, to meet the needs of those who were unfulfilled by the synagogue.

Changes to Jewish norms did not take place solely outside of formal Jewish life. Different movements within the American Jewish landscape set off on a trajectory of changes, some of which would have profound impacts on accessibility for previously marginalized groups. It was mentioned earlier that Sally Priesand was ordained by the Hebrew Union College as the first female rabbi in 1972. Never before had an organized branch of Judaism publically committed itself to recognizing the inherent equalities of women to serve as rabbis and attain the

highest level of Jewish leadership. Decisions as this one allowed for an expanded understanding of God's revelation while simultaneously challenging more traditional understandings of Jewish tradition. The result was a more dynamic notion of what was possible within the Jewish community.

Another emerging trait is relativism. Religious relativism might be defined as ideas and beliefs that are meaningful to members within a certain religious group but may not hold true for those outside of the group. The Reform movement decided to ordain women, and more recently homosexuals and other queer identified individuals.[61] While this became a religious imperative for this particular movement, it was relative to those who held the same values for equality and belief that tradition was morally adaptable. This notion is non-negotiable for Reform Jewish communities but not held by many other Jews, specifically those who believe that the Torah explicitly states that a man should not lay with a man they way he lies with a woman.[62]

This phenomenon might be best explained through the "emergence of Sheilaism."[63] In Habits of the Heart, Robert Bellah and other authors provide a vignette about a woman who "named her religion after herself." According to Sheila Larson, Sheilaism incorporates the following, "I believe in God. I am not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith carries me a long

[61] Report of the Central Conference of American Rabbis Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate, 1990
[62] Leviticus 18:22
[63] Putnam and Campbell, 97

way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice."[64] The authors use her example to highlight "the logical possibility of over 200 million American religions." Here, we see an example of American individualism and one attempt to "transform external authority into internal meaning."[65]

If the 1960s and 1970s gave way to groups of individuals looking to go outside the traditional structure in order to find meaning and build community, the last two decades of the 20th century can be characterized by the communal response to address these changes and further increase in the individualism pronounced by growth in financial resources and advances in technology.

## The 1980s and 1990s: The Internet and Individualism

Jewish organizations and institutions began to see the need to respond to the number of Jews who were exiting from organized religious life because of the growing tension between individual values and those promoted by the religious establishment. The health and strength of various Jewish movements during this time period allowed for various groups to make statements that would both respond to the changing needs of the American Jew and attract criticism and conflict between the various movements.

In 1983 the Reform movement adopted patrilineal descent as one definition for who is a Jew.[66] Traditionally, Jewish lineage has been understood to be passed through the mother's lineage. The Reform movement responded to the growing

---

[64] Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habit of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 221.
[65] ibid
[66] Sarna, 438

number of interfaith marriages with its solution for how to maintain positive relationship with those who exemplified the changing look of the American family. Many Jewish men married non-Jewish women. The movement decided to further expand its definition in order to include the largest population of the American Jewish community in its definition of who was a Jew. This invited more traditionally adherent movements to challenge the intentions of their more progressive counterparts. Tensions between internal Jewish groups intensified based on decisions such as this one.

During this same time period, religious conservatism was on the rise. This growth in religious conservatism represents the first aftershock of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s according to Putnam and Campbell. This time marked a shift from how often one attended church, a factor used to measure one's religious commitment previously, to what church they attended.[67] Various assumptions could be made about one's religious commitments and values based on her affiliation with a religious institution. The result was a growing sense of competition between religious groups and the differing ways they interpreted religious tradition in order to resonate with their experience as American. This is a time in where boundaries were tested and in the case of decisions like patrilineal descent crossed in ways some groups felt were inauthentic to Jewish discourse.

The 1980s and 1990s were a time when fundamentalist religious voices on platform slowly began to silence the moderate religious voice. We spoke earlier about the blurred lines between news and entertainment introduced by the

[67] Putnam and Campbell, 102

television. On Sunday mornings, in the comfort of one's own home, Americans could turn the television channel to watch politicians debate heated political issues just as easily as they could tune in to watch a preacher deliver a fire and brimstone sermon about the problems in society coming forth as messages from God. The blurring of lines between religion and politics contribute to ongoing decline in civic engagement as the 20th century drew to a close.

The increase in personal autonomy coupled with a growing sense of organized religious institutions aligning with political ideologies is one reason why "for many [baby] boomers privatized religion [became] a worthy expression of autonomous moral judgment [and] institutionalized religion [became] less central to their lives than their parents' lives."[68] For Putnam, "personal autonomy has thus not only led to the decline in parish involvement…but it has also led to an alteration in the meaning of that involvement."[69] The impact of a retreat from formal religious life does not only impact the religious community but the society at large when people redirect their energies from public realms and invest them solely to the private sectors of their lives.

The introduction of the Internet is a major factor because it both blurs boundaries and vastly expands our concept of communal boundaries. We mentioned earlier that the move to the suburbs extended the boundaries through which individuals lived their lives. Such an extension pales in comparison to the expansion that results from the Internet. Putnam argues that, "no sector of American society will have more influence on the future state of our social capital

[68] As quoted in Putnam, 74
[69] As quoted in Putnam, 74

than the electronic mass media and especially the Internet."[70] The television introduced a new level of passivity to one's participation in entertainment but the Internet contributed to an increase in the solitary activity of the individual as it made its way into the American household.

The Internet afforded a democratization of information and allowed anyone who had access to participate in this rapid exchange of ideas and information. It also allowed for an increased retreat from public places. This tension between the public and private spheres results from what Ray Oldenburg refers to as "the problem of third place."

Oldenburg suggests that there is a problem of place in America, namely that "in order for [daily life] to be relaxed and fulfilling, [a person, and in turn society] must find its balance in three realms of experience."[71] He sees the problem of decreased public engagement and public leadership as a consequence of the lack of public space in which relationships and community can grow. This problem of place is pronounced by the introduction of the Internet into the American household.

Another factor that influences individual and communal behaviors in the 1980s and 1990s is the presence of new wealth. The Internet boom ushered in a period of expansion of resources and information that impacted all areas of society. Gerald Bubis identifies the period leading up to the 21st century as a time in which "an unexpected renewal of intensive Jewish living…has manifested in the building of magnificent campuses of higher Jewish learning, Jewish museums, camps,

---

[70] Putnam, 410

[71] Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community.* (Philadelphia: De Capo Press, 1997), 14.

synagogues, schools, libraries and research centers and in the founding of sophisticated new Jewish organizations."[72]

He infers that "One-time capital investments for new centers run in the billions, and community-wide campaigns for Jewish needs [in the United States] and abroad raise over a billion dollars annually." Accordingly, "If one totals the gifts to synagogues, Jewish agencies, and Jewish organizational endowment funds, the figure is in the billions."[73] Bubis illustrates the incredible cost of sustaining Jewish life that has emerged from a growth in individual and collective wealth. This has helped to expand the options available to those wishing to engage in Jewish life, and also the cost of these options now require of donors and members in order to support such expansion.

With regard to Jewish leadership, Bubis reflects that at the beginning of the 21st century, there has been "an increase in the power and position of the economic elite in Jewish organizational boardrooms." This contrasts to 50 years earlier when "boards of directors of Federations and agencies were much more representative, or heterogeneous in their composition."[74]

This shift becomes important when we arrive at current tensions and barriers for Jewish engagement in regards to financial accessibility and assumptions that because "Jewish are the most financially successful group in America" each potential member of an organization must fit into this portfolio.[75] Not only have the ideas of what it means to be Jewish expanded, so too the expansion of the role of

---

[72] Bubis, 6
[73] Bubis, 5
[74] Bubis, 7
[75] ibid.

communal wealth that would reshape institutional priorities. This reality will have significant influences on perceptions of organized Jewish life on part of those who may or may choose not to belong.

This lengthy yet limited history of American Jewish life since World War II is intended to illustrate the tensions that result from the American Jewish experience and its process of expansion. We now stand at a new juncture in the narrative. The economic downfall of 2008 affected every area of American society. Additionally, scandals like the one involving Barry Madoff quickly cut off funding to Jewish and non-Jewish organizations that depended on financial contributions in order to keep their doors open. The organized Jewish community continues to struggle to overcome the impact of these economic misfortunes and unfortunately have had to make rapid decisions that have drastically changed organizational structures and program options in the process.

Before I introduce the trends and tensions that emerge from this history it will be helpful to consider the data that results from two community studies and small focus groups conducted as part of my research. The important conclusion that results from this next section is that no one solution will respond to the various trends and tensions that emerge as a result of the recent changes in American culture. The new realities that emerge from these trends affect how individuals understand themselves and the motivations and barriers to participating in community.

**A Tale of Two Cities: What Two Jewish Communities Can Teach Us About Jewish Identity Formation and Organized Jewish Life**

Until this point we have devoted energy to exploring the foundation upon which American Jews develop attitudes towards Jewish identity and the Jewish community. In this section, we take a close look at two communities: Baltimore, Maryland and San Francisco, California. The information presented in this section depends largely on the results that emerge from community studies.[76] As part of my research, I conducted focus groups in Baltimore and San Francisco. While these groups were small in number, they provide rich insights and conclusions to the trends and tensions we will explore further.

The data below helps to highlight similarities and differences facing these two Jewish communities. Both communities have commendable infrastructure for organized Jewish life and invest substantial resources in efforts to engage an admittedly diverse and exciting pool of Jews. However, key differences exist including the cost of living, the proximity of Jews living close to one another and the profile of religious affiliation. In order to probe the impact of each of these areas on Jewish identity formation and motivation to participate in Jewish life it will be helpful to provide basic information about both Jewish communities in the chart below. This is a referential sampling of the information made available in the two community studies.

---

[76] Ukeles, Jacob B. and Ron Miller. *The 2010 Greater Baltimore Jewish Community Study: Summary Report.* Prepared by Ukeles Associates, Inc., 2011.

Phillips, Bruce. *2004 Jewish Community Study: Full Findings.* Prepared for the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation, 2004.

| | Baltimore, Maryland<br>2010 Jewish Community Study | San Francisco, California<br>2004 Jewish Community Study |
|---|---|---|
| # of Jews | 93,400 | 228,000 |
| # of Jewish households[77] | 42,500 | 125,000 |
| Median age | 40 | 39 |
| Percentage of respondents considering moving out of area | 5% | 16% |
| Jewish identification | Orthodox 21%<br>Conservative-Trad'tl 32%<br>Reform 27%<br>Reconstructionist 1%<br>Just Jewish 12%<br>All secular including "no" religion 8%<br>Misc <1%[78] | Orthodox-Traditional 3%<br>Conservative 17%<br>Reform or Liberal 38%<br>Reconstructionist 2%<br>Unaffiliated/Secular 33%<br>Other religion 6%<br>Jewish renewal 1%[79] |
| % of respondents who report belonging to a synagogue | 46%[80] | 22%[81] |

**Sometimes You Want To Go (Or Avoid) Where Everybody Knows Your Name**
**Baltimore, Maryland**

The 2010 Greater Baltimore Jewish Community Study (GBJCS) shows:

- "Baltimore's Jewish community to be stable with a high level of Jewish engagement[82]…but a growing number in the Jewish community is not highly engaged in Jewish life."[83]

[77] In both studies, Jewish households is defined as having at least one person in the home who is Jewish by religion or had a Jewish parent or grandparent and considered him/herself Jewish.
[78] Bmore Study, 64
[79] SF Study, 53
[80] Bmore study, iii
[81] SF Study, 54

- The Baltimore Jewish community is comprised of 42,500 Jewish households; "a Jewish household is a household that includes as least one self-identified Jewish adult."[84]
- There are 93,400 Jewish people. According to the GBJCS, "A Jewish person is an adult over the age of 18 who considers himself Jewish or a child being raised Jewish."[85]
- In spite of expansion, "seventy-five percent of Jews in [this] study live in five contiguous zip codes."[86] Pikesville has the largest concentration of Jews, with thirty-three percent of Jewish people in Baltimore residing here.[87] While not all Jews living in Pikesville identify as Orthodox, a large concentration of Baltimore's Orthodox Jews do live in this area.
- The Orthodox demographic of the Baltimore Jewish community is "the fastest growing part of [the] population,…making up thirty-two percent of the Jewish people."[88] The GBJCS differentiates between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews who make up the overall Baltimore Jewish community in highlighting major trends and insights.
- Orthodox Jews make up one third of the Baltimore Jewish community.
- One quarter of Baltimore's Jews identify as Conservative.
- Twenty-three percent are Reform.

---

[82] GBJCS, i
[83] GBJCS, iii
[84] GBJCS, ii
[85] GBJCS, ii
[86] GBJCS, ii
[87] GBJCS, ii
[88] GBJCS iii

- Thirteen percent identify as either non-denominational or secular.[89]

The variation of responses between Orthodox affiliated and non-Orthodox affiliated Jews about participation in Jewish life reveals the challenges that progressive Jewish leaders face in regard to Jewish engagement in Baltimore.

According to the GBJCS, seventy-four percent of respondent reported that being Jewish was very important to them.[90] However, the differences between Orthodox and non-Orthodox respondents illustrate a slightly different picture about feelings of Jewish belonging and connectivity for Baltimore Jews. When it comes to a sense of connection to Judaism and the Jewish community, age is irrelevant in Orthodox circles but in non-Orthodox circles, this is aligned with data that suggests younger generations are increasingly disconnected from organized religious life and feelings of connectivity to religious values in contrast to older generations.

One hundred percent of Orthodox respondents reported that Judaism is very important to them across age lines. In contrast, "among the non-Orthodox, the youngest age groups are least likely to view being Jewish as very important:

- 54% of Jewish respondents under age 35, 67% of those 35 – 64, and 76% of those 65 and over report that being Jewish is very important to them."[91]
- Regarding feelings of Jewish connectedness, "among the non-Orthodox, younger respondents under age 35…only 14% think it is very important for them to be part of a Jewish community in greater Baltimore, while another 48% think it is

[89] GBJCS, iii
[90] GBJCS, iii
[91] GBJCS, 61

somewhat important; 38% feel being part of a Jewish community in Baltimore is either not very important or not at all important."[92]

Clearly, there is a difference in terms of the challenges facing leaders who wish to engage non-Orthodox Jews in formal ways in contrast to their Orthodox counterparts. While the Orthodox community cannot ignore questions of relevance and connectivity, the sense of individual responsibility and obligation to organized Jewish life is drastically different depending on one's denominational affiliation. The professional and lay leadership in Baltimore recognize this growing demographic of disengaged, progressively aligned Jews living in Baltimore and as a result they have expressed a commitment to find innovative ways to reverse this trend in the years to come.[93]

The results of the GBJCS suggest that the differences between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews living in Baltimore only stands to increase. The study shows that "between 1999 and 2010, the number of children in Baltimore Jewish households where the survey respondent was Orthodox increased 54% from 6,500 – 10,000, while the number of children in non-Orthodox households decreased 13% from 18,400 – 16,000."[94] This data suggests that while the overall Baltimore Jewish community appears to be stable, the likelihood that non-Orthodox Jewish communities will face increasing challenges appears to be significant.

This trend can be seen in the variations between the 1999 community study and the most recent GBJCS, which shows that the number of children being raised as Jewish has decreased from 91% to 79%. The study cites "increased intermarriage rates, and an

[92] GBJCS, 62
[93] GBJCS, 118
[94] GBJCS, 44

increasing likelihood in Greater Baltimore that intermarried households will not raise their children as 'Jewish-only.'"[95] In short, changes in attitudes towards Judaism and connections to organized Jewish life are increasingly noticeable between the last community study and the 2010 community study. This information supports the trends of disengagement from organized religious life and raises questions about relevancy and meaning for non-Orthodox Jews living in an otherwise largely condensed Jewish community.

The data suggests that an increasing number of non-Orthodox Jews, especially young adults, feel ambivalent about the importance of Judaism and involvement in Jewish life. However, the focus group and other informal conversations suggest positive associations towards Jewish tradition and community. These include but are not limited to occasion gatherings of Jewish family and friends around holidays and lifecycle events. What are the steps one might take between these positive associations and becoming formally involved in organized Jewish life remains the question.

The Baltimore focus group, referred to as focus group one (FG1), was comprised of 7 people: 5 between the ages of 25 – 35 and 2 between the ages of 45 – 60. An additional 4 people, who could not attend the gathering, responded in writing to the questions. Of these 4, 2 were between the ages of 25 – 35; the other 2 between the ages of 45 – 60. Of the 11 participants, the only familial relationship existing among the participants was represented by a non-Jewish respondent and her Jewish mother-in-law.

