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## Engaging Disengaged Jaws

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# **Engaging Disengaged Jews**

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for ordination**

**Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion  
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# **Engaging Disengaged Jews**

## **Thesis Digest**

**Who are the disengaged? What are their preferences? What can synagogues do to better meet their needs?**

Because disengaged Jews are typically not affiliated or active with Jewish organizations, they have been a difficult group to identify and study. This research effort sought to learn about this population by exploring:

- What the disengaged think about synagogue life and the degree to which it meets their needs;
- Whether or not these individuals are interested in new avenues to search for meaning, social and civic engagement, or the pursuit of a just society within a Jewish framework; and
- How, if at all, synagogue programs and services might be better structured to reflect these views and address this population's unmet needs.

Through survey research, in-depth interviews and a focus group, disengaged respondents in this study explained that while they do not find synagogues to be inspirational, meaningful, intellectually stimulating or comforting, they might be inclined to participate more if the experience could be made more relevant and meaningful to their lives. They may also be more willing to attend if their friends and families wanted to go with them.

Throughout this study, the disengaged demonstrated that while they are not interested in what they perceive as normative synagogue life, they have not turned their backs on Judaism, and they are interested in becoming better connected with the Jewish people, learning more about Jewish history, and interacting more with fellow Jews. The study outlines several opportunities to achieve these objectives, and recommends additional research to give a greater voice to this important population and, following the words of Franz Rosenzweig, help bring these Jews "from the periphery to the center, from the outside in."

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review**

### **Overview**

There is a sizable body of research that explores Jewish commitment among moderately-affiliated and newly-affiliated Jews.<sup>1</sup> These studies provide valuable insight into the factors that affect Jewish identification and offer useful policy guidance for Jewish institutions to consider to better attract and retain these populations.

While these studies have significant value, they focus largely on those Jews who are at least moderately affiliated with Jewish life. For example, the population's studied have been identified through lists of synagogue members, Jewish donor lists, and individuals who have participated in formal outreach activities (e.g., introduction to Judaism classes, intermarriage classes). This research leaves us with less understanding about those individuals who are not on the radar screen of institutional Jewry, those Jews who rarely (if ever) attend synagogue. I call this population the "disengaged."

This designation is not intended to convey a value judgment, nor does it reflect this population's involvement in other facets of Jewish life, in which they may be highly engaged. The disengaged label used in this study refers solely to their relationship to synagogues, which is the focus of this study.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Cohen, Steven and Eisen, Arnold (2000) *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* and The Jewish Outreach Institute (2001) *The Impact of Jewish Outreach on the Intermarried and Unaffiliated*.

There is much we do not know about the disengaged, including:

- What the disengaged think about synagogue life and the degree to which it meets their needs;
- Whether or not these individuals are interested in new avenues to search for spiritual or religious fulfillment in a Jewish context; and
- How, if at all, synagogue programs and services might be structured to better reflect these views and address this population's unmet needs.

In addition, the existing research tends to be sociological in nature—that is, the research generally seeks to understand the foundations of beliefs and behaviors of the respondents in order to better understand the group itself. In contrast, the primary focus of this research is marketing. The questions explored in this effort have less to do with why the individuals are the way they are, but rather, what do these potential synagogue consumers need and desire, and how, if at all, synagogues can satisfy this market opportunity.

Such market-oriented thinking is not intended to turn clergy and other synagogue leaders into marketers. Instead, as Shawchuck, Kotler, Wrenn and Rath (1992) explain: the purpose of market research for clergy is to help “think systematically and insightfully about the market of people who currently or potentially have unmet needs for spirituality, meaning and purpose in life; and to think about what their congregation can offer to meet those needs” (p. 25).

While the focus of this research is the disengaged, three market segments have been identified and studied:

The first market segment is the engaged. Engaged synagogue users are defined here as those who attend synagogue—not including specifically attending someone's life cycle event—once a month or more. While this segment could be further segmented (e.g., those who attend daily or weekly), as a whole, this group represents those “regulars” who consistently attend services throughout the year.

The second market segment is the moderates. Moderate synagogue users are those who attend a synagogue no more than 3-9 times annually—not including specifically attending someone's life cycle event. While this group could also be further segmented, moderates share the characteristics of attending synagogues (a) more often than just the high holidays; and (b) in an episodic, rather than regular, manner.

The third major segment, the focus of this study, is the disengaged. Other than to attend someone's life cycle event, disengaged synagogue users either attend only for the high holidays or not at all. Those who attend only for the high holidays are referred to as “annuals.” Those who do not attend synagogue at all are referred to as “abstainers.”

### **Ramifications and Objectives**

The disengaged represent an underserved target population for synagogue products and services. If we do not reach out to this market of Jewish individuals and their partners

and families, (a) they will miss out on the benefits that can be gained through synagogue life; (b) we risk losing this population to other religious groups and activities that may be less beneficial to them but seemingly more compelling (e.g., other faiths, self-help groups); (c) we will not adequately leverage our resources or accomplish our missions as Jewish leaders; and (d) we may lose the perspectives and benefits that the disengaged can bring to synagogue life.

The goal of this research is one of direction setting, to begin to explore and design new opportunities to engage the disengaged. In the words of Franz Rosenzweig, it is an attempt to understand how, if at all, to bring these Jews “from the periphery to the center, from the outside in.”<sup>2</sup>

To achieve this objective, this research effort seeks to:

- Better understand how the disengaged view synagogue life and to compare their views with those of the engaged; and
- Better understand what opportunities exist to both modify existing synagogue offerings and develop new services of value to the disengaged.

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<sup>2</sup> Rosenzweig, “*Neues Lernen*,” in *Kleinere Schiften*, p. 97, cited in Mendes-Flohr, p. 227.



## **Literature Review**

Much has been written about disengaged Christians, who are known collectively as the “unchurched.” Like the Jewish disengaged, the unchurched are defined by their church attendance patterns: They are typically defined as those individuals who have not attended a church service during the past six months, other than for special events such as weddings and funerals (Barna, 2000).

According to Wade Clark Roof (1993), the unchurched are more likely than the churchd to be politically liberal, work in white-collar professions, and are involved in fewer social relationships. Recent studies by the Barna Group (2002) concur with these findings and add that the unchurched tend to be more likely to be male, divorced, better educated, and have a larger incomes than the churchd. Like Roof, Barna’s studies also find that the unchurched tend not to be “people persons,” that is, they tend to be less relational and less likely to join organizations than their churchd counterparts. Barna suggests that the unchurched largely don’t attend church because (a) they don’t think it is worth the time or effort, and (b) they don’t feel welcome or invited. (Barna, 2002). Thom Rainer’s (2003) study of the unchurched uncovered similar findings, suggesting that the unchurched are not anti-church or anti-Christian, but they are not, in large extent, “joiners.”

How different this group is from the men and women described by sociologist Will Herberg (1955), who found that Americans identified with their religion and joined

places of worship as a way of locating themselves socially and give themselves a sense of membership. In contrast, like so many of those interviewed in *Habits of The Heart* (Bellah, et al, 1985), today's unchurched reflect a belief in religious individualism, a belief that their own personal relationship with God is what matters, not participation in organized religion.

People who share this individual, rather than communal, quest for meaning often call themselves "spiritual, but not religious" (Fuller, 2001). This population seeks to find meaning in their lives through non-institutional, informal, and flexible approaches. Wade Clark Roof (1999) suggests that between 9 and 19 percent of the total U.S. population fits into this category. For this group, spirituality is about private reflection and private experiences. This group of unchurched prefers an experiential and personal approach to faith rather than membership in an institution, as they have often had bad experiences in congregations and generally do not enjoy public ritual.

According to Fuller (2001), this unchurched "spiritual but not religious" approach has deep roots in American life. In the late 1600s, less than one-third of Americans went to church, and by the time of the Revolutionary War, only 15% of the population attended religious institutions. At the same time, these individuals demonstrated a highly eclectic approach to spirituality. In colonial times this was manifested by a fascination with numerology, the occult, astrology and magic. The tradition of seeking non-institutional mystical philosophies continued throughout U.S. history, with the growth

of such movements as the Universalists, Freemasons, Swedenborgism, Transcendentalism, and other perceived “exotic philosophies” (Fuller, 2001).