Within the group, all 4 of the respondents between ages 45 – 60 consider

[95] GBJCS, 46

themselves friends, three of which belong to the same Conservative congregation[96], the fourth a member of a neighboring Reform congregation. Of the 7 younger participants, 2 participants no longer live in Baltimore but think about wanting to return home. They were visiting Baltimore when the focus group was conducted and were included to share how they navigate the tension between living at a distance and wanting to move back. All participants consider themselves strongly connected to one another through social circles, some dating as far back to infant play groups. Others forged friendships during adolescence; two participants moved to Baltimore as young adults.

In each focus group, participants were asked questions about formal Jewish experience as a child, associations with Judaism and Jewish life as adults, motivations, inhibitors for participation in organized Jewish life and questions about their sense of belonging and desires to engage with Jewish community and life in formal and informal settings. The full list of questions is listed in Appendix 1 and can be found at the end of the paper.

Among the group of respondents, everyone except for one participant feels positive towards Judaism and Jewish tradition. This individual recalls feeling forced by his parents to go to Hebrew School; he continues to hold negative feelings towards organized religious life.

He says, "I felt pressured into doing things [at Hebrew school] that I didn't believe in and had no interest in doing. I couldn't wait to be done. Now, I am older and more mature and I still feel there isn't much that resonates with my life today." Abe*[97] is

[96] One respondent clarified that her family no longer pays dues, but sometimes attend Friday night services and remain connected to the community.
[97] All names changed for the sake of anonymity.

married to a Jewish woman and had a Jewish wedding ceremony but remains uninterested in cultivating his Jewish identity or engagement.

The non-Jewish participant recalls positive associations with Jews from her childhood where "most of [my] friends were Jewish." As an adult, Ruth* married a Jewish man and lives in a mixed community comprised of Jews and non-Jews. She loves the warmth and acceptance she has encountered from the Jewish family she married into and looks forward to the Jewish holidays when the "family gets together and enjoys good company and good Jewish food." Ruth and her husband are preparing to welcome their first child.[98] She reflects on the challenges of trying to please both sets of grandparents, who care deeply for their respective religious traditions. While Ruth is optimistic about the decisions she and her husband are making she anticipates other challenges will arise at pivotal life moments unique to an intermarried couple.

Most every participant in FG1 reflected on the role that family and friends play in their connection to Jewish life and identity. For example Josh* identifies as being from a family in which Jewish identity is embedded in their DNA but does not currently participate in a formal Jewish community. He cites two reasons for his lack of involvement. The first has to do with the cost of participation in organized Jewish life. The second has to do with where Josh meets the Jews he wants to build relationships and community with. Josh noted,

"My brother is married to the daughter of a rabbi but he is the only one involved in any real way, well other than my grandparents. They have belonged to the same *shul* forever. As for me, I enjoy the family aspects. I can do without *shul*. Besides, it is too expensive. That is why my parents stopped going. They didn't want to pay [membership dues] and

[98] Gabriel Joseph was born on February 22, 2012. This is the same day this thesis project came to completion.

also pay additional money for High Holiday tickets when that is all they wanted to attend in the first place."[99]

When asked if Josh could imagine joining a synagogue in the future, if price was not an issue, he responded with "it would have to be something really special." He said,

"all my friends are Jewish and everyone updates Facebook on Rosh Hashanah and Hannukah which reminds me that it is not just my family who makes up my Jewish community. Why would I want to go sit in *shul* with a bunch of people I don't know and spend a bunch of money I don't have when I can go to my parents house for a meal with all my favorite Jewish foods and then over to a friends house to light the menorah with them and their kids?"

Unlike his grandfather, Josh does not hold the belief that he has a responsibility to become a formal member of his local Jewish community. Despite his overall positive associations with Judaism and Jewish tradition, Josh cannot anticipate joining a synagogue unless a specific need or opportunity leads him to change his mind.

Josh lives in a community where he meets Jews in many places. He does not feel the need to go to the synagogue to meet other Jews. Like the other participants who grew up in Baltimore, he expressed that having Jewish relationships is important but does not feel the need to depend on formal Jewish community to help accomplish this. Josh imagines it unlikely to meet Jews he wants to spend time with in the synagogue but can think of many places he can spend time with his Jewish friends outside the *shul*. Such places include sporting events, music performances and the privacy of his home.

It is not just the younger participants who hold these sentiments. In fact, the older respondents echoed many of the same insights. One respondent spoke about her decision to leave the synagogue after her children became b'nei mitzvah. On the topic of formal membership Naomi* said the following:

[99] FG1

"I'd join a synagogue if it didn't cost so much money to go to the handful of activities I actually want to participate in. Maybe I'd join somewhere if I could pick and choose what I wanted to go to, show up, meet some people I already know and maybe some people I don't."

She went on to say, "I want to and feel certain that I won't be made to feel ignorant because of everything I don't know." Naomi is not alone in her insecurities that her foundation of Jewish knowledge is somehow inferior. Others felt that the potential for Jewish ignorance to be revealed was one reason not to participate in public Jewish programming.

On the topic of cost, Abe pointed out that the broader issue of financial stability is more pertinent than whether he will have enough money for specific Jewish activities. On this he says, "The thought of not having money in general is definitely more important to me than whether I have enough money to join a synagogue." Abe worries about his future and is concerned that money spent now might be better saved for tomorrow. He continues:

"Honestly, I'd rather save for my retirement since I can't trust there will be any social security or other help beyond my personal saving. Joining a synagogue is not important to me so if it means that in order to do so I will have less money to spend on things I do care about now and into the future it doesn't seem worth it."

Abe highlights that financial concern is much greater than the cost of Jewish involvement.

One section of the GBJCS focused on how the 2008 financial downturn affected individuals and households in the Baltimore Jewish community. They found that "as a result of the economic downturn, one in three respondents report that their households are 'just managing,' including some who 'cannot make ends meet.'" Furthermore, "forty-three percent of Jewish households report they were negatively impacted by the economic

downturn. This includes households that report a loss in job (18%), a reduction in salary or income or someone who took a lower paying job."[100] While this data illustrates the heightened pressures facing Jewish individuals and households as a result of economic downturn, cost as a barrier to synagogue membership is higher among the non-Orthodox respondents according to the GBJCS.

According to the GBJCS, "16% of all Jewish households interviewed report that cost prevented them from joining a congregation." This would indicate that, overall, cost is not a significant barrier to synagogue membership in Baltimore. However, among non-Orthodox households:

- 37% of households with an annual income under $50,000 report that cost prevented them from joining a synagogue or temple.
- 11% with incomes between $100,00 and $150,000 and
- 3% of respondents with incomes of at least $150,000 report cost as a factor, which prevented synagogue membership.[101]

The study concludes that the Baltimore Jewish community "must deal differently with non-Orthodox households of varying economic wealth."[102] The data from the GBJCS, as well as the information provided from participants in FG1, indicates that non-Orthodox Jews are more likely to perceive cost as a barrier to synagogue life; the necessity for membership is likely to be lower than their Orthodox counterparts.

The respondents from FG1 affirm that many American Jews, especially non-halachic Jews see their involvement with the formal Jewish community primarily as a

[100] GBJCS, v
[101] GBJCS, 69
[102] GBJCS, 69

consumer. In the case of both focus groups, only one respondent in each group reflected on a sense of obligation or responsibility to Jewish participation. In the case of Morty*, a prominent leader in the Baltimore Jewish community, he asserts his commitment to the formal Jewish community while at the same time expressing his understanding as to the barriers he sees facing the younger and less engaged Jews.

Morty has multiple formal affiliations in the Baltimore Jewish community and has served in the highest positions of leadership in the synagogue, as well as, on various community boards, family foundation boards and the board of The Associated.[103] Despite his loyal commitment and enthusiasm for Jewish life, Morty understands those who are "turned off" to Jewish life or feel that the formal Jewish community has a lot to offer but with limited time and resources most tend to take a comfortable path of less connection and involvement. Morty believes this is largely due to the emphasis the Jewish community puts on financial capacity.

Morty worries about the role that elitism plays among the most influential leaders in the community. He recognizes that the majority of funding comes from a relatively small group, which leads to disconnect that many feel from the organized Jewish community. On this point he says, "Elitism is not the way to build or sustain community, especially in this era with so much choice and competition for resources." Morty believes that the expectations placed on community leaders are high. He thinks that "people have a pretty complex image of community because there is a lot of judgment and a lot expected of you and as a result instead of cohesiveness and unity there is tension and divisiveness. This creates an atmosphere with which people don't want to be

[103] The Associated is the name for the Baltimore Jewish Federation.

involved and not one that makes them feel good about being involved. Who wants to go somewhere where you are judged and expected to act in a certain way?" For Morty, "Its hard to be a normal person. The pressure is both institutional and individual. The more you are involved the more that is expected of you."

In addition to the pressures and assumptions associated with leadership circles, Morty considers the experiences of his two daughters when he thinks about how younger people form identity in today's world. Morty compares the world his daughters live in to his own adolescence and young adulthood.

"My kids have grown up in a different world. I wasn't exposed to a lot of non-Jews on a social level until I went to college. My kids went to Jewish day school and still they knew lots of non-Jews before they graduated high school. Today, the world is more accepting and open. It is a good thing, but it also dilutes the Jewish experience."

According to Morty, identity formation in general, not just Jewish identity, is tremendously complicated and fluid in today's world.

Today, it is possible to try on identities as if they were clothing. Morty believes that perhaps one reason people are so hesitant to join a synagogue is out of the fear that what suits them today will quickly change tomorrow. Again, he considers the experiences of his two young adult daughters.

"It is difficult to figure who you are at all, much less break it down into who you are as a Jew. I see it with my own kids. One day my daughter is a hippie attending college in Vermont; a year later she's out in Towson[104] with an otherwise 'Gucci' crowd. Throw in the religion aspects and you add a whole other level of difficulty."

Morty captures one consequence of the characteristics of today's fluid world. Today, people move quickly in and out of their respective identities and the groups that reflect

[104] Located outside Baltimore

these different orientations. The commitment requirement to officially affiliate with any group may require more effort that an individual cares to make.

Morty introduces one insight that represents a generational difference between him and his children. Josh offered another as it relates to technology and increased isolationist tendencies and how that contributes to what he sees as a sense of self-focus. On this topic he says:

"Our generation doesn't seem to care that much about anything beyond them. We are less respectful, care more about being on our computer and our own wants more than going out into the world and making a difference. I think it is probably because we don't think we can actually make a difference."

When asked what he felt this had to do with religion today, Josh added the following:

"I think it will be hard to integrate the old teachings of religion with the technology today. People are used to getting their information through new mediums. The [ideas and how they are transmitted] seems more and more disconnected over time, which makes it harder to seem relevant to our lives."

Whether the content or the way the content is communicated, both young adults, and the parents of them see great challenges for how Judaism will be relevant to younger generations without some attention given to the changing trends in both the Jewish community and the world as it functions today.

## To Be a Jew in the City by the Bay
## San Francisco, California:

As part of the study of the Baltimore Jewish community it made sense to differentiate between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox respondents in order to best shed light on the attitudes and associations held by the Jews of that community. The same distinction is not made in the 2004 San Francisco community study (SFJCS).[105] Rather, when distinctions are made between respondents, the SFJCS tends to break down

answers to questions about Jewish connectivity into the following sub-groups: Jewish parentage, interfaith parentage and ancestry only.[106] The difference in how information is organized indicates key differences about who makes up the San Francisco Jewish community and how to organize data in order to best convey the needs of San Francisco Jews.

As of 2004, there were approximately "228,000 Jews, living in over 125,000 households" in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, which is double that of the Jewish population in 1986.[107] The SFJCS reports that San Francisco Jews can be grouped into five geographic regions.[108] While the Baltimore Jewish community lives in eleven geographic locations in and around Baltimore city, the concentration of these locations is significantly more condensed than that of the regions demarcating where San Francisco Jews live. The SFJCS also does not include the East Bay, which currently serves as the residence for 176,816 Jews.[109]

The definition about who is a Jew is similar to that of the GBJCS. According to the SFJCS, a Jew was defined as someone who is "Jewish by religion" or "had a Jewish parent or grandparent and considered himself to be Jewish, regardless of his current religion."[110] A Jewish household was likewise defined as any home with at least one person fitting the definition listed above.

Unlike the Baltimore Jewish community, the San Francisco Jewish community is, in large part, made up of non-Orthodox Jews. According to the community study, only

---

[106] Example can be found on page 51, SFJCS
[107] SFJCS, 15
[108] SFJCS, 5
[109] Email correspondence with Joanne Neuman, Director of Development for the Jewish Federation of the Greater East Bay. 1/31/2012
[110] SFJCS, 6

3% of Jewish households in San Francisco identify as Orthodox.[111] The remaining 97% of the San Francisco Jewish community identifies either with a more liberal denomination, with 41% of respondents indicating that they either have no denominational affiliation or describe themselves as secular.[112]

Additionally, those who identify as one kind of Jew and affiliate with a synagogue may not actually belong to a synagogue of that affiliation. The SFJCS reports that "19% of respondents who say they are Conservative report membership to a Reform congregation [and] conversely, 15% of individuals who say they are Reform belong to a Conservative congregation."[113] This data reveals the blurred lines among denominations as previously referenced. It demonstrates that someone one can identify personally this does not necessarily result in formal commitments to organized Jewish life.

Another important feature of the San Francisco Jewish community are the number of people who have moved to San Francisco as adults and who expect the likelihood that they will move out of the Bay Area. According to the research, "the number of people who say they plan to move out of the [Bay Area] has doubled over the last 18 years."[114] This is, in large part, due to the high costs of living, as well as the lack of family roots that define a large subset of Jews living in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Age is a relevant factor when looking at the data about San Francisco. According to the SFJCS, "younger people [are] most likely to leave the area and older people the least likely to relocate."[115] The study suggests that "the common thread…is 'rootedness.'

---

[111] SFJCS, 53. Table 61
[112] SFJCS, 53, Table 61
[113] SFJCS, 53
[114] SFJCS, 15
[115] SFJCS, 25

Younger people, single people, recent arrivals, recent movers and renters are less rooted in the community and therefore more likely to leave it."[116] It is true that the most likely group of individuals to leave the Baltimore Jewish community represent a similar make up, however the percentage of the population that holds such a profile is significantly smaller in contrast to the San Francisco Jewish community.

Cost of Jewish life is also important as it relates to the SFJCS. The data shows that "36% of respondents with an income well below the median indicate that cost has prevented them from belonging to a synagogue or temple, as compared with only 15% of respondents whose income is well above the median."[117] These numbers are true of other Jewish affiliations including schooling and JCC membership.

The SFJCS sought to identify the percentage of respondents who might be classified as religious seekers. Based on those interviewed, seventy-two percent responded that it is "good to explore many differing religious teachings and learn (seekers)" while only 7% responded that, "one should stick to a particular faith (non-seekers)."[118] This data confirms what Putnam and Campbell concluded regarding the increasing tendency for Americans to experiment with and engage in different faith communities over the span on one's life.

When compared to one another, the make up of the Baltimore and San Francisco Jewish communities illustrate tremendous differences. The GBJCS reports that approximately 20% of couples in the Baltimore Jewish community are intermarried.[119] That is in contrast to the SFJCS, which reports that 55% of married couples are involved

---

[116] SFJCS, 25
[117] SFJCS, 88
[118] SFJCS, 56
[119] GBJCS, 48

in interfaith marriages.[120] This is one reason that Bruce Phillips suggests the number of Jewish households in the San Francisco Bay Area has doubled in recent years. Phillips reports that it is not due to a great increase in Jews rather, it is the number of Jews married to non-Jews that has led to this increase in Jewish households in the recent years.[121]

Diversity is relative. While the Baltimore Jewish community may be more diverse than previously the presence of alternative family structures remains minimal. Consider the LGBT demographic. The GBJCS reports that only 1 – 2% of Baltimore homes has an LGBT identified person in the household,[122] while in San Francisco 8% of Jewish households have an LGBT resident, approximately 10,000 individuals which equates to 25% of the entire population of Baltimore Jews.[123] As a result, the organized Jewish community of San Francisco is perhaps more likely to consider innovative ways to reach this small, but significant percentage of their Jewish community. I do not intend to suggest that either community is better suited to meet the needs of its constituents: however the creativity with which to imagine new methods and approaches may be clearer in a community where otherwise alternative lifestyles are visible to the mainstream.

Unlike the Baltimore focus group where all but two respondents grew up in Baltimore city or county, the San Francisco focus group (FG2) consisted of 5 individuals between the ages of 25 – 35, all who moved to San Francisco as an adult. Each participant had at least experienced a few formal Jewish experiences during their

---

120 SFJCS, 63
121 Based on conversation with Bruce Phillips, Fall 2011
122 GBJCS, 21
123 SFJCS, 107

childhood including attending Hebrew school, Jewish day school, Jewish summer camp and in one case, Adamah: a leadership program for young adults in areas of Judaism and the environment.

Lacey*, a woman in her early thirties who grew up in a community she recalls as having "almost no Jews," reflected on how Hebrew school fit into her childhood. "Where I grew up, there were so few Jews that Hebrew school was really stigmatized. It was an extra thing we had to do and often conflicted with something we wanted to do." For Lacey, her Jewish education meant missing out on other activities such as sports and theatre. In addition to feeling as if she was missing out on more desirable activities, Lacey also "tried to keep it a secret because I didn't want to talk about it. I had only one friend there. Everyone else was really dorky and I didn't want to be associated with them." For Lacey, Hebrew school meant spending time with people she did not get along with and having to miss out on the opportunities that the people she hoped to spend time with participated in when she could not.

Sharon* grew up in a community with many Jews, but agreed with Lacey that the people she met at Hebrew school were not the type of people she wanted to spend time with especially as she became a teenager. Sharon felt a tremendous amount of social pressure as a young person and often worried that by attending the same Hebrew school her peers would come to associate her with people she'd rather not be lumped together with. While this may seem like a petty reflection, the desire to be grouped with people one finds commonalities with and not with those they feel lack any real connection is an important factor in one's decision to join a group in any formal way.

Jacob* and Raffi* grew up in the same Jewish community just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Raffi, the child of a Jewish educator, recalls disliking Hebrew school. However he considers his Jewish upbringing to have been more or less positive. Jacob had a different experience and learned more from what bothered him about the synagogue community he grew up in than what he appreciated. On this point, Jacob says the following:

"In an upper middle class neighborhood, where I wasn't upper middle class I never found a common bond with a lot of [the] people I went to Hebrew school with. [And not just that.] Whether it was around my Shabbes table or at a friend's house, the amount of gossip and talking about other congregants in a negative way always had me paranoid about what people might be saying about my family."

Jacob's experience placed him on the periphery of the community to which his family belonged. Jacob recalls that he felt more solidarity with his African American friends who lived in his neighborhood than his peers at the synagogue.

Despite Jacob's negative experience in the Jewish community of his youth, Jacob is the most involved of the 5 participants from FG2. He considers himself a committed Jew, rarely works on Shabbat, regularly host meals on the Jewish holidays with his wife, and has spent many years of his adult life working in various Hebrew school programs and tutoring students as they prepare for bnei mitzvah. Jacob hopes to be a role model of a "different kind of Jew" for young people in a way he felt lacked in the models he had as a child.

Jacob was also the most likely to attend Shabbat services of the participants from FG2. There is a modern Orthodox minyan in town that he frequents even though he doesn't identify in any way as Orthodox. Jacob, like many other liberal Jews likes to attend the minyan because of the Carlebach style *davening* and the relatively

straightforward approach to the service, with "no commentary." Jacob also appreciates the lay led prayer in contrast to other services in which a rabbi or cantor is the prayer leader. Of the minyan, Jacob says this: "There is nothing I love more than going to [pray at] the Mission Minyan; and nothing I hate more than the Kiddush that follows." For Jacob, the experience he seeks lies in the opportunity to pray in community. In regards to socializing however, Jacob would "rather go home and have Shabbat dinner with my wife and friends ten times out of ten." Jacob associates the socializing that takes place after services as similar to that of the small talk he loathes from his youth.

Similar to respondents in FG1, those in FG2 share in the preference of forming Jewish community based on family and friends. One difference the respondents in FG2 face that is not relevant for those in FG1 is the creation of families of friends to replace the biological families, all of whom are at a great distance from the participants in FG2. While the group from Baltimore all consider themselves to have friends who closely resemble family, every individual who currently lives in Baltimore expects to spend the Jewish holidays with their family. The respondents who made up FG2 agree that tremendous bonds have been formed among those who have become the family of friends with whom they celebrate Jewish holidays throughout the year.

One result is a greater feeling of ownership for Jewish practice present among FG2, in contrast to FG1. In FG2, every member of the group has attended at least one, and in most cases more than one, Jewish holiday meal with a group of peers in place of being with family in the last year. Four of the five participants point to one another as part of the community with whom they "do Jewish." While the origin of these relationships are not necessarily from Jewish circles, the participants reflected that the

people with whom they mark Jewish time are among the "closest thing to family" they have in the city in which they currently reside.

Lacey reflects on her experience as a Jew who also identifies as queer. She says that "the opportunity to find people like me in some of the [Jewish] communities I have participated in has been tremendous in my identity formation." Lacey has moved multiple times over the last decade yet feels a certain consistency in her ability to find like-minded Jewish community in the places to which she has lived. On this she says:

> "it's like I move to a new city and I find a posting for a Shabbat potluck that I know is going to attract other normally marginalized people like myself. So, I show up and bring something awesome to eat and sure enough I look around and find a similar make up of Jews, hippie, queer and more and I realize its possible to find my type of people wherever I am."

This experience, in contrast to her Hebrew school experience as a child, motivates her ongoing exploration of Jewish tradition and community as an adult.

For the participants in FG2, no one is living in a predominantly Jewish environment. Jacob's wife, who could not attend the focus group but weighed in after the fact, works at a local Jewish day schools and has the most regular contact with a Jewish organization. Shauna* grew up in Baltimore and enjoys the opportunity to build Jewish relationships but would not necessarily seek it out if it wasn't built into her experience.

At the time of writing this paper, Jacob and Shauna are preparing to welcome their first child. Shauna admits that despite that they were both born Jewish and care deeply for Jewish tradition, the decision to circumcise their son does not necessarily come easy. It is difficult for Shauna to identify with the ritual and the rationale that Jews have circumcised their sons an upwards of 5,000 years. This does not resonate as strongly as the feeling that in doing so they will inflict unnecessary pain on their new

baby. This goes to show that just because one grows up as Jew does not mean that the rites and rituals associated with the tradition feel resonant with the values the individual or in this case couple, holds for themselves.

Jacob and Shauna are preparing to become first time members of a San Francisco congregation. During FG2, Jacob shared some concerns that come up for him when thinking about formal affiliation.

"I want to join a shul because I want my kid to be part of a Jewish community. Luckily for us, we found a place that meets our needs as Jews and speaks to the values we hold as human beings. I guess that's a good thing because there's no way I'd subject my child to the same stuff I experienced growing up."

Jacob is committed to becoming part of a Jewish community as his family begins to grow but stands firmly on the ground that it is only because there is a place he and his wife feel mirrors the values they hold.

Despite the fact that Jacob is excited about the community they plan to join, he has some financial concerns about the cost of organized Jewish life.

"I don't think its right how much it costs to be involved in the Jewish community. That's one thing Chabad's got right; you can show up and they don't ask you for money – they ask you if you have a place to go for Shabbes. The rest of the Jewish world could probably benefit from such an approach."

Jacob does not anticipate facing the same financial challenges as an adult that characterized his childhood but he finds the expense for membership to most Jewish institutions "appalling."

One final comment as it relates to FG2. The topic of values alignment emerged as a discussion item among the group. When it comes to the decision to become a member of a Jewish organization all respondents agreed that the organization would have to mirror the values that they hold, not just as a Jew but also as a human being. The Jewish

Farm School came up as an example of one Jewish organization that is growing, in part, because of "the intention [the leadership] puts into making options available that take Jewish education seriously."[124]

"The Jewish Farm School (JFS) is an environmental education organization whose mission is to practice and promote sustainable agriculture and to support food systems rooted in justice and Jewish tradition."[125] Raffi felt that in addition to taking Jewish education seriously, "JFS has positioned itself appropriately at the crossroads between Jewish content and what is happening in the world at large." The ability to how Jewish tradition relates to global issues makes a crucial case for how Judaism can be relevant in the 21st century.

Jacob sees JFS as an example of an organization that sits on the periphery of organized Jewish life. He sees this distinction as necessary as JFS offers a unique alternative approach to more traditional Jewish institutions. He sees, "really great people doing really great things. Institutions will catch up later but I'm excited about the options out there right now to get involved with an organization that expresses its values through what it offers." Jacob is optimistic about what is to come from the imagination and innovation of people intent on reviving Jewish education and community in the generation that stands to take on more significant leadership in the years ahead.

## What Do These Two Studies Teach Us?

In looking at these two vibrant Jewish communities we are can conclude the following: while some challenges will be the same for many American Jewish communities, each community will encounter its own unique set of opportunities and

---

[125] www.jewishfarmschool.org

challenges based on the make-up of that specific community. Baltimore with its large and growing Orthodox community and its increasingly disconnected non-Orthodox population faces a significantly different set of challenges than San Francisco, where one finds a small (3%) Orthodox community along with a largely unaffiliated, younger, more transient Jewish population.

The way in which Jews assimilate with the secular culture is also different. In San Francisco Jews live in a variety of places, with non-Jewish partners. In Baltimore, the rate of intermarriage is among the lowest in any American city where Jews live.[126] The challenges confronting the organized Jewish community and its leadership are different because of the circumstances that stand at the forefront of these respective communities. As a result, the solutions and ideas for how to best serve the needs of the Jews who reside in these communities will surely take on different forms in the years ahead of us.

In short, there is no single solution. The complexity of identity formation and the communities in which people choose to participate necessitates a degree of regionalism that ought to be seen as significant. It is likely that the communities who stand to most successfully address issues of membership to Jewish community will be those who understand the specific characteristics that define their Jewish community and they will provide compelling opportunities for individuals who are seeking to create institutional Jewish connections. The section that follows will look at the tensions and trends that emerge from everything we have discussed to this point.

[126] The GBJCS reports that 20% of couples in Baltimore are intermarried. GBJCS, 48

## Emerging Trends and Observations

Thus far we have looked at some traditional Jewish sources that might inform our discussion on the changing relationship between the individual and the community. We have also examined Jewish texts, historical data and real time dialogue. We now understand barriers that might exist between those who view themselves on the inside of a community and those who see themselves on the outside.

We have explored recent American history in order to better understand the unique experience of the post-World War II period and its impact on American Jewry. In order to understand the trends that influence the American Jew today we have studied the tensions associated with the contemporary Jewish scene.

Often, the values of what it means to be an American stand in tension with traditional understandings of what it means to be a Jew. One attempt to reconcile these tensions has been the success of different denominational movements. Each movement makes decisions about how to make adjustments in order that Jewish tradition might remain meaningful and relevant. However, when the messages of the larger civic culture are in tension with those of one's religious or ethnic tradition an individual must make choices regarding what provides them with meaning and gives them a secure sense of identity.

Sylvia Barack Fishman suggests two ways in which American Jews have responded to situations when American values and Jewish values stand in tension with one another. The method that has served as the normative approach in previous generations of Jewish life has been that of compartmentalization:

"a process whereby an individual employing two contradictory value systems either utilizes them in serial and separate fashion or becomes inattentive to their contradictions." She goes on to say that such a method "has enabled individuals and groups of individuals to feel that they are both Jewish and American."[127]

Compartmentalization however is not enough. It can lead to an internal struggle that may lay in the subconscious of the individual. We recall that Martin Buber believed that all conflict exists because of the failure to align one's thoughts, speech and actions. In the case of the American Jew, it is not just the alignment of these three areas but also the reconciliation of the tensions that emerge from two cultural systems that inform one set of values.

Fishman suggests that a better method for engaging the differences between one's system of values as an American and as a Jew would be through a method of coalescence. Rather than internalize one set of values and appropriate them as synonymous with the other, Fishman suggests that if we might engage in "the work of boundary relocation."[128] Such an activity is necessary in order to engage in "the continuing process of creating a Judaism that harmonizes with liberal American values."[129] For Fishman, this provides an ideal entrance into a process in which we consciously adapt and eventually internalize new norms that bring our different value systems into alignment. What follows is an examination of certain trends we must consider in order to imagine new possibilities for organized Jewish life that

[127] Fishman, 7
[128] Fishman, 17
[129] Fishman, 16

have the potential to reach the growing number of unaffiliated and uninspired Jews in the United States today.

The impact of a generational shift is significant and stands to challenge the norms that informed previous attitudes towards membership and belonging. Such can be seen in the growing number of young people who may believe in God but do not necessarily feel they have a responsibility to act on that belief in formal community. The change associated with where people live, how they interact socially, in what ways they secure wealth, how they seek access, various forms of technology and information all require thoughtful consideration. They signify how the American culture at large and the American Jewish experience relate to previous generations of Jews

## Mobility

The result of increased sprawl and mobility that has occurred since World War II has extended the physical boundaries in which one engages in regular routine. It became common in the mid-20th century to reside in the suburbs and drive into the city for a job. Today, it is increasingly more common to identify individuals who commute to an entirely different city for work from the one in which they live or, on the contrary, to work from one's home.

Putnam suggests that moving could be one reason for the erosion of social capital[130] along with the possibility that the places to which we move are "less congenial to social connectedness."[131] Ray Oldenburg suggests that, "the structure of shared experience beyond that being offered by family, job and passive consumerism is small

[130] The Collins English Dictionary defines social capital as the network of social connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation.
[131] Putnam, 205

and dwindling. The essential group experience is being replaced by the exaggerated self-consciousness of individuals."[132] Individuals on the move spend less time at home, eat more meals alone and in transit and therefore invest more dollars into commodities to support such a lifestyle, which Oldenburg contribute to feelings of "boredom, loneliness, alienation, and a high price tag."[133]

The greater the miles an individual travels for the sake of personal routine, the less time available to engage in public life, a trend that has clearly gained momentum in recent decades, and continues to do so. In this way, the challenges presented by sprawl and mobility takes a toll. And not only on the individual who can feel as if she lives her life out in multiple locations but also contribute to the weakening of a social fabric that depends on a variety of opportunities for public engagement.

**Technology Will Be An Integral Part of Any Community**

Advances in technology encourage a culture of belief that the next best thing is just around the corner. In the summer of 2007, Rabbi Steven Schwartz gave a sermon on the eve of the release of the highly anticipated iPhone. In his drash he raised the question about the tension between excitement for the old verses the new. Schwartz suggested that the only people not waiting in line to purchase this new device were those sitting in the congregation. He then asked, "How is it that we have become fascinated with the newest? Why don't we stand in awe that Jews have circumcised their sons for 5,000 years? Isn't that fascinating?" Rapid advances in technology create excitement for the newest models and features. The society that holds this value sends a message that anything older is outdated and somehow less valuable to suit one's needs.

---

[132] Oldenburg, 13
[133] Oldenburg, 13

The growth of the virtual world contributes to the decline of face-to-face interaction. At the same time it allows for more connectivity and interaction in virtual circles. The television set in the home contributed to a more passive individual. While American homes now likely contain multiple technological devices for entertainment and work purposes, the opportunity to actively participate through these mediums increases. There is not time in this paper to go into great detail about studies of the effects of increased computer use on the human psyche, but one should be cautious to embrace that virtual activity is synonymous with physical interaction. The point remains however that newer technologies encourage interaction between individuals and provide multiple online networks that allow for cultivating relationships and building online community.

Such interactions have the potential to be both brief and more regular. Technological advances have significantly changed our concept of wait time. We expect and are expected to be available at almost any time of day. We assume immediate receipt of information we send along to others and feel pressure to respond quickly because of this assumption. The time one takes to consider her response, and the etiquette contained within an email exchange changes the nature by which people interact. It is easy to read tones and moods into an email that may not have been intended by the sender. We can instantly like and dislike, friend and unfriend, and press reply or forward without much time to consider the consequences of our decisions.

While these advances allow for us to reach further out into the world of information and relationships, we spend increasingly more time alone. It was once a luxury to have one television set in a home. Today, there are television sets in multiple rooms of a household. Possession of computers, laptops, ipads and hand held mobile

devices increase rapidly for those who can afford to keep up with the rate at which new items are introduced into the consumer market.