While these non-institutional spiritual offerings have helped countless Christian Americans engage in their own spiritual development, Fuller notes that unchurched spiritual systems have an uneven track record of success. While they have helped millions of Americans with their own personal spiritual quests, the spiritual systems are frequently transmitted by those who lack training and theological sophistication, and the absence of a strong institutional base makes it hard for people to sustain their spiritual enthusiasm or find a cohesive community. Further, these approaches tend to focus on individual transformation and offer less opportunities for their adherents to contribute to society.

It is here that organized religion can play a major role for the unchurched. While the dominant themes of non-institutional spiritual quests are self-understanding and self-reflexivity (Roof, 1999), there is an increasing quest for community, particularly among today’s unchurched and aging baby boomers and their offspring, who are looking for something “beyond the self-centered therapeutic culture in which they grew up” (p. 9). While ironic, it is perhaps not surprising that “non-joiners” explain that they feel like they are missing out on community.

This is where congregational marketing enters the picture. The unchurched have not ruled out organized religion—that is to say they are not anti-church. Rather, these

individuals are not convinced that organized religion can help them on their individual journeys. They do not believe that organized religion is listening to their needs. The unchurched repeatedly suggest that established religious institutions want them to buy into what it is they have to offer, regardless of whether or not this is what the individuals need or want.

Congregational marketing seeks to remedy this, and exists to ensure that both users and institutions achieve their objectives. Congregational marketing is a strategic approach in determining what people need and want, and a determination of how the institutions can meet these needs while remaining consistent with their missions. (Shawchuk et. al, 1992).

The growth of the nation's mega-churches has been propelled by a market-driven emphasis on listening to the needs of the unchurched and engaging in strategic marketing to meet those needs. For example, the Willow Creek Community Church ([www.willowcreek.org](http://www.willowcreek.org)) of South Barrington, Illinois began in 1975 when the Pastor, Bill Hybels, went door to door asking if the residents attended a local church. If the person answered "yes," they said "great!" and moved on. For those who said "no," they asked "Why not?" The five most common answers that emerged were:

- 1) It is irrelevant to my life—there is no practical application.
- 2) It is boring. It is dull and predictable and I am turned off by the liturgy and symbolism.
- 3) All they want is my money—they don't care about me.
- 4) I always leave feeling depressed or guilty.

- 5) They invade my privacy and embarrass me. They want me to stand up or sign a book or wear a nametag.

With these responses in hand, they began to develop a market-driven church for the a fictional persona named “Unchurched Harry.” Unchurched Harry is a male between 25 and 50 who sees himself as self-reliant, dislikes tradition, and feels little need for religion. In addition to the “Unchurched Harry” services, Willow Creek added programs and services for those who wanted more than just the introductory experience. The results have been hugely successful: Willow Creek has grown into a thriving institution for the unchurched, serving more than 15,000 visitors each week on its multiple campuses. This success has been maintained by “staying close to the customer”—listening to the needs of the unchurched as well as their growing congregation.

While the Jewish disengaged and the Christian unchurched share the same common denominator of not attending the services of their faith, these two groups do not necessarily share the same rationale for their institutional avoidance. There are significant cultural differences between these two groups, and the issues that attract and deter the unchurched are not likely to be the same issues that attract and deter the disengaged. Thus, while we can learn from the experiences of the unchurched, we cannot assume that that the preferences of the unchurched will be the preferences of the disengaged. In fact, as the research will demonstrate, while there are some commonalities such as a predisposition not to join groups, boredom with services, and a

desire for greater relevancy and meaning, the idea of “spiritual but not religious” is not a dominant theme among the disengaged.

## **Chapters**

### **Chapter Two: Method and Respondent Overview**

This chapter details the qualitative and quantitative procedures used in this research and provides an overview of the 273 respondents who participated in this effort.

### **Chapter Three: The Disengaged and Their Views on Synagogue Life**

This chapter details the views of the disengaged on a variety of issues, including:

- Their impressions of synagogue life, clergy, and dues structures;
- What opportunities might exist to increase their synagogue attendance; and
- Their involvement in non-synagogue social and volunteer activities

### **Chapter Four: Alternative Programs**

This chapter details the views of the disengaged concerning several pre-identified synagogue alternatives, including:

- Liberal Jewish Weekend Retreats
- Jewish Social Justice Center
- Jewish Life Cycle Center
- Services With A Universal Focus
- Free/Low Cost Online Courses
- Progressive Clergy To Discuss Work-Life Issues

### Chapter Five: Implications

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data analysis, this chapter outlines potential next steps to leverage the data and further engage the disengaged.

### Appendix A: Survey Instrument

### Appendix B Cover Letter

### Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

## **Chapter 2: Method and Respondent Overview**

Who are the disengaged? What are their preferences? Because these Jews may or may not be affiliated or active with Jewish organizations, they have been a difficult group to identify and study. Given the historical difficulty in reaching this group (and, therefore, the relative dearth of data on their views concerning synagogue life) this study utilized a respondent-driven survey methodology specifically designed for reaching hard-to-find populations. The methodology is known as "snowball sampling." This quantitative methodology was followed up with (a) a focus group of seven participants; and (b) individual interviews with six respondents.

### **Quantitative Phase**

The snowball sample methodology was selected for the quantitative stage of this research due to its efficacy in studying characteristics of hard to reach populations. While Jews themselves are not difficult to find and study, Jews who are disengaged with synagogue life are much more difficult to identify. While some proportion of those who are not engaged in synagogue life are involved with other Jewish organizations (e.g., federations, Jewish community centers, Zionist groups) using lists from these organizations would disproportionately select "active" Jews who simply do not use synagogues. The snowball sampling methodology allowed the process to better reach a diversity of Jews who may or may not be active in other facets of Jewish life.



Snowball sampling was first introduced by James Coleman in 1958 as an approach to utilize social networks to reach hard to find respondents. The process begins by the researcher selecting "seeds" who are the first survey respondents. These seeds then recruit others who may in turn recruit additional respondents. While an effective research tool, snowball sampling is not without its potential drawbacks. As Atkinson and Flint (2001) note:

Treading an uneasy line between the dictates of replicable and representative research design and the more flowing and theoretically led sampling techniques of qualitative research, snowball sampling has significant advantages and potentially, significant disadvantages. (p.2)

Specifically, there are two potential disadvantages in this approach: (1) biases toward individuals with interrelationships; and (2) nonrandom sampling.

With respect to the first issue, a bias toward individuals with interrelationships, this problem is most common when using snowball sampling to reach a certain type of respondent in one location. As Berg (1988) writes: "As a rule, a snowball sample will be strongly biased toward the inclusion of those who have many interrelationships with, or are connected to a larger number of individuals." For example, if this study attempted to reach only Disengaged Jews in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area, the interrelationships would be problematic. Instead, by leveraging the internet and selecting "seeds" from across the country, this study reached 273 respondents from at

least eight states, including Texas, Illinois, Ohio, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Massachusetts and California, as well as one respondent from Australia.<sup>1</sup> With such seed diversity, the inter-related bias has been significantly reduced.

The second problem, non-random sampling, is an issue for this methodology and care must be taken when making inferences to the population at large. At the same time, when constructing questions, special attention was paid to permit comparison to past studies (such as Steven M. Cohen's 1996 Assessment of the vitality of Conservative Judaism in North America) and where they could be compared, the findings were similar.

Due to the many advantages of such respondent-driven sampling as this, it is currently being used by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other international health organizations (Salganik, M.J. and D.D. Heckathorn, 2004), and has been used to reach such diverse populations as drug users, AIDS sufferers, the seriously ill, and "urban elites" (Atkinson and Flint, 2001).

There is one additional benefit to this methodology that is pertinent here. Snowball sampling is as an excellent method for obtaining data where some degree of trust is required to initiate contact and obtain personal information. When trust is required to discuss sensitive topics and reveal personal details, "chain referral" techniques such as snowball sampling can imbue the researcher with characteristics associated with being

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<sup>1</sup> Many other states were likely represented in the sample, but respondents were not asked to include their address unless they wanted to be involved in additional research. There were 51 respondents who provided their mailing address for this purpose.

an insider or group member, which can help aid entry to settings where conventional approaches may not succeed. (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). In this particular situation, respondents were able to reveal their most personal impressions of synagogue life—revelations that may have been more difficult if they had not been introduced to the study by someone they trusted. Fortunately, the respondents did appear to have trust, and in addition to the quantitative data, they provided more than 300 qualitative statements of feelings, concerns, and insightful ideas during the “quantitative phase” of this research.

### **The Survey**

The survey research for this study was conducted in two major phases. Both phases directed the respondents to a website ([www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com)) where the survey was housed. (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey as it appeared on the Zoomerang website.)

### **Phase One: Initial Sample**

On May 19, 2005, 154 survey invitations were sent via email to a list of Jews culled from various sources, including congregational directories and personal lists, to begin the snowball sample. This large number of “seeds” was selected to reduce interrelationship bias. By May 24, 2005, 61 completed surveys were submitted, representing a nearly 40% response rate (.3961) from the initial email push.

### Phase One Cover Letter

The Phase One email push was accompanied by a cover letter describing the survey (see Appendix B.) The letter was crafted along the lines recommended by Dillman's (1978) seminal work *Mail and Telephone Surveys, The Total Design Method*.

The "Total Design Method" seeks to convince the potential respondents that a problem exists that they can identify with, and that their help is needed to find a solution. The reward to the respondent derives from the feeling that they have helped solve an important problem. The cover letter explains the subject of the study, its benefit to the group that the recipient identifies with, and the importance of the respondent's participation.

An additional enticement was added to help stimulate responses—email recipients were informed that three survey respondents would win a \$30 Starbucks coffee card.

Incentives such as this are often employed to augment recruiting success and to minimize respondent drop off (Goritz, 2005). While there can be risk associated with incentives (such as an increased response rate at the expense of response quality), this was minimized by offering a relatively small incentive in a random lottery format.

Given the significant number of detailed qualitative responses provided by the respondents (over 300 qualitative responses) and the high completion ratio (253 completes, 20 incompletes) respondent quality does not appear to have been

compromised. The winners were selected on July 5<sup>th</sup><sup>2</sup> and the gift cards were mailed several days afterward.

### **Phase Two: Snowball Sample**

A follow up email was sent on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2005 to the Phase One population with a reminder to non-respondents to complete the survey and a request for all respondents to forward a link to the online survey to any Jews they knew--particularly those Jews they knew who were not engaged in synagogue life. These requests were to explicitly state that the principal researcher had been copied on the email request. This cover letter also corresponded to the Dillman (1978) "Total Design Approach" and can be found in Appendix B.

### **Survey Design**

The survey was designed to correspond with the classic "Theory of Reasoned Action," pioneered by Izek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is a model of the psychological processes that mediates observed relations between attitudes and behavior. The Theory of Reasoned Action is composed of attitudinal, social influence, and intention variables to predict behavior. The theory states that intention to perform a behavior is determined by the individual's attitude toward performing the behavior and the subjective norms held by the individual. To apply the theory in this study, the survey sought to explore the respondents' attitudes regarding various aspects

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<sup>2</sup> On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Professor Jonathan Cohen and I utilized the random number generator found on [www.random.org](http://www.random.org). We used the random number generator to select five random integers between 1 and 273 (the total number of eligible survey participants). We selected randomly generated numbers in the event that any of the first three winners needed to be disqualified. The numbers selected (96, 198, 87, 62, and 160) were then used to match with respondents based on their survey record number.

of Jewish life, the respondents' assumptions about their friends' and families' use of synagogues, and the respondents' interest in participating in several alternative synagogue programs.

In addition to providing key data for understanding how respondents view synagogue life, this quantitative data served as the basis for developing the focus group and individual interviews which were held from August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005 – September 19<sup>th</sup> 2005.

#### Focus Group and Individual Interviews

In Late July, 2005 Disengaged survey respondents from the Cincinnati, Ohio area were recruited to participate in a focus group to further discuss the issues brought up in the survey research. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, seven respondents participated in a two-hour focus group held in a conference room at the Blue Ash Library, in Blue Ash, Ohio. (See Appendix B for Focus Group Protocol).

The focus group was conducted to provide additional depth to the data collected in the survey research phase. Focus groups are often employed for this purpose, as they allow researchers to access the "knowledge, ideas, story-telling, self-presentation, and linguistic exchanges within a given cultural context" (Barbour and Litzinger, 1998.)

As Krueger and Casey (2000) explain, the purpose of focus groups is to promote a comfortable atmosphere of disclosure in which people can reveal their ideas, experiences, and attitudes. In the give and take that occurs within these groups,

participants both influence and are influenced by one another, and this was the case here, where focus group participants readily built on one another's comments and ideas.

The four women and three men who participated in this focus group ranged in age from their mid-twenties to their mid-fifties. The questions began from the general and moved into the specific wherever possible. While there was a significant amount of material to cover in a short period of time, special care was taken to allow the focus group participants to interact with one another and build on each other's ideas.

Following the guidance presented in Krueger and Casey (2000) and others, the research questions were worded, ordered, and presented to respondents in a conversational, non-threatening manner. After a closed-ended question was asked of all participants, questions were open-ended in order to ensure that as much data as possible was collected. The focus group lasted just over two-hours.

Following the focus group, six individual interviews were held with Disengaged respondents from Ohio and Illinois. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour.

Respondents were interviewed in a process known as a semi-structured life world interview, which is defined as "an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena." (Kvale, 1996, pp 5-6). Care was taken throughout the

interview to confirm interviewer understandings and interpretations and to allow the respondents to confirm or restate their ideas.

The interview format was semi-structured based on a series of open-ended questions based on the topics under question. (See Appendix B for Interview Guide) This approach was selected rather than a fully open-ended structure in order to provide respondents the opportunity to discuss their opinions of synagogue life in greater detail and still ensure that respondents had the opportunity to comment on several predetermined issues, including the opinions about several pre-identified synagogue alternatives.

## **Respondent Overview**

Two-hundred and seventy three respondents participated in this survey research phase, and thirteen of these respondents (5 percent of the total population) were further involved in follow-up focus group and individual interviews.

All but two of the respondents were Jewish,<sup>3</sup> and 54% were between the ages of 35-54, 25% were between 18-34, and 21% were over 55. Nearly three-fourths (72%) of the respondents were married. Of those who were married, 81% were in-married (both partners are Jewish) and 18% were intermarried.<sup>4</sup> Just over half of the respondents have

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<sup>3</sup> Two respondents who completed the survey were not Jewish but were married or partnered with someone who was.

<sup>4</sup> This 18% respondent intermarried rate is much lower than current national averages. For example, the National Jewish Population Survey 2001-2002 reports a 47% intermarriage rate since 1996. At the same time, this 47% rate is fairly recent, and the intermarriage rate before 1970 was reported to be 13%.



no children under the age of 18 living with them, 34% have a child 6-18 years old and 18% have at least one child under 6.

The majority of respondents were members of a synagogue (71%), but as we will see, membership does not equate engagement. The respondents also weighed heavily on the liberal end of Jewish denominations, with 46% of the respondents reporting to be Reform and 34% reporting to be Conservative. Other affiliations included Orthodox (1%) Reconstructionist (3%), Humanist (7%), Secular (5%), Renewal (7%) and Just Jewish (8%)<sup>5</sup>

### **SYNAGOGUE USE**

For purposes of this study, Table 1 “Annual Synagogue Utilization” provides the key marketing segmentation data. Using this data, three market segments emerged: engaged users, moderate users, and disengaged users.

Engaged users represent 40% of the sample, and are defined as those Jews who use the synagogue at least once per month.

Moderates, in contrast, attend synagogue no more than 3-9 times annually, and represent 34% of the sample size.