We have information available to us instantly, often from those on site even before the news and media have the chance to spin the story. Social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest allow people to commentate on the events they bare witness to and consume the information that is relevant to their personal interests and focus. These networks use trends that emerge from search engines and online traffic to advertise additional information as it relates to a person's search patterns. With so much information available to the individual consumer, a process of targeting the information that shows up on the computer screen is more and more prevalent. If I open an email about a concert, the paid advertising that adorns the side of the screen is likely to relate to the information in the email I just opened.

The role that technology plays in our lives is paramount. We have increasingly more access to information and cannot deny the global implications of our actions because we are confronted with images that illustrate them all too easily. And yet, these technological advances encourage the increased isolationism and solitude that we have already learned contributes to a decline in civic engagement and participation in public life. It will be the challenge and opportunity of today's leaders to strike a balance in its dependency on technology to aide in community building efforts without relying too heavily on the products that invite us to move further away from physical interaction.

**Increased Isolation: The Loss of Third Place and the Growth of Virtual Space**

Ray Oldenburg's book, The Great Good place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community, suggests the

impossibility to strike equilibrium in the life of individuals, and the society as whole, without a balance between three vital places in which life unfolds. According to Oldenburg, "one is domestic, a second is gainful or productive, and the third is inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it."[134] He continues by saying that, "each of these realms of human experience is built on associations and relationships appropriate to it; each has its own physical separate and distinct places; each must have its measure of autonomy from the others."[135]

Oldenburg's criticism of American society is that we, "the middle classes particularly are attempting a balancing act on a bipod consisting of home and work" and that " a third life is either deficient altogether, and the other two-thirds cannot be successfully integrated into a whole."[136] The absence of balance leads to increased pressures on the relationships in the areas that seek to accomplish that which Oldenburg argues is reserved distinctly for the third place, resulting in "alienation, boredom and stress."[137] Oldenburg invites an analysis of the trend that results when an individuals life, and communal engagement, becomes increasingly defined by silos.

In short, the nature of the third place is intended to "serve the human need for communion."[138] Oldenburg suggests that the third place provides a neutral ground upon which private relationships can be nurtured in the public realm and in which public relationships have a stage upon which to form. Such a setting is necessary because "if

---

[134] Oldenburg, 14
[135] Oldenburg 14-15
[136] Oldenburg, 15
[137] Oldenburg, 15
[138] Oldenburg, 20

friendships and other informal acquaintances are limited to those suitable for private life…the city becomes stultified."[139]

Individuals require third places in order that every social encounter does not bring with it the pressure to either host or be hosted. Additionally, individuals require the presence of third place in order to open up opportunities to encounter new people and perhaps new relationships that might be forged on the foundation of shared locality, interest or common need. A coffee shop, laundry mat and public park are all examples of third place.[140] The personal benefits an individual stands to gain as a result of the presence of third places include new perspective on society and relationships,[141] "spiritual tonic" that can raise one's sense of self and outlook,[142] and the opportunity to make friends and socialize with those outside the realm of those we feel comfortable to welcome into our most private quarters, our homes.[143]

Lest one think the impact of third place lies solely on the individual we ought to consider the consequences of third place as it relates to the larger society in which it is rooted. The purpose of third place is not simply "to [promote] a way of life in which the masses spend their time lounging about coffeehouses or taverns while all hope for a better world crumbles about them"[144] although these public places can "host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work."[145] More importantly, such places "are important to the unity of

---

[139] As quoted in Oldenburg, 22
[140] Oldenburg, 23
[141] Oldenburg 48
[142] Oldenburg, 55
[143] Oldenburg, 60
[144] Oldenburg, 66
[145] Oldenburg, 16

neighborhoods, cities and societies."[146] The existence of third places allows for a setting in which political, social and civic engagement can be nurtured. It can be a leveler, in that "it is accessible to the general public and does not set formal criteria of membership and exclusion."[147] As society becomes increasingly more private, the absence of third place increases the disconnect between an individual and her community and is often replaced with a growth in the time, energy and relationships that depend on virtual, rather than physical space.

In the conclusion of Bowling Alone, Putnam makes the following plea: "Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 American will spend less leisure time sitting passively alone in front of glowing screens and more time in active connection with our fellow citizens. Let us foster new forms of electronic entertainment and communication that reinforce community engagement rather than forestalling it."[148] His comment invites two reflections.

First, the Internet provides an opportunity for activity and engagement in a way that the television does not. A person living abroad can speak with and even see her loved ones through the computer when living abroad. One can interact with and learn from others interested in similar hobbies and/or issues; she can read and respond to a multitude of news data. She can build and maintain relationships due to the extraordinary presence of social media sites whose purpose is to do precisely that. In such a reality, finding a lost friend from childhood can be as easy as a Google or Facebook search.

---

[146] Oldenburg, 23
[147] Oldenburg, 24
[148] Putnam, 410

In contrast, for all the opportunities afforded to individuals because of the interactive nature of these technologies the possibility for increased distraction, boredom and passivity remains possible and in many cases probable. A student can sit behind his computer, surfing the Internet, playing Sudoku or shopping for consumer goods during the time his graduate school professor is conducting a course that depends on group participation in order to flourish. A single person in his twenties may find himself up until the wee hours of the morning in online chat rooms. While online, he feels connected to virtual friends who all of a sudden disappear when he logs off. Difficult situations that once demanded face to face discussions, or at least a phone call, can now be communicated in the form of text message, private chat and, in some cases, "defriending" someone in order to send a message that the status of the relationship has changed. The student, who was previously shopping online during class can instant message another classmate to say something about someone else in the classroom that would never be appropriate to say aloud. Such are the more detrimental consequences to these interactive forms of technology that come to replace or stand alongside the passivity invited by the television. One thing is certain, the multitude of destinations that stand at one's fingertips leads to the increased silos in which one obtains information, experiences feelings of acceptance or exclusion, and acts out her identity over the course of time.

## Expanding Oppositional Poles With a Disappearing Middle

It's been suggested that the religious landscape in America has become increasingly polarized and pluralistic. The poles that hold up the spectrum have the "highly religious" at one end and the "avowedly secular at the other."[149] In the middle

[149] Putnam and Campbell, 3

lies a shrinking group that identifies as moderate religious. The extent to which one group feels distant from another is greater as a result of the growing spectrum and yet there are fewer groups located at the center that help to mitigate the growing extremes on either end. It was mentioned that the distance between one's work and home has increased due to sprawl and mobility. So too, the distance between one's tradition of origin and religious associations as an adult has also grown in the lives of many Americans.

This polarization is due in part to the perception that organized religion and conservative politics are in a committed relationship with one another. Thus it is possible to locate a growth in the religious right as well as, those who denounce religion with an assertion that religious values preached in the organized sector and personal liberal political values are somehow in tension with one another. Given the increased polarization one might expect the effects on American culture to be detrimental. Putnam and Campbell suggest that because of the great mixing that is taking place in American households and communities, people are able to co-exist. This does not mean, however, that there are no consequences

The weakening of the moderate middle can lead to a vacuum. This results in a belief that religious identity can only be housed at the more fanatic extremes of organized religious life. We discussed earlier the blurring of the lines between news and entertainment. This too is relevant in the success of the extreme poles to gain reinforcement in the media that there is a certain look and feel to the religiously affiliated. This is complicated by the difficulty many progressive religious organizations experience in an attempt to draw clear boundaries while remaining inherently open to the diverse

backgrounds and beliefs of potential members. Introduce alternative and new ways of understanding the definition of membership and clarity as to who is in and who is not becomes confusing.

## Breaking Down The Walls/Clarifying Boundaries

The story of American life since World War II has been one of increased isolationism and exit from formal public life. In some ways, it can be argued that more walls have been put up between individuals who previously left the privacy of their homes in order to participate in community and social interactions. At the same time, the Internet has played a substantial role in creating access to spaces in which there are virtually no walls and few limitations.

The Internet has changed the ways in which individuals build relationships and profoundly altered the way in which people are able to build and connect with community. As the world of information opens up and turnaround time for communication is instantaneous the diversity of what is available to people and the rapid pace at which processes are able to happen has the potential to create tremendous confusion as to what limitations exist.

Both the presence and lack of boundaries plays an important role in how groups form. Different groups in the American Jewish community have come to understand the nature of boundaries in a variety of ways. For the more traditionally Orthodox, the authority of the Jewish legal tradition often translates into clearly defined boundaries that allow an individual to locate herself either within or outside of the group. The more progressive the movement, the more liberties they take to create a large tent in efforts to

respond to the needs of a diverse and varied profile of American Jews. Both have positive and negative consequences that result.

Whatever the case, boundaries drawn too starkly or that are otherwise unclear can be either a motivator or inhibitor when it comes to organizational participation. The research indicates that while public opinion seems to desire fewer and fewer boundaries, with the youngest sectors of the population championing this cause, the lack of clear boundaries is also a contributing factor to increased feelings of alienation, loneliness and boredom mentioned earlier.

Rabbi Eli Kanfer takes this precise issue up in his book, Empowered Judaism: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us About Building Vibrant Jewish Communities. Kanfer suggest that it is possible to define clear boundaries while remaining open to everyone who wishes to come in.[150] Kanfer believes that one reason for the success of independent minyanim, for example Kehilat Hadar in New York City, is its ability to translate its vision in a way that has "energized hundreds of people to take hold of their own Jewish life and express it in community."[151]

Kanfer thinks that boundaries lead to openness. In this sense he believes that "boundaries – like time – are not for the sake of boundaries themselves, but for the sake of opening new possibilities."[152] For Kanfer, "when basic expectations are clear, people feel freer to open up and experiment."[153] This argument is often used to support the opinion that Jewish law provides such boundaries necessary for individual and communal

---

[150]Rabbi Elie Kanfer. *What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us About Building Vibrant Jewish Communities.* (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010), 13.
[151] Kanfer, 13
[152] Kanfer, 47
[153] Kanfer, 47

growth. But, the halchically observant need not have a monopoly on the suggestion that clear boundaries, whether derived from Jewish law or values and ideas can help to strengthen one's sense of self and the identity of the communities they might choose to belong.

## Increasing Choices in an Otherwise Open Market:

Americans have an increasing number of choices available to them in every sector of life, including religion. This is true both in one's ability to move from one religion to another, as well as, to move along the religious spectrum of the religion they inherited. According to Putnam and Campbell, "religion is highly fluid" and leads many Americans to feel that it is "perfectly natural to refer to one's religion as a 'preference' instead of as a fixed characteristic."[154]

With the freedom to make choices, Americans are able to take advantage of a vast array of religious options, including the choice not to hold a religious identity or affiliate with a religious community. This group of people is what Putnam and Campbell refer to as "the nones" which we will focus on next. Putnam and Campbell suggest that, "religious identity in America has become less inherited and fixed and more chosen and changeable."[155] According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "more than one-quarter of American adults, (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion – or no religion at all.[156]

[154] Putnam and Campbell, 4
[155] Putnam and Campbell, 135
[156] http://religions.pewforum.org/reports

The data applies to the American Jewish community as well. The 2006 Faith Matters Survey, conveyed the number of individuals left the faith of or rarely attend services in the religious tradition held by their parents. The survey found that 20% of Jews have moved away from Judaism with an additional 55% responding a lapse in their Jewish involvement.[157]

This movement suggests a change in rootedness, reflected in the demographic studies and increased mobility mentioned earlier. It is not just an increase in physical movement away from religious affiliation or in movement among various religious traditions. The doors to many religious institutions are open wider than they have been previously, allowing for people to walk in and out in a more rapid fashion. This "revolving door" phenomenon supports the notion that "Americans seem less firmly anchored in our various religious heritages than we were a generation or two ago."[158]

Putnam and Campbell believe that this state of flux contributes to increased polarization in America; "that people gradually, but continually, sort themselves into like-minded clusters – their commonality defined not by one religion, but also by the social and political beliefs that go along with their religion." It is interesting to note that the observation above suggests that in increasing numbers people are leaving the religious tradition of their birth, in part because the operating values and ideas do not resonate with the personal beliefs a person holds.[159]

This results in what Putnam and Campbell refer to as "religious churn" which, they say, results in "a jumble of relationships among people of varying religious backgrounds,

---

[157] Figure 5.1, Putnam and Campbell, 138
[158] Putnam and Campbell, 139
[159] Putnam and Campbell, 4 - 5

often within extended families and even households, which keeps religious polarization from pulling the nation apart."[160] The ability to choose one's religious community, rather than inherit it, leads to simultaneous processes of polarization and pluralization in American religious life.

This shift in thinking about religious identity finds itself in tension with the traditional understanding that Judaism is a religion of descent. For a tradition that is grounded in the notion of covenant and obligation, the adoption of one's freedom to choose as an operating value for religious identification stand to have profound consequences for one's sense of belonging and the impact on organized Jewish involvement.

Perhaps one of the most important observations we need to consider in regards to both identity formation and engagement in Jewish communal life rests on the role of choice. Rabbi Tzi Blanchard observes, "For the economically and socially successful contemporary Jew, America is primarily a society of voluntary association at work and at play."[161] He describes the milieu of 21st century America as a culture of individual choice. According to Blanchard, "individuals believe that they have the right to choose their own identity and ways it is expressed publicly." As a result, "there is no group of experts or authorities recognized as legitimate gatekeepers to the Jewish institutions – synagogues, agencies, federations – where Jewish identity is expressed."[162] We can infer from this the possibility that Sheilaism has made its way into the public realm and feeds a culture that prides individualism to the highest possible degree.

---

160 Putnam and Campbell, 5
161 Blanchard, 40
162 Blanchard, 5

This individualism is present among clergy as well as members of the Jewish community. The Reform movement grants autonomy to its clergy to decide whether to officiate at wedding ceremonies where only one member of the couple is Jewish. Students receive many opportunities to engage with the tensions that go into making this decision but the power to decide where to draw the line lies in her personal choice.

As a movement, we have struggled to strike a balance between individual choice at the center and a greater collective norm that informs how individuals are to act. We are afraid to place expectations on our members because we worry that with so much choice they will go elsewhere if we impose expectations they consider unnecessary or unfair. We assume that the majority of the synagogue members will participate occasionally, at best. We often make adjustments to address individual needs at the expense of the values we hold for community in its ideal form. We can choose to go to another community similar to the one we leave. We can opt to try on different ideas within the same religious tradition. We can also move out of the religion into which we were born and explore another religious tradition altogether. The doors, while they may serve as a barrier for some, are often open to those in search of a spiritual home.

Choice is not operative only as it relates to which religion one might choose but also includes the option to exit the religious realm of American life completely. This leads to another important trend and crucial to those thinking about the growing demographic phenomenon Putnam and Campbell refer to as "the nones."

## The Rise of the Nones

The data introduced in the previous section regarding the change in one's religious identity over the course of one's lifespan includes the possibility for an

individual to shed herself of religious identity and become classified as a "none," which represents "the third largest 'religious' group in the United States."[163] A "none" is "defined by the absence of religious affiliation."[164] These people respond that they identify with no particular religion and do not feel as if religious tradition or values inform their daily lives and choices. The "nones" represent approximately 22% of the U.S. population, according to the 2006 Faith Matters Survey, while the Jews fall just short of 2%.[165]

The growth of this demographic begins to increase exponentially in the 1990s as Americans become increasingly concerned that American politics and religion are becoming too conservative. This group is mostly comprised of "young Americans [who] came to view religion, according to one survey, as judgmental, homophobic and too political."[166] Earlier I discussed the shocks that have impacted American religious life since World War II: the sexual revolution, the rise of religious conservatism and the increase of "the nones."[167] This final shock is significant and growing.

The data corresponds between those who say they have no religious preference and those who do not attend religious services. We might understand the former as representative of religious identity and the latter as religious affiliation. One statistic suggests that between 1973 and 2008 the percentage of people who had no religious preference (the "nones") increased from 6% to 17% by 2008. Accordingly, the number of people who did not attend religious services also increased from 14% in1973 to 22%.

---

[163] Putnam and Campbell, 17
[164] Putnam and Campbell, 17
[165] Putnam and Campbell, 17. Figure 1.2
[166] As quoted in Putnam and Campbell, 121
[167] Putnam and Campbell, 22

In regards to generational succession, "cohorts of whom barely 5 percent say they have no religious affiliation are being replaced by cohorts of whom roughly 25 percent say they have no religion."[168]

This data suggests that an increasing number of Americans feel that religion is less important in both their identity and in their community involvement. Additionally, there has been a significant increase in those who feel that religion and politics are intimate partners in America, which is one reason an increasing number of Americans choose to exit from the religious arena.

This information requires us to think about other factors. Because one is defined as a "none" does not necessarily indicate a lack of belief in God or interest in spiritual growth. "They reject conventional religious affiliations, while not entirely giving up on their religious feelings."[169] For those interested in questions about membership and belonging, this growing group of unaffiliated Americans stands potentially as an otherwise untapped group that could become inspired by opportunities for identifying with a particular religious tradition and community.

Over the course of the last fifty years, the poles that represent either end of the religious spectrum have galvanized, depleting the sense of place for those who stand at the center. The center has become muddled and this may represent one reason why it is difficult for those who do not identify strongly with one ideological group or the other to locate themselves along the spectrum of religiosity.

This represents a great challenge and opportunity to progressive religious leadership, including those within the Jewish community. It is true that the changes and

---

[168] Putnam and Campbell, 122 – 123. Includes data from Figure 4.10.
[169] Putnam and Campbell, 126.

modifications that progressive religious movements represent find it difficult to manage the issue of authority. However, the data indicates that it is the progressive religious groups that stand to be strengthened if these movements can find creative and meaningful ways to stand apart from their counterparts in promoting change and in celebrating and acknowledging the role of individual choice.

## God, Space and Time

Most of the observations in this section have focused on the ways in which society has changed and the affects of that on individual identity. Another area that deserves careful attention has to do with the role of God. We have already discussed the ways in which technology has increased the number of activities and opportunities available to those with Internet access or who can afford the various technologies that allow for multiple ways to engage with this information. We are increasingly plugged in yet Jewish tradition suggests that relationship with God results from making time and space to convene with the Divine. The world without a break is the world as imagined by Pharaoh; the world as envisioned by God necessitates intentional breaks from the otherwise ongoing efforts to be productive.

In Exodus, Chapter 5, Moses goes to Pharaoh to request that the Israelite people might go out to the desert to worship God for three days. Pharaoh denies this request on the account that they are not to cease from their labor.[170] Dvora Steinmetz, in a session with the 3rd cohort of Hebrew Union College Rabbinic Education Fellows suggested that Pharaoh feared the ideas that might arise if the Israelites were permitted to take the time that Moses requested. Pharaoh could not afford for this group, both enslaved and

[170] Exodus 5:5

numerous, to have the space in which their thoughts might focus on such concepts as freedom and God.

Steinmetz suggests that this is perhaps why the restatement of the commandment to observe Shabbat comes immediately following the instructions for how the, now free, Israelites are supposed to construct the *mishkan*. In Egypt, the Israelites were forced by Pharaoh to build with no time to rest; time that could give rise to ideas that could challenge Pharaoh's power. Once the Israelites are free they enter into a covenant with God. In turn, God distinguishes boundaries in order that the Israelites can be both productive in their building of a place to worship God and also observe the commandments to guard one day for the purposes of active rest.[171]

How does this relate to the issues of time, space and God in 21st century America? We live in a society that puts increasing demands on time. While individuals have a tremendous amount of choice concerning the ways they fill time, most would agree that there do not seem to be enough hours in the day to accomplish all the things one would like. This dilemma leads people to feel as if they are often pulled in multiple directions simultaneously. Perhaps, it is possible, that the increased demand on time and the tendency to direct their energies in multiple directions leads individuals to experience their day to day environment in a way similar to that of the enslaved Israelite; namely without any intentional time and space freed up in order to reflect. Thus there is no time to consider something different than their current reality. If an individual cannot imagine something different than what she currently experiences the possibility for transformation and change becomes increasingly less likely.

[171] Text study presented at the Mandel Fellowship Retreat in Boston, January 2010.

Such an experience not only has implications for the individual but also for the social environment where creativity is sacrificed and the opportunity to imagine different realities is undermined. If we succumb to the belief that it is not possible to make time for that which may not be tangibly productive, but in turn could be spiritually rewarding we dismiss the possibility to change how we view time and employ it to our creative advantage.

In a TED talk titled Ken Robinson Says Schools Kill Creativity, Ken Robinson makes the case that one of the biggest challenges facing our world today is that our education systems are killing our creativity.[172] In part, this is because, in our society, we "are not prepared to be wrong." He clarifies that being wrong and creativity are not the same thing but our fear of being wrong has the power to squash our desire to be creative. Robinson says "if you are not prepared to be wrong, you will never come up with anything original." According to Robinson, children demonstrate creativity when they are young but "by the time they get to be adults most kids have lost that capacity."

Robinson says that this fear of being wrong plagues our business and our schools; that "mistakes have become stigmatized" in our society. If the "worst thing you can do is make a mistake" than "we are educating people out of their creative capacities." The loss of creativity could be one of the most detrimental shifts to take place in society and could create a different kind of enslavement, not identical but also not completely divorced from the slavery of the Israelites under Pharaoh's rule in Egypt.

The story of the covenant between the Israelite people and God unfolds in an environment of ample space, in time and place, in which they have entered. Stories of

---

[172] February 2006
http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

false gods emerge when the Israelites attempted to fill physical space with tangible objects to temporarily calm their fear that the God they could not see may not be able to protect them and offer the guidance necessary in order to reach the Promised Land. The generation that constructed the golden calf was prohibited from entering the Promised Land.

God can be seen as a problematic term given all the associations previously mentioned with religion, not to mention the rise of fanatic activities often carried out "in the name of God." Still, a relationship with God may be one way to counter the tendency to view the world through the prism of one self. The portrait of Jews, according to the Pew Forum, shows that 41% of American Jews believe in God with absolute certainty, while an additional 31% are fairly certain in their belief. Of those surveyed, only 10% responded that they do not believe in God with an additional 7% unsure or unwilling to respond to the question.[173]

This information indicates that actually American Jews have a relatively high rate of belief in the Divine regardless of the declining numbers in formal religious membership and the concerns associated with religious identity. We learned earlier that the rabbis were not responsible for contributing to the repair of the walls of the city because they received protection from God. It is possible that today's American Jew does not feel a need to go inside the walls of Jewish life in order to connect with God.

A belief, however, does not indicate an ongoing relationship wit God. The portrait of American Jews suggests that 68% of the population attend services either a few times a year or never. When it comes to prayer, 44% of the population surveyed

[173] http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits

responded that they pray seldom or never, with 79% responding that they feel as if their prayers are answered seldom, less often or never.[174]

This data suggests that despite the fact that a large portion of the American Jewish population believes in God, there is high concentration of believers who are not regularly exercising that belief which may limit the extent to which one's relationship with God might inform their daily lives and activities. The regularity with which one engages in Jewish ritual and observance has implications for the three relationships we identified earlier – the relationship one has with her individual self, those she cultivates with other people and her relationship with God.

In each of these relationships it is important for a person to achieve wholeness. We have already learned that numerous tensions arise along the journey to find balance between an individual's needs and the requirements of the community at large. She has options to move rapidly in and out of community and to walk through a variety of doorways some that provide access while others remain locked. Technological advances provide more opportunities to get information and to be entertained. While they allow for activity and participation, this is often in a virtual realm and takes place in timeframes linked to the convenience of an individual. The result is a society where one finds an increasingly siloed, individualized experience. Yet it is human nature to crave relationship and to meet others in places that promote shared values and common interests.

[174] http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits

## VIII: Recommendations

That we stand at a crossroads in American Jewish history should not be a surprise to anyone. The qualitative and quantitative data reveals that identity formation and membership affiliation is increasingly more complicated and difficult as the world becomes a more fluid and flexible place. This is true especially in America where the degree of openness and freedom is among the greatest in the world and the level of affluence, which allows for increased consumption in all areas of information and life affords people the opportunity to move around and try on different individual and collective identities at various times in their lives.

These new realities of increased technology, mobility, and options for participation coupled with renewed pressures on time, growing isolationism and a devaluing of efforts towards that which does not yield financial reward, present challenges to both the individual and the community. Perhaps it is helpful to first paint a picture of the profile of the American Jew today, remembering that no one profile will fit all people. We can still gain certain insights by identifying some generalizations that define the contemporary American Jew.

### In Today's World, How Do You Jew?

Today's American Jew, especially if they were born in the last quarter of the 20th century, is likely to be the most flexible, fluid Jew in history. It may be true that there were other moments in history where Jews challenged social norms, questioned the relevance of Jewish tradition as it relates to her life and even had the choice to participate or withdraw from her Jewish community. But, never before

has an average Jew had the access to information, technology and wealth to allow for the variety of options available to her today.

Likewise, there has never been a time in previous generations where individuals could benefit from the scope, speed and range of technological developments. In this contemporary era, the technology and communications revolutions are providing opportunities to simultaneously expand one's sense of reach and to help define who is part of a community and who is not. The results are overwhelming in both their positive and negative implications.

Today's American Jew may or may not invest energies in exploring the role that Judaism plays in her identity. Far too often one does not invest time to consider whether the values she holds as an American and a Jew are in tension or in alignment with one another.

**The Pulse of Creativity and Innovation in American Jewish Life Today**

The forces that pose the greatest challenges for American Judaism represent also the same forces that inspire some leaders and organizations to believe that the possibility that a Jewish renaissance is upon us. Perhaps this is one reason why the 21st century has already given birth to a tremendous number of new ideas and possibilities for Jewish engagement and for building community.

The final piece this paper is dedicated to highlighting some of the exciting things happening in the milieu of American Jewish life today. Here, we will consider the possibilities for how these might grow into new models upon which the role of individual identity and community membership might be defined in ways that differ

from those that operated previously in American Jewish life but still challenged by today's realities.

The paragraphs that follow speak to some of what is already happening. Three suggestions for new models that build on these exciting happenings will be introduced. These models may not be possible everywhere, but a clear sense of the new operating assumptions that define the American Jew and inform the American Jewish community will be important for anyone wishing to engage the questions of belonging and issues of membership.

## A Taste of What's Already Happening

There are many exciting things happening in the American Jewish landscape at this moment. Creative and talented Jewish leaders are creating opportunities for Jews to participate in communities committed to Jewish learning and intoxicated with positive spirit. Rabbi Sharon Brous leads the Ikar community in Los Angeles. In a conversation with the 2012 ordination class of the Hebrew Union College she said, "I'm less concerned about what a Conservative Jew is or is not supposed to do. I care about people who care about being Jewish and want to explore what that means in their lives."[175] Rabbis like Sharon Brous and Noah Kushner, in San Francisco, are shedding off denominational affiliations in order to expand the possibilities for progressive Jews who want to participate in Jewish communities filled with spirit and committed to deep Jewish learning. Both of these women have been identified by Jewish and non-Jewish media sources as women to watch in the

[175] February 2, 2012, Hebrew Union College Ordination Seminar presentation on the topic: "Rabbis and the Changing American Jewish Community."

American Jewish community**,** in part because they seek to provide opportunities for young adults who desire a Jewish community with a new kind of flavor.

The opportunities for Jews to engage culturally are at an all time high. Unfortunately, JDub records closed its doors. There is still something important to learn from a period that gave birth to a Jewish record label. Former Development Director, Jaime Walman wrote a compelling piece in August, 2011 in which she suggested that the Jewish community will need to consider the challenges to organizations and individuals who wish to create innovative access points for Jewish engagement. In the piece, Walman asked: "How do we ensure that professionals working within these innovative organizations can continue to pursue their passions, inspiring other young Jews like themselves while also having sustainable careers?"[176] Innovation, she infers, is not without cost.

JDub was not able to keep its doors open, but there are other cultural happenings in the American Jewish community that continue to thrive. Jewlicious is one example. The main attraction of the Jewlicious community is an annual music festival in Southern California; this year it will take place on a boat.[177] In addition, the community sets up "Shabbes tents" at large music festivals to provide space at otherwise non-Jewish events for those who wish to honor their Jewish commitments as part of the festival experience. www.Shabbattent.org is the virtual site that has helped to organize tents at major music festivals, including Bonnaroo,

[176] http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/former-jdub-staff-addresses-real-issues-in-closing/
[177] www.jewlicious.com

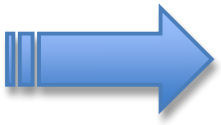
Coachella, Langerado, Burning Man and Phish festivals.[178] Such is a perfect example of opportunities to blend one's Jewish practice with the happenings in the greater society.

There are new movements being born, intentionally pluralistic and grounded around topics and projects, rather than theology. One example of this is the Jewish Food Movement. Led by Nigel Savage, Hazon is the umbrella organization for this movement. It promotes Jewish inspiration and sustainable communities.[179] The organization was founded with a bike ride. Today, Hazon organizes the largest Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)[180] project in the American Jewish community, hosts multiple bike rides each year and holds an annual conference that serves as the primary gathering for individuals and Jewish organizations concerned with food and the environment.

[178] http://shabbattent.com/
[179] www.hazon.org
[180] CSA stands for community supported agriculture. A household can buy into a CSA by purchasing a share. During the summer season, each household receives a share that has in it the produce growing on the farm. The idea is that the community invests in the farm and reaps the benefits of what grows. In addition to receiving seasonal fruits and vegetables in their weekly share, the recipients also commit to the ups and downs that are possible in any given growing season. When there is abundance, they participate in the enjoyment of the bounty and when there is hardship they become aware because their share may lack the variety or bulk in what they receive.

# *Three Models You Might Consider….*

*And an invitation to imagine your own!*



W H E R E D O Y O U J E W

# Community Rabbi

*In today's world a Jew should be able to find his/her rabbi in the coffee shop, at the local farmer's market and even in the bar...meet them where they're at.*

**What's a Community Rabbi?**

**A resource** for individuals looking to explore Jewish identity and engage in Jewish learning outside the traditional synagogue model.

**An organizer** of micro-communities who want to build Jewish community with their peers.

**A teacher** able to provide rich Jewish content at gatherings of likeminded people who are interested in learning more about Judaism and gain skills to live Jewishly informed lives.

**Someone** who has the knowledge of Jewish tradition and ideas and can help those intimidated by organized Jewish life to gain access in order that they may become more comfortable with integrating Judaism into their lives.

**A model** that challenges normative assumptions about what Jewish leadership looks like and where Jewish engagement can take place.

## Who are the people in your neighborhood?

The world today doesn't operate according to the same boundaries that it used to. As a matter of fact, it is often hard to identify any clear boundaries in a highly fluid and flexible world. While the way in which people form community may change, the desire to build meaningful relationships and be a part of community does not. It is our human nature to want to be in relationship. Today we just have more opportunities for how to build community.

**Nullam hendrerit Maec enas non justo a Nam iaculis porttitor enim. Sed purus eros**

**consectetuer erat. quam egestas euismod. risus. Maecenas ac nullam gravida.**

Many young adults look back on their years in Hebrew school and wonder about the value of their Jewish education. Even if you hated Hebrew school, you probably can think of at least one Jewish holiday or a big Jewish idea that excited you as a child. Why not find ways as an adult to reignite that excitement?

There's a new rabbi in town and she's not your bubbie's rebbe. She was hired because she likes to host people for Shabbat and wants them to stay for a Friday night jam session after dinner. She will invite you to meet her for happy hour after work and to get on the bus to the local farm to celebrate the harvest festival of Sukkot.

This rabbi knows you have a lot of choices when it comes to your social life and wants to introduce you to other people looking for fun experiences that help you do Jewish in ways you never thought possible.

## The Community Rabbi

At the 2012 URJ Biennial, incoming URJ President, Rabbi Richard Jacobs addressed the trend of declining membership that most every organization in America must confront. Jacobs said, "While 80% of Jews affiliate with a synagogue at some point in their lives, their engagement tends to be temporary and unfortunately tenuous." He went on to state that, "no more than 50% of American Jews are members of synagogues at any one time. "[181]

Jacobs also addressed the changing trends within the Jewish community as it relates to synagogue membership. On this topic he said,

"Jews once joined synagogues out of civic duty. It was just the right thing to do. But by the 1970s they joined at least for their children to get a Bar or Bat Mitzvah but increasingly left with the last *hora* at the Bar or Bat Mitzvah party…a newer trend indicates that fewer and fewer Jews will join, even for their children. Of all the movements, Reform leads the way."[182]

Jacobs concern stems, in part, from the fact that the Reform movement has depended on strong synagogue membership for its own stability.