The third group—the focus of this study—are the disengaged. These respondents either never attend synagogue or attend only for the high holidays. Those who never attend

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<sup>5</sup> Totals are greater than 100% as many respondents selected more than one affiliation.

and those who attend only for the high holidays share many characteristics, but in many respects they differed markedly. Those who attend only for the high holidays are referred to as “annuals,” and those who never attend are referred to as “abstainers.” These two sub-segments comprise the study’s disengaged users and represent 26% of the total sample size. While the 26% representation of the disengaged was lower than initially expected, the overall number of disengaged respondents (n=70) was higher than anticipated. This was due to the effectiveness of the snowball methodology, particularly among the engaged users who disproportionately forwarded the survey relative to the disengaged.

**Table 1 Synagogue Use of Respondents**

	Number of Respondents	Percent
<b>Engaged</b> <i>(attend 1/month or more)</i>	107	40%
<b>Moderates</b> <i>(attend 3-9 times annually)</i>	91	34%
<b>Disengaged</b> <i>(attend annually or abstain)</i>	70	26%
<b>Total</b>	268 <sup>6</sup>	100%

<sup>6</sup> Five respondents did not answer this question.

Disengaged respondents can be found across the major Jewish denominations, although disengaged annuals primarily identify with the Reform and Conservative movements, and disengaged abstainers are largely characterized by respondents who do not identify themselves with any major movement. Specifically,

- Annuals identified themselves as being “Reform” (57%) and “Conservative” (35%), with a smaller concentration among “Just Jewish” (18%), “Secular” (14%) and “Other” (12%); and
- Abstainers are composed largely of those who call themselves “Just Jewish” (30%), “Reform” (22%), “Other,” (17%), “Secular (13%), “Conservative” (9%) and “Humanistic” (9%).<sup>7</sup>

Disengaged respondents reflected the same age cohorts as other respondents, although the annuals were more likely to fall in the 18-34 age group. Overall, however, the disengaged can be found in all age groups in similar proportion as the moderates and the engaged. (Table 2)

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<sup>7</sup> Respondents were allowed to select more than one denomination.

**Table 2: Age of Respondents (n=276)**

<b>AGE</b>	<b>Engaged (~1/month of more)</b>	<b>Moderates (3-9 times annually)</b>	<b>Disengaged (<i>Annuals and Abstainers</i>)</b>	
18-34	18%	26%	35%	→ Annuals: 41% Abstainers: 22%
35-54	57%	54%	49%	→ Annuals: 47% Abstainers: 52%
55- 74	23%	17%	17%	→ Annuals: 12% Abstainers: 26%
75+	3%	3%	0%	→ Annuals: 0% Abstainers: 0%
Total <sup>8</sup>	101%	100%	101%	→

There was a much larger difference regarding parental status. Half of the engaged and moderates have children 18 and younger, compared to less than one-third of the disengaged. As we will see later, participation of family members is a key factor for respondent participation, and it is certainly possible that many of the disengaged respondents in this study would attend more frequently if they had school-aged children. (Table 3)

<sup>8</sup> Totals in the table do not equal 100% due to rounding.

**Table 3: Parental Status of Respondents (n=266)<sup>9</sup>**

	Engaged (~1/month of more)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged ( <i>Annuals and Abstainers</i> )					
I have one or more children age 5 or younger	14%	17%	24%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>23%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>24%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	23%	Abstainers:	24%
Annuals:	23%							
Abstainers:	24%							
I have one or more children between the ages of 6-18	39%	41%	13%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>15%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>10%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	15%	Abstainers:	10%
Annuals:	15%							
Abstainers:	10%							
I have no children under 18 who live with me	50%	51%	69%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>70%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>67%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	70%	Abstainers:	67%
Annuals:	70%							
Abstainers:	67%							

Respondents were also asked about their marital status. As with the other demographic data, respondents cut across all categories of engagement and marital status. Table 4 outlines the marital status of the respondents according to their level of engagement, and Table 5 details the level of engagement for the respondents according to their marital status. While the disengaged respondents can be found in each of the marital status categories, this group was disproportionately married to non-Jews. Specifically, 39% of the abstainers were intermarried, compared to 9% of the engaged and 15% of the moderates. The annuals, on the other hand, were much likely to be single or married to a Jew than intermarried (Table 4).

<sup>9</sup> Responses are greater than 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one category.

When looking at engagement by marital status, however, a slightly different picture emerges (Table 5). While the disengaged are more likely to be intermarried than any other marital category, the intermarried are not most likely to be disengaged. Specifically 40% of the intermarried are moderately engaged, 31% are disengaged, and 29% are engaged (Table 5).

**Table 4: Marital Status by Engagement (n=276)**

<b>AGE</b>	<b>Engaged (~1/month of more)</b>	<b>Moderates (3-9 times annually)</b>	<b>Disengaged (<i>Annuals and Abstainers</i>)</b>	
Single, never married	13%	21%	33%	→ Annuals: 39% Abstainers: 22%
Separated or divorced	5%	4%	6%	→ Annuals: 4% Abstainers: 9%
Married/long-term partnership with someone Jewish	69%	57%	44%	→ Annuals: 53% Abstainers: 26%
Married/long-term partnership with someone non-Jewish	9%	15%	16%	→ Annuals: 4% Abstainers: 39%
Widowed	4%	2%	1%	→ Annuals: 0% Abstainers: 4%
Total <sup>10</sup>	100%	99%	100%	

<sup>10</sup> Totals in the table do not equal 100% due to rounding.

**Table 5: Engagement by Marital Status (n=271)**

	Single, never married	Separated or divorced	Married /long-term partnership with someone Jewish	Married /long-term partnership with someone non-Jewish	Widowed
<b>Engaged</b> (~1/month of more)	<b>25%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>Moderates</b> (3-9 times annually)	<b>33%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Disengaged</b> ( <i>Annuals and Abstainers</i> )	<b>42%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>14%</b>
	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
<i>Annuals</i>	<b>33%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<i>Abstainers</i>	<b>9%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>14%</b>

In many respects, the disengaged look like any other Jews—they can be found across movements, age groups, marital and parental status. On the other hand, there are key differences: Disengaged respondents tend to be younger, have fewer school age

children, and while the intermarried are not disproportionately disengaged, disengaged respondents are disproportionately intermarried.

As we will see in the chapters that follow, while the disengaged and engaged share many qualities, their views about synagogue life are quite distinct. In fact, not only do the disengaged have distinct opinions about synagogue life from the moderates and the engaged, they have distinct opinions as a group, with annuals reporting views quite unlike the abstainers. Both, it turns out, are open to the idea of synagogue life, but their visions of how they would like that life to look are quite distinct.



## **Chapter 3: The Disengaged and Their Views On Synagogue Life**

### **Impressions of Synagogue Life**

The disengaged have any number of reasons for not attending synagogue—ranging from the most substantive to the most minor. Assessing the reasons for their disengagement is extremely complex, as it can involve everything from ideology to lifestyle, politics to social situations.

At the same time, the disengaged have much to say about what they would like from a synagogue and what would motivate them to attend more frequently. Some of their ideas are surprising, others reflect common sense. One thing is for certain: disengaged Jews have a wholly different view of synagogues than their engaged counterparts.

For example, the vast majority of the engaged Jews surveyed in this study find synagogue services to be inspirational, meaningful, intellectually stimulating, and comforting, and they report that synagogues are generally good places to volunteer, socialize, and hold their life cycle events. As engaged synagogue user “Sharona” explains:

I love my synagogue services because my rabbi engages her congregants in discussions about the *d'var torah*. She does not lecture, rather she teaches. That is why I find the services so meaningful.

Of course, not all of the engaged Jews surveyed are completely fulfilled: For example, one-third of the engaged Jews surveyed do not find synagogue services to be inspiring

or intellectually stimulating. Nevertheless, the majority of engaged Jews surveyed are highly satisfied with their synagogue experiences. (Table 6)

Moderates are also largely satisfied with the synagogue experience, although only half of this group find services to be “intellectually stimulating” or “inspirational,” or consider the synagogue to be “a good place for volunteer or social activities.” (Table 6)

For example, Moderate user Roger explains that he wants:

Better sermons with more intellect. [I] feel that most synagogues dumb down their services or juice them up with a hokey guitar to appeal to families or whoever the [financial] base is. More substance all the way around is needed. Nothing in a service I've been to in the last two years has challenged me spiritually or mentally and has only angered me politically.