In addition, Jacobs recognizes the responsibility of progressive Jewish leadership to acknowledge the increased likelihood that Jews will remain unaffiliated and encouraged the Reform movement to consider this a primary challenge to address under his leadership. Jacobs recognizes the potential to meet this growing group of American Jews and even claimed that "the fastest growing group in Jewish communal life is the lifelong unaffiliated and the lifelong uninspired." He concluded his comments on declining membership trends by acknowledging that, "this is not what we mean by excellence." The need to focus on

[181] **http://urj.org/biennial11/webcast/sunday/**
[182] ibid.

initiatives outside the walls of the synagogue will be crucial if Jewish communities want to engage today's American Jew.

One possibility for this type of engagement is the creation of community rabbi positions. The best model of this, to date, has been a position created by Hillel International in recent years. In recognizing that a majority of college students would not come to Hillel to participate in Jewish programming, a senior level Jewish educator position was created on a handful of American college campuses. These educators, many of them rabbis, have been hired to work outside of the Hillel building and to build relationships and offer opportunities for Jewish engagement to those least likely to come in the building yet they were excited about the opportunity to meet other Jews and learn more about Jewish tradition.

I recently spoke with a rabbi who filled one of these positions during the first two years after he was ordained. Rabbi Joel Nickerson talks about the dynamic and creative nature of his job. He recalls that almost every meeting he had took place in a local coffee shop, bar or other public establishment that many traditionalist may find to be unlikely places in which one might offer rabbinic guidance or engage in Jewish learning. He saw his responsibilities as twofold: to be accessible as a rabbi for individuals wishing to explore some aspect of their Jewish identity and to create small groups of folks who were interested in meeting other Jews, wanting to learn more about Judaism and Jewish tradition in a warm and non-judgmental setting.[183]

Rabbi Nickerson spoke of the tremendous opportunity to work on an east coast college campus and find creative ways to meet Jews and invite them to become

[183] Conversation with Rabbi Joel Nickerson over lunch in Los Angeles, January 2012.

involved. By the time Rabbi Nickerson left to take on a new rabbinic position, he had succeeded in forming 7 micro communities and realized that the potential for the work to continue was high. College campuses are a likely place for such a position to emerge, but some cities are now beginning to create community rabbi positions, not only for university students, but in cities where a large number of unaffiliated Jews live and might benefit from a similar approach. Baltimore is one such city.

The Baltimore Jewish community is currently in the process of hiring a community rabbi of its own. The position they have created is mirrored, in many ways, after the position held by Rabbi Nickerson. The job description requires someone who is both creative and entrepreneurial in spirit. This person aside from being able to demonstrate a strong Jewish knowledge and have the ability to provide rabbinic leadership to those she might work with, must also be willing to create opportunities for unaffiliated Jews in unlikely places like sports clubs and bars. The ideal candidate will be someone that unaffiliated and uninspired Jews in their 20's and 30's will be able to identify with and can translate her passion for Jewish life and practice in a way that may encourage others to participate as well.

These positions, in large part are grant funded which indicates that they may or may not find their niche in the long run. However, the potential of a community rabbi position to reach the unaffiliated, which we previously learned is at least 50% of all American Jews at any given moment is incredible. If such a position is successful, the face of who the rabbi is and where one encounters their Jewish leadership is virtually flipped on its head from the start.

We have already learned that a growing number of people are uninterested or unmoved to become formal members of a synagogue. Many find what is offered in these places to be irrelevant to their lives and the people they tend to meet in these places do not necessarily mirror the type of people someone, especially the younger generations, are hoping to meet. Without an interest in either the content that is offered or the possibilities for growing meaningful relationships it should not cause much wonder why the number of unengaged Jews grows every day.

We have also learned that many of the unaffiliated Jews are not necessarily disinterested in Judaism. In fact, in a city like Baltimore, the majority of Jews including the unaffiliated say that being Jewish is quite important to them and Jewish relationships and community are as well. The unaffiliated are likely to hold perceptions and assumptions about the synagogue, and other Jewish institutions, that leads them to engage informally, at best, and more likely through the private relationships they already have.

The community rabbi could create opportunities to engage unaffiliated Jews in interesting and meaningful Jewish learning, facilitating ongoing opportunities for individuals to expand their Jewish circles with gatherings in places people might already want to go to and with the kind of people they are hoping to meet. It resembles a *havurah* while also having access to religious leadership similar to that of a religious institution. The Jewish community recognizes the potential to build Jewish relationships in unlikely places and has created many opportunities to date for young Jews to meet one another at happy hour events and other social gatherings.

The value of a position like the community rabbi rests in the potential for meaningful Jewish engagement to take place, and for the relationships that are forged to do so alongside real Jewish learning. Happy hours and matzah balls are fantastic ways to get together a large group of Jews for the sake of networking and socializing, but this is the low hanging fruit. The task of the community rabbi is to create opportunities for individuals Jews and also for the sake of building Jewish community.

An example is to create Shabbat groups. We have already learned that Americans spend increasingly more time in private settings, due in part to the lack of third places. The thought that a person who may not have a tremendous confidence when it comes to her Jewish identity would host a Shabbat dinner is unlikely. Many Jews who make up the demographic this position would work with are likely to have only childhood memories of formal Jewish engagement and could feel as if they are somehow ill equipped to host a group of people for a Shabbat meal. They fear they do not know the prayers, they might offend someone who knows more than they do or that they might be found to be Jewishly ignorant.

The community rabbi would invite these people to first observe and then to participate in different aspects of the Shabbat meal. This could include making challah, lighting candles, saying Kiddush, breaking bread and even learning songs they might sing at the dinner table after the meal. The rabbi would learn if any of these people had special talents. For example maybe someone plays a musical instrument, and find ways to encourage individuals to contribute their talents while

creating a Shabbat atmosphere likely to challenge their assumptions about what such a meal looks and feels like.

The rabbi would set up the next step she would hope these individuals might wish to take: to host a Shabbat dinner of their own. The rabbi would make herself available to help the host prepare for the meal and also attend the dinner so that the host would not feel as if she was alone in her attempt to create a Shabbat dinner experience for others. The host and the rabbi would work together to identify the guest list. Perhaps the host has a group in mind of people she wants to have over for Shabbat dinner. The rabbi might suggest the host invite a few people she does not yet know but the rabbi has had the occasion to meet during her work in the community.

Success could be measured on multiple levels. Did the Shabbat dinner attendees have a good experience; were people engaged and happy? What occurred at the get together to indicate it was a Jewish gathering? Upon reflection, did the host find the experience to be a positive one and would she be interested in hosting a group like this in the future? Did anyone who attended the meal suggest that he might be interested in hosting something similar in the future? Did the rabbi meet people she did not yet know who she will follow up with that she can invite into a relationship?

One goal of a rabbi whose job is to work in a setting, unbounded by walls, is to make opportunities for Jewish engagement and meeting other Jews accessible to those who are not going to walk through the doors of the synagogue, either at a specific point in their life or, as Rabbi Jacobs suggested, possibly ever. The rabbi has

the opportunity to be extremely creative in the places she imagines hold potential to simultaneously challenge one's assumptions about what Jewish community engagement looks like and also to provide rich opportunities for people to grow in their Jewish lives and relationships.

Such a position if seen as part of the larger Jewish people can also serve as a bridge to help people move into more formal Jewish engagement if they feel moved to do so. It is possible that the synagogue rabbis, in a community that has a position like this are likely to feel territorial and worry that a position like this could present competition when it comes to officiating at lifecycle events, especially *simchas* such as weddings and the birth of new babies. This is a real concern and cannot be taken lightly.

It will be important for a person who holds such a position to see herself as a conduit to other Jewish engagement. She will need to be in relationship with the synagogue rabbis in order that the work she does outside the walls of the synagogue is informed by the possibilities that exist inside the synagogue. She must be a team player. It will be an asset to the entire Jewish community for such a person to know the cultures and unique characters of the local synagogues and to work to make connections between the unaffiliated and the rabbis should they get to a juncture where they want to become more formally involved in Jewish life. In this way, such a position should not be seen as standing in competition with the synagogue rabbis but as a partnership for the sake of strengthening the Jewish people as a whole.

The work of such a rabbi will have limitations and is unlikely to result in growing an infrastructure intended to formally organize the constituents she works

with. Such a position is necessary to respond to the more fluid, less committal American Jew we spoke of earlier and may not need to grow to offer the same things the synagogue might. It is important to realize that not every model needs to meet all the needs held by Jewish individuals and Jewish communities. But, the possibility to meet the specific needs of the large proportion of unaffiliated and uninspired Jews is great and should be considered seriously.

A position like this can create opportunities to experiment and engage in ways that might be difficult for organizations and institutions. However, financial viability of such positions in the long run will be difficult if they are only to exist off of grant funding and temporary resources. It will be the responsibility of rabbis, community leaders and funders to imagine models for long-term sustenance. The question of membership is particularly puzzling.

The community rabbi is hired to respond to the trends where the drop-in/drop-out rate is quite high. The programming offered through such a position will have to be a balance between episodic opportunities for engagement and ongoing options that allow for people to engage with Judaism and other people on a deeper level over time. Festival celebrations around *Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot* and other Jewish holiday celebrations happen once a year; learning groups and Shabbat *havarot* can take place more regularly.

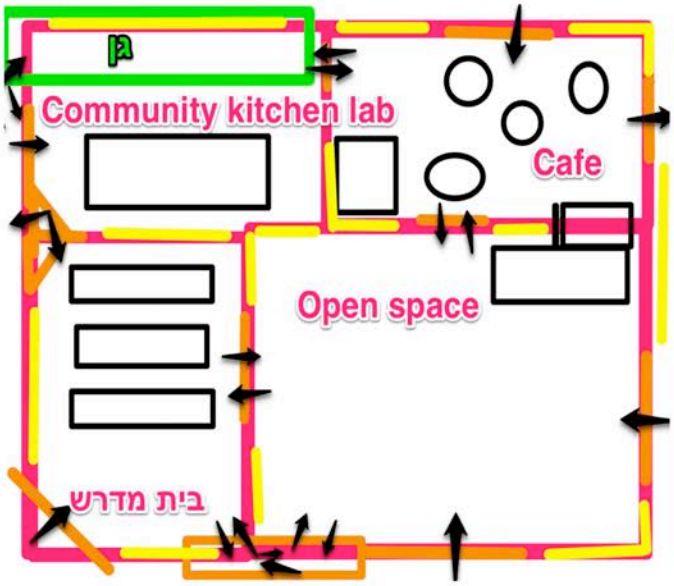
If we are to prioritize Jewish meaning before the issue of dues is introduced, then a position like this can be seen as a great setting in which people can first engage and then consider how to offer support. Such a position is informed in some ways by the Chabad approach, which Rabbi Jacobs says provides a model in which

we “form relationships of real caring” before “handing out membership forms.” The communities that spearhead these community rabbi positions will have to confront the challenge of long-term viability and what, if any, membership models might emerge from such a structure. Perhaps, if these communities are successful in seeing the shared work between the synagogue rabbi and the community rabbi, in the future the community synagogues might each absorb a fraction of the cost to provide the salary to hire skilled professionals to fill the role of community rabbi and ensure that person has the resources to offer opportunities to those who, after they become engaged and more secure in their Jewish identities might desire to become members of a synagogue community where they can build on their experiences fostered by the community rabbi position.

# JVAC

JEWISH VENUE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

Where the gastronomic and cultural Jews find each other. A place that feels like coming home.




Bet Midrash * Open Space * Eden Cafe * Educational Kitchen * Community Garden

## There are so many ways to get involved at the JVAC:

* **Join us** for lunch in Eden Cafe; a cafe that prides itself on being kosher, comfy and conscious or attend one of our many classes that blend creativity and Jewish tradition.
* **Open a Tab** and enjoy discounted prices on workshops and learning opportunities. Refill your tab as you go.
* **Become a member** and take full advantage of all areas of programming and celebrations that take place at the JVAC throughout the year.
* **Earn brownie points** by contributing your time and talents. In exchange for your contribution of time and heart we give you credit to apply to programs you want to attend.
* **Come one, come all** to special celebrations throughout the year as we move to the rhythm of the Jewish calendar.
* **Give back** by getting involved with our community kitchen and participate in our weekly food service to those in need.

## Where to start

Learn through discussing and doing
Cook your favorite Jewish foods and learn the stories behind their meaning in Jewish tradition and culture.
Attend art exhibits, meet the artists and learn how Judaism informs their work.
Help prepare meals for those in our community in need of some extra love and support.
Eat your favorite Jewish foods, prepared with ingredients that resonate with Jewish values and ideals

## JVAC space available for community gatherings and private events

Inquire about ways to enjoy the JVAC space for your group and family needs. The JVAC is available as a rental space for spiritual community gatherings, life cycle celebrations, private parties and large group gatherings. In addition to a substantial calendar of events, including daily, weekly and monthly activities, the JVAC is a convertible space that can suit the needs of various groups looking for a creative and inspiring space to further their own goals for Jewish learning and for the sake of building meaningful community. We look forward to partnering with you!

## The Jewish Venue for Arts and Culture

It isn't a JCC and it isn't a synagogue. In fact, a person walks into one room of the Jewish Venue for Arts and Culture and is most likely to feel like he has entered into a local art gallery; his visit motivated by the desire to see the latest exhibit on the otherwise white walls. Another person walks in through the doors of Eden Café; the tagline of the otherwise coffee-shop-feeling food establishment reads "kosher, conscious and comfy." She purchases a cup of soup and a sandwich, shares a meal with a friend and then stays to take advantage of the free Wi-Fi to do some work before returning to the office.

The Jewish Venue for Arts and Culture (JVAC) has four spaces on the inside, all intended to provide opportunities for community gatherings and Jewish cultural experiences. The kitchen not only provides the food sold in Eden Café but also is the host to ongoing classes and workshops where people are invited help make challah every Friday morning, learn about Jewish holidays through making the foods associated with them and help to prepare meals to feed the local residents in the community who would otherwise go hungry. Outside the kitchen is a community garden in which Jewish learning takes place and the produce is used to give local flavor to the food that comes out of the kitchen.

The café as mentioned previously operates on the values that it is to be kosher, conscious and comfy. The vision is that the food people eat invokes the spirit of Jewish tradition as well as a commitment to ensuring that consumer dollars spent here support businesses that care about what goes into their product and the people who help to produce the product. Finally, it is a place where people want to

linger, to spend time; to engage with others and also to sit for long hours in pursuit of their work and their dreams that they stand on deadline to meet.

An open space features rotating art exhibits, evocative to the eye and interesting to the lover of art. The themes are inspired by the vastness of Jewish tradition and identity. The artists who show their work may or may not be Jewish, but the themes and ideas presented should all have resonance with ideas that sprout up in Jewish tradition. This space is convertible in that it can be used for an art opening, a private party or a Shabbat service. The power of the space lies in its simplicity and flexibility.

The final space is a *bet midrash*, or a place of learning. With long open tables, and a library that features both traditionally Jewish and non-Jewish sources this will be the site of regular classes and opportunities to grow one's knowledge. Some of these opportunities will fit into an otherwise normative view of what Jewish learning looks like; many of these opportunities may not. There will be regular classes that engage within an area of Jewish literature. An example is a course on interesting topics that appear in the Talmud and the rabbinic legal codes. There will also be regular classes that engage with certain topics such as Shabbat and Judaism's views on the relationship between the individual and community. Many classes may not be understood as explicitly Jewish but have within them the potential to explore Jewish values and ideas. An example of such a class might be titled, "What Does Fair Trade Coffee Have to Do With a Stolen Lulav?"[184]

[184] Title of learning session from the 2010 Hazon Food Conference in Northern California.

The *bet midrash* will be a place that values diversity and encourages *machloket b'shamyaim*, debate for the sake of heaven. In Pirkei Avot 5:17 that rabbis teach that any dispute that takes place for the sake of heaven is destined to endure. The rabbis reference the debates that took place between the sages Hillel and Shamai. They disagreed on virtually everything and in the process gave birth to enduring wisdom for the Jewish people.

That is, the space will operate under the belief that people come to better know themselves and the ideas they wish to articulate when they are challenged and therefore, required to debate their point. It is a value in Jewish tradition to debate with one another. The possible reward of such debates is that everyone involved comes to better understand the issues and ideas that come up as part of that debate.