Among the target group, the disengaged, positive experiences are clearly the exception. The vast majority of the disengaged do not find services to be inspirational, meaningful, intellectually stimulating or comforting (Table 6). It is at this point, however, that we begin to see clear distinctions between the two disengaged market segments: the annuals and the abstainers.

### Annuals

Annuals reported a higher degree of satisfaction than expected, given their limited participation in synagogue life:

- Half of the annuals find services comforting;
- Three-fourths believe synagogues are good places for life cycle events; and
- Two-thirds report having positive experiences while at the synagogue.

While they're not highly satisfied (for example, only one-third of the annuals report being intellectually stimulated or inspired at synagogue), annuals do not appear to have significant obstacles to overcome in order to become more frequent users. As one annual, Brian, explains: "They [synagogue services] are fine, it's just my lifestyle currently that prohibits me from attending." Ellen concurs: "It's more an issue of competition for time than an aspect of the services." Still, there are significant number of annuals who cite issues other than time constraints. Not surprisingly, many of the criticisms that annuals provide about services seem to reflect high holiday services in particular. Laura, for examples, wishes that "the Rabbis were less into telling me I should be coming to synagogue more," and Marty says that services should be "less about sadness in the world and more about celebration."

### Abstainers

Abstainers, on the other hand, have far fewer positive comments about their synagogue experiences:

- Three-fourths do not usually have positive experiences while at the synagogue;
- Less than one-fifth find synagogues services meaningful or comforting or provide them with good opportunities to hold life cycle events; and
- Less than ten percent find services inspirational or intellectually stimulating.

One common complaint is about perceived "relevance." As Lisa explains, services should be "more relevant to what is going on in world today and less about tradition, which is what went on in world yesterday - otherwise I can't relate and don't care." Or

as Carl explained, synagogues should be more about “people in the community, not just about problems in Israel.”

Another repeated theme was about a desire to enjoy the synagogue experience.

Abstainer Candice says “I don’t want to walk out and feel like I was beat up or wondering what the purpose was.” Or, as Cliff suggested, somewhat sheepishly: “This might sound wrong, but I want to be entertained.”

Even though the abstainers had fewer positive experiences to report, and 60% find services to be boring more often than not, their actual “negative experiences” were much lower than might be expected (Table 7):

- Less than one-fifth of abstainers report that they usually have negative experiences; and
- Less than half regularly find services to be irrelevant or boring.

This relative dearth of negative experiences is promising, and reflects the attitudes expressed by the unchurched. There appears to be more apathy than abhorrence, more indifference than irreconcilability.

**Table 6: Recent Positive Experience With Synagogues (n=258)**

	<b>Engaged</b> (~1/month of more)	<b>Moderates</b> (3-9 times annually)	<b>Disengaged</b> ( <i>Annually</i> and <i>Abstainers</i> )	
Synagogue Services Are Usually Inspirational For Me	<b>63%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>24%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 33% Abstainers: 5%</div>
Synagogue Services Are Usually Intellectually Stimulating For Me	<b>59%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>22%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 29% Abstainers: 9%</div>
Synagogue Services Are Usually Comforting For Me	<b>85%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>40%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 51% Abstainers: 18%</div>
Synagogues Are Good Places To Hold My Life My Life Cycle Events	<b>90%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>57%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 76% Abstainers: 18%</div>
Synagogue Services Are Usually Meaningful For Me	<b>89%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>32%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 41% Abstainers: 14%</div>
I Usually Have A Positive Experience When I Attend Synagogue Services	<b>95%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>51%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 65% Abstainers: 23%</div>

**Table 7: Recent Negative Experience With Synagogues (n=258)**

	<b>Engaged</b> (~1/month of more)	<b>Moderates</b> (3-9 times annually)	<b>Disengaged</b> ( <i>Annually</i> and <i>Abstainers</i> )	
Synagogue Services Are Usually Boring For Me	<b>14%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>54%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 60% Abstainers: 41%</div>
Synagogue Services Are Usually Irrelevant To Me	<b>10%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>34%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 31% Abstainers: 41%</div>
I Usually Have A Negative Experience When I Attend Synagogue Services	<b>1%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>18%</b>	→ <div>Annually: 18% Abstainers: 18%</div>

## Opportunities To Increase Synagogue Service And Program Attendance

### Services

Respondents were asked what might entice them to attend synagogue services more frequently. This question was written to correspond with the same question used by Steven M. Cohen in a 1996 study of conservative Jews<sup>1</sup>. When comparing conservative respondents in this survey with the conservative respondents in Cohen's 1996 study, key similarities emerge. Most notably, the rank order of factors that might stimulate increased attendance for conservatives are nearly identical (see Table 8). As we see here and discuss at length later, the importance of family and friends is paramount.

**TABLE 8**  
**Ranked Comparison of Factors To Increase Attendance Among Conservative Jews, 1996 and 2005**

<b>1996 Cohen Study (Conservative Only)</b>	<b>Current Study Subset of Conservative Only (n=85)</b>
1. If Family Would Attend More	1. If Friends Would Attend More
2. If Services Were More Meaningful	2. If Family Would Attend More
3. If Services Were Shorter	3. If Services Were More Meaningful
4. If Sermons Were Better	4. If Services Were Shorter
5. If Friends Would Attend More	5. If Sermons Were Better
6. If I Had Better Prayer Competency	6. If Services Were More Spiritual
7. If I Felt Closer To God	7. If I Had Better Prayer Competency
8. If Services Were More Spiritual	8. If I Felt Closer To God
9. If People Were Friendlier	9. If People Were Friendlier
10. If Child Care Were Available	10. If Child Care Were Available

<sup>1</sup> Steven M. Cohen (1996). *Assessing the Vitality of Conservative Judaism in North America: Evidence from A Survey of Synagogue Members*, Pew Project on Conservative Judaism,

While the disengaged surveyed did not point to any one silver bullet that would cause them all to attend synagogue more frequently, they offered some ideas about what might have an impact on their attendance: (Table 9)

Among annuals:

- Over half reported that if friends or family wanted to go more frequently they too would attend more frequently; and
- Two-thirds report that they might attend more if sermons were better and services more meaningful.

As one annual user, Rick, explains:

The reason I don't go more is that most reform services are very Protestant, and the conservative services I can't comprehend. I like the show, but not the whole *megillah* – the fact is that the presentation from the bema is not filled with inquiry or wonder—it's rote and ritual. I'd like some inquiry and meaning.

Similarly, Allan is looking for more than what he has found in the past:

Apply intellectually stimulating sermons directly and clearly to life today (not exclusively Jewish life.) Institute synagogue-sponsored community initiatives that will have lasting impact for (and in partnership with) the truly needy. Do so by leveraging tangible skills and real-world experiences of the congregation. Use sermons as the inspiration and rallying cry for meaningful, ongoing community-based services.

Annual user Aaron is also interested in meaning and applicability:

I have no objection to services, I think services and structure is a good thing, but the services should be socially grounded and relevant to today's society. It should be beneficial and practical—you would learn something and apply it where the synagogue would commit to improving the community—not necessarily the Jewish community. I would be inclined to join in I thought it was for the greater good, not just bettering myself"

Abstainers were less encouraging, although there was interest in two ideas:

- 46 percent might attend more if more of their friends would go; and
- 41 percent might attend more if services were more meaningful.

Abstainer Shira suggests "Make the services connect more to my day-to-day [life] or the issues that interest me. As a highly agnostic person, I find it disempowering the way some services refer to God so much." Alex agrees, suggesting that he wants "services more relevant to what is going on in world today and less about tradition which is what went on in world yesterday - otherwise I can't relate and don't care."

Candice is also very direct: "I want more education at services—more than a lecture to tell me that I am a bad Jew, and not a sermon that is so simple and stupid, so common sense."