These different spaces that make up the JVAC are easily accessible to one another. It is possible that someone may walk in through the doors of the café and never set foot in the *bet midrash* or that someone will come to see an art installation in the open space and never realize that there is an educational kitchen attached to the open space. If someone walks through just one door of the JVAC, and never steps foot into another room, this is okay.

However, for those who choose to walk through multiple doors in the JVAC, the opportunities for integration of values and ideas will permeate the building. The JVAC will be a place that values the democratization of Jewish education. What does this mean? It means that diversity of ideas and various opinions will not only be welcomed but will be a requirement of teachers and presenters to demonstrate their knowledge on a topic. The JVAC will not be affiliated with any particular movement or denomination

and will actively recruit leadership from all areas of Jewish life and also perhaps from the society at large to come share wisdom.

Another value will be the primary roles that art, culture and food play at the JVAC. The JVAC will be a place where Jews who wish to celebrate their Jewish identity through primarily cultural and irreligious mediums feel welcomed and encouraged to do so. Those who work and teach at the JVAC will have expertise in a variety of areas. While some may have a deep knowledge of how their interests connect to Jewish tradition, many will only come to explore some of those connections once they become part of the JVAC community. Instructors will be chefs, artists, musicians, as well as, rabbis and educators. The degree to which Judaism plays a role in their works and lives will vary.

As a learning community, the JVAC will strive to create a place where people feel there is no minimum amount of knowledge they must have in order to participate. The JVAC will operate on the assumption that everyone who comes into the space will bring with him certain areas of expertise and many areas in which he stands to grow. Questions are to be encouraged. Ongoing enculturation and explanation will be of primary importance to those who work on the JVAC team.

Programmatically, the JVAC can serve as a place of Jewish learning and experience that may seem less threatening than places where the primary step one must take to enter into community is religious. The JVAC will seek to provide an experience where people can enter into Jewish learning and experience through actively engaging in projects while learning about the connections to Jewish tradition contained within that which they do. For example, someone comes to experience a recent art installation on

the theme of creation. Some of the information available next to each piece of art includes the artists' reflection on the biblical passages and other ideas from Jewish literature that informed the pieces on the wall.

Another example may be considered in the educational kitchen. A group of friends regularly come to the kitchen on Sunday mornings to participate in the food service program that serves community members who depend on community support. They are motivated to participate in this program because of their commitment to social justice and desire to contribute to the public good. Before food service begins, the program manager offers a *kavanah*, an intention. He quotes Exodus 23:10 which commands the Israelite people to uphold communal systems that ensure the needy will have food and be cared for. After food service is over the volunteers come together to share their thoughts on an individual's responsibility to his community. The program manager thanks the group for their commitment to community and for doing a mitzvah. It is my belief that such experiences if they are positive can lead one to a more curious place about their Jewish identity.

The JVAC will seek to provide opportunities to explore one's identity and to engage in a variety of hands on ways that relate to Judaism. Culture, food and community will be celebrated and elevated in this place. Those who feel that they are somehow a "bad Jew" because they don't go to *shul* or because they experience their commitments to Judaism through food and film festivals will experience a place where the vision includes these as important pathways to becoming more aware of one's Jewish self. The JVAC will be committed to providing ongoing opportunities for people to drop

in and also to become more regular participants in the variety of formal and informal offerings available to participants.

Such a place allows for multiple ways in which a person can interface with the JVAC community. A person's involvement may be limited to patronage in the café. He may come in for a meal, nominally interact with any of the people or programs at the JVAC and leave, hopefully with a nourished stomach. A person can occasionally drop into programs based on interest. Someone may show up one time only because they are excited about an art exhibit or lecture. But, it is also possible that a person will become a regular in one or more areas of programming the JVAC offers.

Regarding classes in the bet midrash, cooking classes and other workshops the JVAC may offer, fees for programs will be offered at different prices based on one's relationship to the overall organization. Excluding purchasing food in the café, three tiers for involvement will be made available to those who wish to take advantage of JVAC offerings.

For the episodically inclined, one time fees will be available in almost every case. Just as a person can purchase a ticket to a concert or museum gallery, so too will a person who desires to come to a program offered at the JVAC be able to pay a one time price in order to do so. The cost will cover the expenses incurred by the program itself as well as a nominal contribution to the overall expenses that allow the JVAC to keep its doors open.

For those who consider themselves more regularly involved but do not want to commit themselves to an annual dues structure they would be invited to open a tab. This works in the following way: a one-timer must pay for each program he attends.

However, those wishing to receive a discounted price can open a tab, perhaps at various levels. As illustration let us say most classes range from $10 - $30 each. If a person knows he is likely to attend 15 classes throughout the year, he may open a tab of $200. By paying up front, he gets to take advantage of a discounted price to be determined ahead of time. This person can choose to add funds to an account once it runs out or move to the pay-as-you go model presented above. There is no ongoing commitment but for the time he has an open tab individuals who choose this method of engagement enjoy discounted prices for JVAC programming and likely other small perks so the JVAC might show its gratitude for the commitment they make in paying upfront.

The final tier would be similar to an annual membership dues model. The 8 x 10 is a music venue in downtown Baltimore. For $500 a year, a person can purchase a pass that permits them entrance to any performance at the club throughout the entire year. Someone who attends less than one concert a month would not purchase such a pass. However, the avid music fan that goes to hear music multiple times a week may find great value in this option; so too at the JVAC.

The most engaged members of the JVAC community may find it more valuable to make an annual contribution and as a result be permitted to take advantage of all JVAC programming throughout the year. Of course additional cost may be incurred. For example, someone who opts in at this tier would still be required to pay for costs of materials for various programs. This group of the JVAC community will receive other special options such as discounts in the café and in some cases admission into programs that may otherwise sell out. The goal is not for this to be exclusive although the potential does exit. Rather, the goal is to show appreciation for the members of the JVAC

community wishing to make a long-term commitment to the mission and efforts of the organization.

In addition to financial contributions there will be a variety of opportunities for JVAC community members to earn brownie points that convert into discounts on program fees and food purchase in the café. A person can earn brownie points by contributing his time and energies to help support JVAC programs. Participating in the food service program, offering to greet people at an art exhibit opening or helping to support a teacher in the *bet midrash* can all help a person accrue credit in order to decrease the costs of participating in JVAC programs. In addition to the personal reward one stands to gain from contributing his/her time and energy to a good cause the JVAC will count time as an equally valuable contribution of resources; one that will help the community thrive and sustain itself over the course of time.

The JVAC will be an actual place in which culture, food and learning are primary content areas in which Jewish engagement might happen. The majority of what is offered will not necessitate a person having a religious identity as part of their Jewish self. This does not mean that there will be no opportunities for religious or spiritual engagement in the JVAC community.

The JVAC community will operate according to the rhythm of the Jewish calendar. The Jewish holidays and annual cycle will inform much of the curriculum, implicit and explicit, that grounds the JVAC and allows for integration between the various areas of programming that occur inside. Specials will be available on the café menu offering foods associated with various Jewish holidays. Table toppers listing

suggested conversation questions people might engage with over a meal will introduce key ideas and themes indicative of the time of year according the Jewish year.

In addition to accordance with the Jewish calendar year the JVAC will also operate according to the rhythm of the Jewish week. Food will be available for purchase in the café Sundays through lunch on Friday but will not serve food to be purchased on Shabbat. Perhaps, on Shabbat, community meals may be served allowing for a community Shabbat dinner celebration. This leaves open the possibility for a spiritual community either as part of the JVAC or in partnership with to use the space to build joyous community and celebrate Shabbat. The open space that may house a concert or art opening during the week can now become a place where people can sing together to welcome Shabbat. The JVAC will not align itself with any particular movement. The possibility for a pluralistic Shabbat community to grow in the JVAC space is great.

The JVAC provides important opportunities for potential members and participants. It is a place that allows someone to enter into organized Jewish life through a door that is not religious. The potential to become involved in a spiritual community will be an option at the JVAC just as the potential to be involved in a social program or even a yoga class may be available to people at the synagogue. The key difference is that the primary purpose of the JVAC will be to emphasize opportunities that tap into the cultural and creative aspects of Jewish life and learning.

The JVAC will operate under an assumption that most people do have inclinations to religious and spiritual matters but perhaps there are other first steps they might want to take in order to enter into Jewish community before those that require a certain degree of ownership and confidence in the language and ways of Jewish tradition.

The JVAC will seek to provide a variety of opportunities for people to enter into Jewish community and to begin to engage their Jewish identity in areas that may feel more accessible or easy to connect with. The opportunities and carefully integrated strategies are just as important to cultivating a rich Jewish identity as to wrestle with what one believes when it comes to his relationship to the Jewish people and to God.

The JVAC will be committed to engaging people who wish to explore but will be committed to its vision; the culture of the Jewish people is as important as one's religious commitments and opinions. Those who come into the JVAC will step through a cultural door, but once inside a journey awaits.

The JVAC will take from the best of what the various movements within Judaism have to offer. The majority of what it means to be a member of the JVAC will be that Jews (and non-Jews) are able to interact and engage with Jewish ideas, values and narratives through a variety of creative mediums. The experiential approach to learning will not be at the expense of the commitment to deep learning and engagement with Jewish texts and tradition.

Imagine that an egalitarian minyan that counts both men and women is held in the open space. At the same time, a mechitza minyan is held in the *bet midrash*. Different segments of the JVAC community come to participate in the Shabbat service of their choice, followed by a Shabbat dinner that everyone is invited to attend together. The committee and staff at the JVAC will have to pay careful attention to make decisions that will create a Shabbat friendly atmosphere for the greatest number of people possible. Even with this intention, they will know that they cannot be everything to everyone.

The JVAC is not a synagogue, but one might ask what makes the JVAC different from a Jewish Community Center (JCC). In some ways, the answer is not much. The JVAC is intended to be a common ground, free of denominational affiliation that can be a home to Jews wanting to engage with the cultural and non-religious aspects of their Jewish identity. Perhaps it is a boutique model of the JCC.

The Jewish Venue for Arts and Culture will feel as much like a music venue and/or art gallery as it does a place for public Jewish gathering. It will be a place where the most loyal members may come only to eat in the café, help serve food to the needy through a regular food service program, or drop in regularly to attend art openings in the open space. It is possible that someone may regularly attend activities offered through the JVAC and never participated in a religious program. But, it is also possible, that the religious programming the JVAC decides to provide will speak to a level of diversity and pluralism that resonates with the more fluid and flexible Jew who lives in America today.

MEMBERSHIP

# MOSHAV KAYAM

*Intentional Jewish Living*

## MANY WAYS TO SOW

BUILDING COMMUNITY IN THE WORLD TODAY

Moshav Kayam seeks to provide a place for Jews to experience the rhthym of the Jewish people through doing, learning and living.

### SEE WHAT WE'RE ALL ABOUT

Moshav Kayam draws inspiration from the kibbutzim and moshavim in Israel. It is a place where people can participate at a variety of levels in order and to cultivate a relationship that suits the needs of various lifestyles and commitments.

There are many ways to get involved with Moshav Kayam. While a small group of individuals and families will live here year-round, opportunities for seasonal visits, as well as, short-term engagement are great ways to experience all Moshav Kayam has to offer.

Based just a short drive from downtown Baltimore, Moshav Kayam is open year-round with many opportunities for locals to enjoy the produce of our efforts. Join us for a meal at our dairy restaurant. We offer a variety of cultural activities including music and theatre performances, summer concert series, celebrations for all major Jewish holidays, art and cooking workshops and regular opportunities to learn with the long and short term members who live in our community.

WHERE EDEN MEETS REALITY

## Join us!

### Drop-In

Come enjoy an overnight or couple day stay at our retreat center. Perfect for a conference or Shabbaton. Equipped with meeting rooms, kosher dining room and opportunities to participate in various projects and activities hosted by Moshav Kayam.

### Stay Awhile

Join us for a season on the farm or participate on an artist in residency program. Food and lodging in addition to Jewish learning and community building programs lasting 3 - 6 month periods.

### Stick Around

Join our year round community. Enjoy the experience of living in an immersive Jewish environment in a do-it-yourself community that values diversity, shared responsibility and lives according to the Jewish calendar.

### Spend Some Time

Enjoy a meal at our dairy restaurant. Attend workshops with visiting artists. Join us for our summer concert series or to celebrate the major Jewish festivals.

### Get In A Groove

Plenty of opportunity to regularly volunteer with the animals, in the fields and in our industrial kitchen.

## Moshav Kayam

Kayam Farm is a Jewish educational farm located on the periphery of the Baltimore Jewish community. It hosts over 3,000 visitors each year, has developed a fifty share CSA and offers a variety of Jewish educational programming that serves both the local Baltimore Jewish community and the American Jewish community at large.

Currently, Kayam Farm sits on 160 acres of land owned by the Baltimore Jewish community. Half of the land serves as a day camp during the summer months, the other half a year round retreat center and program facility. The farm is housed in the retreat center and visiting groups have the opportunity to tour the farm, help feed and care for the animals, and learn with the Kayam Farm staff, many of whom are alumni of the programs mentioned previously.

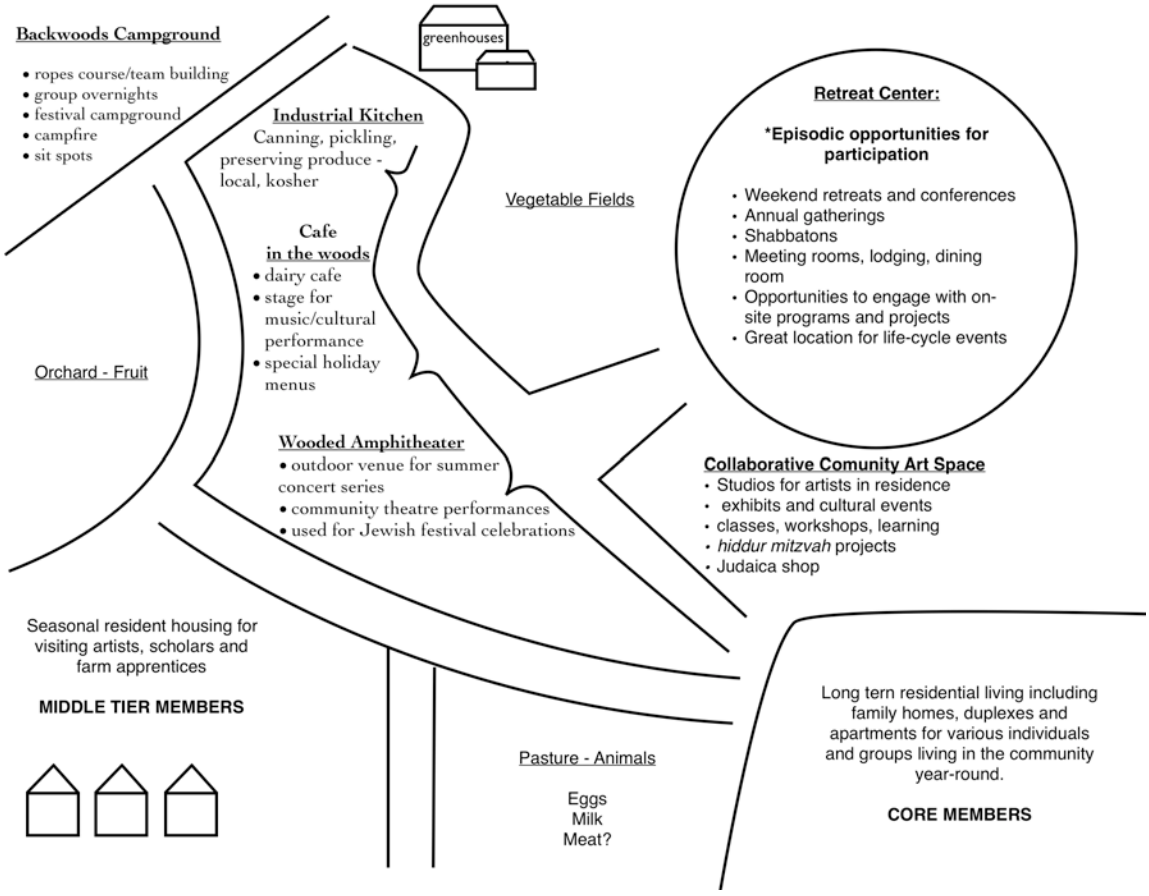
Additionally, Kayam Farm contributes to Jewish learning in the Baltimore Jewish community through its community garden program, one of several learning programs offered to the local community. Kayam hosts an annual *bet midrash* Shabbaton and summer kollel. The *bet midrash* Shabbaton invites people for Shabbat on the farm where they learn about the intersection between Jewish tradition and agriculture. For the summer kollel, young adults live at Kayam and help with daily farm duties. They spend the afternoon in the *bet midrash* exploring the relationship between Jewish text and agriculture. The living experience is intentional and pluralistic.