**Table 9: Factors to Stimulate Increased Synagogue Service Attendance<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Would You Attend Shabbat Services More Frequently If:</b>	<b>Engaged (~once/month)</b>	<b>Moderates (3-9 times annually)</b>	<b>Disengaged (Annuals and Abstainers)</b>	
Services Were More Meaningful	60%	62%	61%	→ Annuals: 70 % Abstainers: 41%
The Sermons Were Better	60%	51%	53%	→ Annuals: 65% Abstainers: 27%
The Services Were More Spiritual	50%	45%	29%	→ Annuals: 44% Abstainers: 18%
My family wanted to go more often	54%	67%	48%	→ Annuals: 58% Abstainers: 27%
More of my friends would go	59%	62%	54%	→ Annuals: 58% Abstainers: 46%

One additional factor of note emerged in the “additional comments” segment of the survey. When asked in the survey what changes could make synagogue more appealing, 12% of the unprompted 198 responses from engaged and Moderates mentioned musical changes—typically about making the music more “upbeat” and participatory. Among the disengaged, however, less than 3% mentioned musical changes—they were much more likely to request more English, less Hebrew, and “more relevance” in the services. For the disengaged, music may be more about “fine-tuning” than the more sweeping changes they seek.

<sup>2</sup> Respondents were also asked if child care at the synagogue would increase their attendance. While this was not a significant trigger to increase participation among any one market segment, 62% of parents with children under 5 (across all segments) report that they would attend more frequently if child care were available.

## **Programs**

The survey also investigated the degree to which synagogue programs (as opposed to synagogue services) could be modified to increase attendance. On the one hand, the disengaged were the least interested in each of the listed alternatives—they consistently rated the value propositions lower than the engaged (Table 10). On the other hand, a number of ideas resonated with at least half of the disengaged.

Among the annuals, the top program choices that might cause at least half of them to attend synagogue more frequently were those programs that would help them:

- Lead a more meaningful life (72%).
- Meet and interact with likeminded people (72%)
- Make the world a better place (62%).
- Learn more about Jewish history (62%)
- Become a better person (55%)
- Become better connected with the Jewish people (54%).

Annual user Isaac echoed several of these ideas, presenting his idea for “an inter-synagogue Jewish singles political action group -- an opportunity to work on liberal causes with other singles.”

Abstainers agreed with annuals, although in lower proportion. Still, at least half of the respondents would attend more programs if the programs could help them:

- Lead a more meaningful life (63%).
- Learn more about Jewish history (60%)
- Meet and interact with likeminded people (53%)
- Become better connected with the Jewish people (50%).

On this last issue, abstainer Marlie would like “an accessible hands-on program to become more involved with Israel” and to understand “how Judaism addresses women's rights.” Abstainer Candice talked a great deal about community in this regard.

The first thing would be build community—create a community—I think it is important for me to feel part of it... I would want to feel part of something and know what's going on, and have it be more causal.

**Table 10: Factors to Stimulate Increased Synagogue Program Attendance (n=254)**

Would You Attend Shabbat Programs More Frequently If:	Engaged (~once/month)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged (Annuals and Abstainers)	
Help Me Become A Better Person	69%	63%	53%	<div> <div> Annuals: 55 %  Abstainers: 47% </div> </div>
Help Me Lead A More Meaningful Life	75%	76%	70%	<div> <div> Annuals: 72%  Abstainers: 63% </div> </div>
Help Me Meet and Interact With Like Minded People	78%	81%	66%	<div> <div> Annuals: 72%  Abstainers: 53% </div> </div>
Help Me Learn More About Jewish History	74%	73%	61%	<div> <div> Annuals: 62%  Abstainers: 60% </div> </div>
Help me become better connected with the Jewish People	73%	65%	54%	<div> <div> Annuals: 55%  Abstainers: 50% </div> </div>

### **Attendance of Social Influencers**

A key element of the Ajzen and Fishbein Theory of Reasoned Action is social influence; that is, the degree to which the respondents' actions correspond with their beliefs about the actions of their friends and family. As we saw earlier, across the market segments, significant numbers of respondents say that they would attend synagogue more frequently if their friends and/or families would attend more, which is consistent with the research findings identified earlier concerning the unchurched.

Similarly, this study also explored whether or not there was a relationship between the respondents' synagogue usage and their perception of the degree to which their friends and family attend synagogue. Here the results were mixed: First, the engaged surveyed attend synagogue far more often than their friends and family (Table 11). While it is not surprising that their friends and family do not attend *more* than the engaged do, it was unexpected to see the degree to which the engaged led the way in usage—that is to say, the engaged significantly exceeded, rather than reflected, the perceived attendance behaviors of their social influencers.

Among the disengaged, their behavior only partially reflected the Theory of Reasoned Action. On the one hand, their usage reflected their perceptions of the usage of their social influencers:

- Over half of both annuals and abstainers say their friends attend services about the same amount as they do; and

- Half of the annuals say their family attends services as often as they do.

On the other hand, several abstainers made the untenable response that their family members attend even less than they do, and 40% think their friends and family attend more than they do. These findings tend to minimize the degree to which abstainers are impacted by the perceived behaviors of their social influencers when it comes to synagogue participation. While they would attend more frequently if their friends and family would go with them, the degree to which they think their friends and family go without them is not a motivating factor.

**Table 11**

**Most Of My Friends and Family Members Regularly Attend Synagogue Services**

Most of my immediate family members regularly attend synagogue services	Engaged (~once/month)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged (Annuals and Abstainers)	
My family members attend synagogue services MORE THAN ME	5%	21%	37%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 35% Abstainers: 41% </div> </div>
My family members attend synagogue services LESS THAN ME	67%	44%	10%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 11% Abstainers: 9% </div> </div>
My family attends synagogue services ~THE SAME AS ME	26%	34%	47%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 54% Abstainers: 32% </div> </div>
My friends attend synagogue services MORE THAN ME	5%	15%	28%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 22% Abstainers: 41% </div> </div>
My friends attend synagogue services LESS THAN ME	67%	40%	9%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 13% Abstainers: 0% </div> </div>
My friends attend synagogue services ~THE SAME AS ME	28%	44%	56%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 59% Abstainers: 50% </div> </div>

## THOUGHTS ABOUT CLERGY

The role of clergy in the synagogue is complex and multifaceted. In his book *The New Rabbi* (2002), Stephen Fried writes:

Congregations all want...someone who attends every meeting and is at his desk working until midnight, someone who is twenty-eight years old but has preached for thirty years, someone who has a burning desire to work with teenagers but spends all his time with senior citizens, basically someone who does everything well and will stay with the congregation forever.

Fried's concerns notwithstanding, the engaged in this study were generally very positive about their experiences with clergy: across the board the vast majority of the engaged said that clergy understand their world and their lifestyle, they enjoy interacting with clergy, and that clergy care about their congregants. These respondents also say that clergy are not authoritarian or intimidating. (Table 12)

The disengaged are less positive. Annual Laura says "I feel I am being lectured at." Annual Julie agrees: "I want the leader to be warm and welcoming, but here they are very preachy." Annual Lucile says: "I would love it if the rabbi would say 'are there any questions?'"—to welcome questions, not just talk and talk." Abstainer Candice, never one to mince words, has complaints about the "high pulpit, the affected voices where they are calling God down...it is all very bizarre."

Making matters worse for the disengaged, only 43 percent consider clergy to be understanding and/or accepting of their lifestyle. Both abstainers and annuals reported feeling that clergy "beat me up about being a bad Jew" and that the clergy focus too much on "telling me I should be a better person." While it may be possible that the

respondents are reporting on what they think clergy do as opposed to what the respondents actually experienced (given the infrequency of their synagogue attendance), this perception remains a significant obstacle to overcome.

Still, the news was not all bad for clergy and the disengaged: Less than one-fourth of the disengaged find clergy to be authoritarian and/or intimidating. And, in what may be the most encouraging news about their views on clergy, nearly two-thirds of the disengaged believe that clergy care about their congregants. In an age of cynicism about leaders in general, it is encouraging to see that even those Jews who do not regularly interact with religious leaders believe that clergy care about their congregants. This is at least one hurdle that doesn't need to be overcome.

**Table 12: Thoughts On Clergy (n=254)**

	Engaged (~once/month)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged (Annuals and Abstainers)	
Jewish Clergy Typically Accept and/or Understand Me/My Lifestyle	72%	67%	43%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 47%  Abstainers: 34% </div> </div>
Jewish Clergy Care About Their Congregants	79%	82%	64%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 62%  Abstainers: 68% </div> </div>
Jewish Clergy Are Intimidating And/Or Authoritarian	19%	16%	24%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 28%  Abstainers: 13% </div> </div>

## FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Rabbi Sam Gordon ( 2001) notes that synagogue dues structures may not be appropriate for all Jews.

A set of imposed dues structure is perhaps the most resented aspect of American synagogue life. The marginal and alienated who seek, however tentatively, to enter the synagogue are met with an entry barrier and disincentive to membership. We define synagogue membership based on those who pay dues rather than on those who participate.

While this argument makes sense and we see some degree of price resistance with our disengaged respondents, price resistance is more apparent among the annuals than the abstainers (Table 9): Over half of the annuals might change their synagogue service attendance behavior based on costs:

- 7 percent might join a synagogue or attend more frequently if programs were free;
- 16 percent would be interested in a “pay as your go” policy; and
- 30 percent might attend more if annual dues were less expensive.

Given that the survey didn’t discuss specific pricing, however, the annuals are likely objecting to their perceived notion of costs rather than actual costs. Still, the disengaged did repeatedly complain about money, especially about what they perceive as the synagogue’s preoccupation with it. Annual user Laura complained “I don’t always want to be asked for money—it always feels like people are asking.” Julie agrees “Don’t tell me how much it costs right when I ask for information about the place!”



This sentiment is shared by the unchurched. As Barna (2002) explains, the unchurched often point to what they perceive as the church's preoccupation with money as a key reason for their nonparticipation.

Among the abstainers, money was discussed less often, and only one-third could be enticed to attend more by lowering costs:

- 23 percent are interested in lower membership fees;
- 5 percent like the idea of "pay as you go;" and
- 5 percent might participate more if synagogue was free.

For Abstainers, price is clearly not the major hurdle to overcome, it is the product that is at issue.

**Table 13: I might join a synagogue or attend more frequently if:**

	<b>Annuals (High Holiday Only)</b>	<b>Abstainers (Never attend)</b>
<b>Annual Dues Were Less Expensive</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>I could only pay for those programs or services that I used</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Participation was free</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Financial Issues are unrelated to my decision to use or join a synagogue</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>None of the above</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>32%</b>

## ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE SYNAGOGUE

While this study is decidedly not a sociological investigation of the disengaged, it is important to explore this group's engagement in other community activities to understand if the marketing efforts can leverage their inclination to join other groups or if this group has a lower propensity to become active members in any communities, like their unchurched.

As Robert Putnam (2000) argues, Americans are becoming increasingly disconnected from their social networks and are no longer engaging in community activities to the same degree as they did just a few decades ago. This is particularly evident among the disengaged Jews studied here—particularly concerning volunteerism.

### Volunteer Activities

Across the board, the engaged volunteer more than the disengaged. This is most pronounced with respect to volunteering under Jewish auspices: More than three-fourths of the engaged volunteer through a Jewish organization compared to 18% of the Annuals and 5% of the Abstainers. What was more surprising, however, was the proportion of disengaged who do not regularly volunteer at all: 38% of the Abstainers and 43% of the Annuals report that they do not regularly volunteer at all, compared to just 28% of the moderates and 13% of the engaged. This is consistent with the Putnam's (2000) research, which says: "Churchgoers are substantially more likely to be

involved in secular organizations, to vote and participate politically in other ways, and to have deeper informal social connections” (p. 66) and that “religious involvement is an especially strong predictor of volunteering and philanthropy” (p. 67). With this in mind, offering the disengaged additional volunteer opportunities may not be a successful tool to promote synagogue utilization.

**Table 14: Volunteer Activities**

	Engaged (~once/month)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged (Annuals and Abstainers)	
Volunteer at my child's school	27%	33 %	15 %	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 14% Abstainers: 19% </div> </div>
Volunteer at my synagogue or other Jewish organization	80%	42 %	14 %	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 18% Abstainers: 5% </div> </div>
Volunteer for nonreligious political, cultural, or other nonprofit org.	47%	35%	34%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 32% Abstainers: 38% </div> </div>
I DO NOT REGULARLY VOLUNTEER	13%	28%	42%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> Annuals: 43% Abstainers: 38% </div> </div>

### Social Activities

The disengaged have both similar and distinct patterns of social activities compared to the engaged (Table 15):

- Both groups tend to dine out with friends, participate in group sports, join social clubs, and attend live theater, music and sports in roughly the same proportion as the other;
- The disengaged attend far fewer Jewish-oriented social functions than the engaged (over three-fourths of the engaged regularly attend Jewish social functions compared to less than one-third of the disengaged);
- Similarly, the disengaged attend fewer non-Jewish religious-based social functions than the engaged (31% of the engaged attend such events compared to just 18% of the disengaged.)
- The only category of group social activities in which the disengaged participate in higher proportion than the engaged is in attending weekend excursions with others—two-thirds of the disengaged reported participating in such weekend activities, compared to about half of the engaged. This is particularly noteworthy in that, as we will see later, the engaged are much more interested in attending Jewish weekend retreats than the disengaged.

**Table 15: In Which Social Activities Do You Regularly Participate? (n=252)**

	Engaged (~once/month)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged (Annuals and Abstainers)	
Group Sports	21 %	25%	23%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> <div>Annuals: 25%</div> <div>Abstainers: 18%</div> </div> </div>
Non Jewish religious based social functions	31%	24 %	18%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> <div>Annuals: 18%</div> <div>Abstainers: 18%</div> </div> </div>
Jewish oriented social functions	83 %	58%	29%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> <div>Annuals: 36%</div> <div>Abstainers: 14%</div> </div> </div>
Dine Out With Friends	94%	85%	89%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> <div>Annuals: 91%</div> <div>Abstainers: 86%</div> </div> </div>
Attend weekend excursions with friends and or other families	52%	66%	67%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> <div>Annuals: 66%</div> <div>Abstainers: 68%</div> </div> </div>
Social club (dinner/dance/book/ etc.)	26%	30%	30%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> <div>Annuals: 30%</div> <div>Abstainers: 32%</div> </div> </div>
Attend live theater, music or sports	82%	84%	79%	<div> <div>→</div> <div> <div>Annuals: 80%</div> <div>Abstainers: 77%</div> </div> </div>

### Wrap Up

The research presented to this point suggests that the disengaged think about both communal and Jewish life differently than those who are more engaged in synagogue life. For example, while the disengaged may have a similar secular social life as the engaged, they are far less involved in volunteer work and with religious-based social gatherings.

With respect to synagogue life, the disengaged do not find synagogues to be inspirational, meaningful, intellectually stimulating or comforting, but they might be inclined to participate more if the experience could be made more relevant and meaningful to their lives. They may also more inclined to attend if their friends and families wanted to go with them.

Further, while the disengaged are not particularly motivated by what they perceive is normative synagogue life or even by their perceptions of the behaviors of their social influencers, they have not turned their backs toward Judaism, and are interested in becoming better connected with the Jewish people, learning more about Jewish history, and interacting more with fellow Jews.

All of these ideas and their implications will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Five, but first, Chapter Four will highlight how the disengaged respondents reacted toward several proposed synagogue alternatives. As abstainer Cliff suggests:

I think the reasons I don't go [to synagogue] is because there is nothing there that excites me—I don't understand the language and nothing moves me—I am not comfortable there; I do meditation on my own, but nothing at synagogue. Give me something new and maybe I'll go.

Getting the “Cliffs” of the world excited about new alternatives is, as we will see, not an easy task. Nevertheless, there are several opportunities to pursue to attract both groups of the disengaged.