Jakir Manela is the founder and director of Kayam Farm. His vision is one of a year-round land based community that serves as a place where people can choose

to live in an intentional Jewish community year round. This project is referred to as Moshav Kayam. Manela has worked hard alongside leaders of the Baltimore Jewish community to imagine whether such a project could be possible. He draws inspiration from other outdoor Jewish educational centers, for example the Brandeis Bardin Institute in Southern California, as well as, the kibbutzim and moshavim movements in Israel. Manela recognizes the challenge in working to establish a land-based Jewish community outside the land of Israel, but believes this will be a viable option for those who do not plan to make *aliyah* but would seriously consider moving to a land-based Jewish community in the United States.

The following is a hybrid of Manela's vision and mine. It serves as an illustration of what membership models could look like and considers services and engagement opportunities the center might provide. This is the result of a multi-year *chevruta*.

## A Year-Round Facility For Jewish Living and Learning:




Moshav Kayam would be a year round facility. Multiple opportunities for Jews to get involved in the community would be ongoing. The core center of the community would be small, with perhaps 30 – 50 residents who live full time on the land. A second group of seasonal members would fully participate with the long-term community during the duration of their stay. The majority of the Moshav Kayam community would participate episodically either through conferences or short term retreats. Local residents would have ample opportunities to eat at the kosher restaurant, attend events and engage in holiday celebration. First, an explanation about what Moshav Kayam would offer by way of Jewish life, education, programming and opportunities to engage.

## A Return to Eden:

Perhaps the most inspiring part of Moshav Kayam is engagement with the land. Here is where seeds of Torah are sown and grown. The blueprints can include fruit orchards, multiple vegetable fields and animal pastures. The majority of the produce is used for a seasonal CSA offered to residents of greater Baltimore. The remaining produce is used to make kosher jams, canned goods and fermented treats available for sale locally and by mail order. The animals will produce various products, also available for sale. This is a component that brings in revenue for the organization.

The year round indoor facilities at Moshav Kayam include an industrial kitchen, a kosher dairy restaurant, indoor music facility and a cooperative art space. This component offers residencies, workshops and performance space. The retreat center provides lodging and facilities to meet the needs of groups who host conferences and retreats.

The wooded amphitheater is a site for summer theatre and music. It can also be used to for festivals to celebrate Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot. A backwoods campground is open during the summer months.

The retreat center has short-term accommodations. There are also two living spaces for longer stays in the community. Artists in residents, farm apprentices and interns live in seasonal housing. Individuals and families who live at Kayam year-round live in duplexes near one another. The long-term and short-term communities interact regularly. The long-term residents ensure that the vision

of the community is on course; a pluralistic Jewish setting where Jewish life and learning thrive.

The name *moshav* implies that there are both communal and private aspects to one's participation with Kayam. While some housing will serve as long-term rentals, there may be property nearby available for purchase. Investment into the community fund will be required of all long-term members. Long-term housing rental has a one-year minimum lease. The long-term residents are the leaders of Moshav Kayam. They will host services, teach classes, and develop programs to contribute to the community for collective resources and benefit.

Individual members will fill a variety of community roles. A young father may take responsibility for an afternoon day care program. Another member may contribute her services as an accountant. Yet another may offer to lead community ritual and organize opportunities for group celebration on Jewish holidays. Part of the induction process in becoming a member will include conversations on what services and expertise an individual or family can share. This is the first tier.

A second tier of membership is for seasonal residents. These people will come to Moshav Kayam to contribute their talents and help with programming and projects offered to visitors. In exchange, this group will spend their time at Moshav Kayam building their own cohort and making decisions relating to the group at any one time. They may participate in all ongoing programs and activities. Shabbat lunch will be a potluck where everyone in the community is invited. This is one example of ongoing community programs.

Long-term residents and seasonal residents will create a setting in which they interact and capitalize on the synergy from both groups. The goal is to strike a balance between one large community in which both long and seasonal residents feel rooted and to offer experiences unique to both groups based on the nature of time they intend to be in the community. Regardless of their residence choices, seasonal or long-term, residents create a sustaining and productive pluralistic Jewish community.

Most people who encounter Moshav Kayam will be those who come for an event at the retreat center or those who live in the local community and come to take advantage of programs and events. The largest concentrations of participants will likely be those who view their engagement as episodic or somewhat regular. All through the year Kayam will align it's offering with the seasons and Jewish calendar to maximize opportunities for residents, visitors and the local Jewish community.

Moshav Kayam will partner with other Jewish institutions in Baltimore to provide experiential Jewish education opportunities for all ages. One goal of Moshav Kayam, which is a goal of Kayam Farm in its current state, will be to make Jewish learning fun and engaging. Kayam Hebrew Farm School, pre-school options and family programming will all be available and will come to light as a result of partnership between Kayam and other organizations in the Baltimore Jewish community.

The realization of this model requires individuals and families who want to move into intentional Jewish community as a long-term commitment. This model grows out of the conclusion that Jewish summer camp and other immersive Jewish

experiences are "a highly effective socializing agent and a potential transmitter of religious and ethnic identity."[185] How Goodly Are Thy Tents: Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences provides in depth research, which suggests summer camp among the richest experiences in learning and community building for young Jews. They serve as a lab for socialization, a "process by which each of us acquires knowledge, skills, and values needed to participate as effective members of a group."[186] Moshav Kayam could be one answer to those who ask what experiences in addition to camp have the potential to create the immersive Jewish environment that creates such fertile ground for positive Jewish identity formation.

An ongoing intentional Jewish community has the potential to make a profound impact on the Jewish individual and the community. But the responsibility is not just one group. From the most rooted to the most transient the whole vision can only be realized if all levels of participation are executed.

## Conclusion:

The presence of tension is a theme throughout this paper. It is not unintentional as it is also a theme throughout Jewish history. The drive of the Jewish people has been to embrace tension and to use it as a building block to realize its purpose in every generation. While many things may be new, it has always been the essence of Judaism to find creative ways to reconcile tensions that arise between Jewish ideas and the world in which Jews live. Tension brings forth opportunity. It is an opportunity to explore the relationship between individual and

[185] Amy L. Sales and Leonard Saxe. *How Goodly Are Thy Tents: Summer Camps As Jewish Socializing Experiences.* (Boston: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 3.
[186] ibid, 4.

community, the internal workings of the Jewish people in relationship to the external world and the tensions that emerge as one generation gives way to the next.

Jewish tradition nourishes balance, another theme of this paper. Moses Maimonides teaches that the right path to God is that of the middle ground.[187] This is called the *shvil hazahav*, the golden mean. The task of the Jew is not to abstain from what the corporeal world offers. Rather, she is to engage with it and strike a balance of moderation in order that she travels along a good path. We must ask:

1. What is the balance between individual and community in America today?
2. How does she balance her Jewish identity with all other identities?
3. How does he balance his values of American culture with Jewish tradition?
4. What models should the Jewish community introduce to strike a new balance to meet the needs of Jews in 21st century America?

The challenge to each generation is to figure out how to define balance as it relates to the circumstances that lead them to ask questions and propose possible responses relevant to their time.

A strong forest endures tension and strikes a balance between growth and decay through generations. It is part of the natural process. Over time, Judaism has been strengthened as a result of the cycles of structural and institutional change that has taken place. Today, we are in the middle of such a time.

The realization that we are in the midst of change invites us to cultivate what Rabbi Ken Chasen refers to as a "culture of experimentation." Rabbi Chasen says

---

[187] Moses Maimonides. *Mishneh Torah: Hilchot De'ot.* (New York: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1989.) 12-13.

that the best way to recognize a place where such a culture exists is the ability to provide examples of things tried that have failed. If such a scenario cannot be recalled, it is not a culture of experimentation. We have to be willing to try things that may fail. We cannot simply dress up old models and present them as new. We must engage our creativity and imagination and we must do so in collaboration.

In the beginning of this paper, I used the Redwood as a metaphor to illustrate the similarities of the tree in relation to the forest and the individual in relation to her community. Today's situation requires more than a metaphorical example. We must consider and implement new models to ensure that the Jewish individual and the Jewish community thrive in 21st century America and beyond. I hope you will join in the conversation and take root in this forest.

## ***Appendix 1: Focus Group Questions***

1. What formal Jewish experiences have you participated in?
2. How would you describe your experiences (positive, negative, neutral – explain).
3. Share an experience you have had in the formal Jewish community where you felt a strong connection to the people or topic. An experience that you left without feeling connected? And experience that you left feeling outside the group experience?
4. What is your definition of community?
5. Where do you experience community?
6. How do you identify a strong community?
7. What does a member look like in these communities?
8. Are you currently a member of any Jewish organization?
9. Do you plan to be/could you imagine becoming a member of a Jewish organization in the future?
10. What would inform your decision to join a Jewish community?
11. What would dissuade you from joining a Jewish community?
12. What would your ideal Jewish community look like? Would it be similar or different in any way to what your ideal community in general would look like?
13. What are your hopes for what the world and Jewish community will look like in 2020?

## *Appendix 2: Cluey Table*[188]

## Front Cover Photo Descriptions:

<table>
<tr><td>Rabbi Gabriel Greenberg plays the melodica at Kayam Farm Summer Kollel 5771</td><td>Street art stencil found in Tel Aviv Pesach 5770</td><td rowspan="2">Traffic sign located in Armstrong Woods in Guerneville, California.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">First Night Seder in the Levy's backyard<br>Austin, Texas<br>Pesach 5771</td><td>Homemade Channukah candles made with beeswax local to Northern California. A product of thesis procrastination.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Posted bill in the wine-making shack at the Shamberg family homestead<br>Baltimore, Maryland</td><td>"One Love"<br>neck tattoo reads <u>love</u> in Hebrew (ahava, fem.) and Arabic (hub, masc.)</td></tr>
</table>

## Back Cover Photo Descriptions:

<table>
<tr><td>Base of redwood tree located along the East Ridge Trail of Armstrong woods in Guerneville, California. Approximately 250 - 300 years old.</td><td colspan="2">An image from another thesis project that grew alongside mine. In my opinion, a model we should use in our work towards achieving balance. Thanks Billy.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tu B'Av Love and Music Festival Poster - Year One<br>Designed by Maura Feingold</td><td>Google image search: street sign pointing towards home</td><td>Special commission hannukiyah on display at The Gary Rosenthal Studio<br>Kensington, Maryland</td></tr>
<tr><td>"Angels Come in Various Sizes"<br>Street mural painted in Culver City<br>Spring 2011</td><td colspan="2">Challot made for Jewish Farm School Urban Farm Trip in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania<br>May, 2011</td></tr>
</table>

[188] "Cluey Table" title used for Billy O'Callahagn's MFA Thesis Project, 2012. A tiny nod to the exchange of ideas that results from two thesis projects in the same house.

## Bibliography


Amyot, Robert P. and Lee Sigelman. "Jews Without Judaism? Assimilation and Jewish Identity in the United States." *Social Science Quarterly* 77 (1996): 177–188.

Aron, Isa, Steven M. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman, and Ari Y. Kelman. *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues From Functional to Visionary.* Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2010.

Baker, Dori Grinenko, etd. *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World.* Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2010.

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habit of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Blanchard, Rabbi Tsvi. "How To Think About Being Jewish in the Twenty-First Century: A New Model of Jewish Identity Construction." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service.* 79 (2002): 37-45.

Buber, Martin. *The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism.* New York: The Citadel Press, 2006.

Bubis, Gerald B. "The Cost of Jewish Living" Revisiting Jewish Involvement and Barriers." For The William Petschek National Jewish Family Center of the American Jewish Committee. nd., circa 2004.

Cohen, Steven M. *American Modernity & Jewish Identity*. New York: Tavistock Publications, 1983.

Cohen, Steven M. *Attitudes of American Jews in Comparative Perspective.* Philadelphia: Center for Jewish Community Studies, 2000.

Cohen, Steven M. and Ari Y. Kelman. *Cultural Events & Jewish Identities: Young Adult Jews in New York.* New York: UJA-Federation of New York, 2005.

Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold M. Eisen. *The Jew Within: Self, Community, and Commitment Among the Variety of Moderately Affiliated.* Boston: The Susan & David Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies, 1998.

Danby, Herbert. *The Mishnah: Translated From the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes.* London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

Fax, Julie Gruenbaum. "Payback Time: Turning the Gimme Generation Into Givers." *The Jewish Journal of Los Angeles,* November 11, 2011.

Gifford, Mary Louise. *The Turnaround Church: Inspiration and Tools for Life-Sustaining Change.* Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2009.

Heller, Zachary I., etd. *Synagogues in a Time of Change: Fragmentation and Diversity in Jewish Religious Movements.* Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2009.

Hesterman, Oran B. *Fair Food: Growing a Healthy, Sustainable Food System for All.* New York: Public Affairs, 2011.

Holson, Laura M. "You're Young and Jewish: Discuss." *New York Times*, January 14, 2011, Fashion & Style Section.

Horowitz, Bethamie. "Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity." A Report to the Commission on Jewish Identity & Renewal UJA-Federation of New York, June, 2000.

Kanfer, Rabbi Elie. *What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us About Building Vibrant Jewish Communities.* Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010.

Kehati, Pinhas. *Mishnah Seder Nezikin Vol. 2*. Jerusalem: Maor Wallach Press, 1994.

Maimonides, Moses. *Mishneh Torah: Hilchot De'ot.* New York: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1989.

McFayden, Kenneth J. *Strategic Leadership For a Change: Facing Our Losses, Finding Out Future.* Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2009.

Morton, Oliver. "'Humanity': Bastille Day." In *Eating the Sun: How Plants Power the Planet.* 319-325. New York: Harper Collins, 2008.

Nisbet, Elizabeth. "Participation and Human Development" Background paper commissioned for The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008-2009, May 2008.

Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community.* Philadelphia: De Capo Press, 1997.

Phillips, Bruce. *2004 Jewish Community Study: Full Findings.* Prepared for the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation, 2004.

Putnam, Robert D. and David E. Campbell. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us.* New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2010.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2000.

Sales, Amy L. and Leonard Saxe. *How Goodly Are Thy Tents: Summer Camps As Jewish Socializing Experiences.* Boston: Brandeis University Press, 2004.

Sarna, Jonathan D. *American Judaism: A History.* New York: Yale University Press, 2004.

Smith, Christian with Kari Christofferson, Hilary Davidson and Patricia Snell Herzog. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood.* New York Oxford University Press, 2011.

Smith, Tom W. *Jewish Distinctiveness in America: A Statistical Portrait.* New York: The American Jewish Committee, 2005.

Ukeles, Jacob B. and Ron Miller. *The 2010 Greater Baltimore Jewish Community Study: Summary Report.* Prepared by Ukeles Associates, Inc., 2011.

Weems, Jr., Lovett H. "Changing Religious Traditions: Not New but Accelerating." Lewis Center for Church Leadership. http://www.churchleadership.com/leadingideas/leaddocs/2008/120308_article.html (accessed October, 2011).

Windmueller, Steven. "The Second American Jewish Revolution" in *Journal of Jewish Communal Service,* Vol. 82, No. 3, Summer 2007

Zamore, Mary L. *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic.* New York: CCAR Press, 2011.

**Websites Cited:**

- http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/former-jdub-staff-addresses-real-issues-in-closing/
- **www.hazon.org**
- **www.jewlicious.com**
- **www.jewishfarmschool.org**
- http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits
- **http://religions.pewforum.org/reports**
- **www.shabbattents.org**
- http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html
- **http://urj.org/biennial11/webcast/sunday/**


interesting to you
good for everyone
realistic


Tu B'av
Love & Music Fest
at Kayam Farm
7.25.10
3-7pm
music by Baltimore's own
SMOOTH KENTUCKY
& Matterhorn


HOME


Angels come in various sizes.