## **CHAPTER 4: ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS FOR THE DISENAGED**

Across the country, programs are being developed and implemented to help Jews connect with Judaism in innovative ways: These initiatives are as diverse as the “The Adventure Rabbi,” whose mission is to combine outdoor adventure with Jewish study and ritual, to *Ikar*, a Los Angeles-based community that integrates intellectual and spiritual development with political and social activism. These and other programs are aimed at providing new opportunities to serve those Jews whose needs may not be fully met by traditional avenues of Jewish expression.<sup>1</sup>

In this study, several synagogue alternatives were presented to respondents to determine which, if any, would be attractive to the disengaged. The results were consistent with earlier findings: The disengaged (a) have significantly different preferences than the engaged; (b) have distinct opinion among themselves, depending on whether they are annuals or abstainers; and (c) tend to be more subdued in their enthusiasm for any proposed programs than their more engaged co-religionists.

### **Liberal Jewish Weekend Retreats**

The first program that respondents were asked about (Table 16) was “Occasional liberal Jewish weekend retreats tailored for singles, couples, and families that include optional age-appropriate activities such as social action, outdoor activities, music, meditation,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, a list of fifty innovative Jewish programs listed at [www.2164.net/slingshot.html](http://www.2164.net/slingshot.html).

Jewish holiday workshops and current event discussions.” An example of this, albeit from a less progressive Jewish perspective, is that offered by the New York based Gateways Organization, whose goal is to further Jewish education and raise Jewish awareness and pride through weekend retreats and other social learning opportunities. Such a weekend retreat approach seemed to be a viable and “neutral” opportunity to engage disengaged Jews.

In point of fact, however, the disengaged were least interested in this opportunity. While the engaged expressed enthusiasm (nearly three-fourths of the engaged would be interested in attending such weekend retreats) it was by far the least attractive option for the disengaged, particularly among the abstainers.

The annuals were split about the idea—about half expressed an interest in attending and half said they would not attend. Abstainers, however, were largely unimpressed: nearly three-fourths would not be interested in such a program. This was a surprising finding because two-thirds of the abstainers reported that they already regularly attend weekend excursions with friends and family (Table 15). Apparently the prospect of placing a Jewish framework on top of this activity diminishes its appeal to the abstainers. As one abstainer explained: “Who has the time? With soccer, errands, the house—if I am going to take a vacation it’s going to be a vacation, otherwise no way!”



**Table 16: Liberal Jewish Weekend Retreats (n=249)**

<b>Liberal Jewish Weekend Retreats</b>	<b>Engaged (~1/month of more)</b>	<b>Moderates (3-9 times annually)</b>	<b>Disengaged (<i>Annuals</i> and <i>Abstainers</i>)</b>					
I would be interested in attending	72%	62%	40%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>47%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>24%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	47%	Abstainers:	24%
Annuals:	47%							
Abstainers:	24%							
Neutral	5%	14%	8%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>5%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>14%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	5%	Abstainers:	14%
Annuals:	5%							
Abstainers:	14%							
I would not be interested in attending	23%	24%	52%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>47%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>62%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	47%	Abstainers:	62%
Annuals:	47%							
Abstainers:	62%							

### **Jewish Social Justice Center**

In *Why Be Jewish* (1993), Steven Bayme and Barry Holtz suggest that for many Jews, a key ideology for Jewish identity can be *tikkun olam*. That is to say, social action and progressive politics can and does serve for many Jews as their primary experience for leading a Jewish life. Along this line, the survey asked respondents the degree to which a social justice center could meet their needs.

The proposed alternative (Table 17) was “A progressive Jewish Social Justice Center that promotes grass-roots social justice ventures, Jewish communal life, and life-long learning. The center would serve individuals and families interested in fun and meaningful individual and social transformation.”

The annuals expressed some interest in this opportunity, with almost half suggesting that they would be interested in attending. As annual Aaron explains “you’re surrounded by a highly-skilled congregation who is more than willing to participate in meaningful activities. The synagogue needs to harness this.” Another respondent explained: my definition of meaningful is ... being encouraged to apply myself in an organized setting to help others.”

Still, the abstainers were less interested, with less than one-third (29%) expressing interest in such a program (Table 17). This finding appears consistent with the relative lack of volunteering among this group discussed earlier (Table 14).

**Table 17: Jewish Social Justice Center (n=249)**

<b>Jewish Social Justice Center</b>	<b>Engaged (~1/month of more)</b>	<b>Moderates (3-9 times annually)</b>	<b>Disengaged (<i>Annuals and Abstainers</i>)</b>	
I would be interested in attending	<b>59%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>42%</b>	→ Annuals: 48% Abstainers: 29%
Neutral	<b>16%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>23%</b>	→ Annuals: 18% Abstainers: 33%
I would not be interested in attending	<b>25%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>35%</b>	→ Annuals: 34% Abstainers: 38%

### **Jewish Lifecycle Center**

Another idea was to offer a place where the disengaged might wish to have their lifecycle ceremonies in a non-synagogue environment. To meet this potential need, the survey presented the idea of “A warm, inviting Jewish Lifecycle Center (non-synagogue) where individuals and families can design and hold personal customized life cycle events (weddings, bar mitzvahs, baby namings, etc.) and have access to progressive rabbis for personal life needs.”

To a certain extent, this idea was to cater to what Charles Lieberman has called “privatized religion.” To Lieberman, ethnic Judaism emphasizes peoplehood, community and solidarity. In contrast, privatized religion, speaks more in terms of using the synagogue (and Judaism) for private, rather than public communal purposes.

This option was very well received by the annuals surveyed—some two-thirds expressed an interest in utilizing such a center. This was also the second favorite option among the abstainers, with 43% of the abstainers expressing interest in such a center (Table 18).

While the survey respondents were largely positive, the qualitative data didn’t bear out these findings to the same degree. For example, one respondent suggested that it sounds like “all the bad parts of the congregation, but none of the connected community elements.” Annual Aaron explains that he wouldn’t want to use it—“I see rabbis trying to infuse moments in our lives with religion—maybe because that’s the only time they

can get our attention—instead of having religion fall naturally in our lives. This sort of place is the rigid mechanical part of religion that I find distasteful—the preordained milestones that must be infused with religion.” It appears as if the idea for a stand-alone life cycle center makes sense when presented in brief, but when discussed in greater detail, the idea falls short as a stand-alone proposition.

**Table 18: Jewish Life Cycle Center (n=247)**

Jewish Life Cycle Center	Engaged (~1/month of more)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged ( <i>Annuals and Abstainers</i> )					
I would be interested in attending	38%	45%	58%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>65%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>43%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	65%	Abstainers:	43%
Annuals:	65%							
Abstainers:	43%							
Neutral	24%	26%	23%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>21%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>29%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	21%	Abstainers:	29%
Annuals:	21%							
Abstainers:	29%							
I would not be interested in attending	37%	29%	19%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>14%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>29%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	14%	Abstainers:	29%
Annuals:	14%							
Abstainers:	29%							

### **Services With A Universal Focus**

Hebrew College President David Gordis (2005) writes:

The contemporary problem for many Jews, and I include myself among them, is that in the traditional liturgy we are often called upon to affirm repeatedly formulations that are no longer consistent with what we actually believe. A variety of strategies are adopted by those that deal with this problem of inconsistency, but for many, no persuasive approach to a liturgy that no longer speaks to them has emerged. That is one of the reasons why quite a number of people are alienated from the synagogue though the community would like to attract them and they themselves see no alternative point of Jewish engagement for themselves. This is an area where experiments with renewal must be undertaken and in which rabbis must be prepared to play an active role. (p. 160)

For many Jews, the strategies Gordis refers to include treating the liturgy as metaphorical rather than literal, or saying the words not necessarily because they believe them, but because they connect the reader with the Jewish people or the Jewish past.

Among the disengaged, however, such strategies seem less effective. In this light, the survey asked respondents whether they would be interested in "Synagogue services that are less focused on God, Israel, and Hebrew, and are more focused on meaningful conversations about universal values, pressing social concerns and modern life."

Over half of the annuals expressed interest in this idea, and this proposal was the only compelling program idea for the majority of abstainers: Nearly two-thirds of the abstainers expressed an interest in attending such services. As one respondent explained, she wants "less praying to God—as I am not sure if it's relevant to today and my needs. I want to learn more about what living Jewishly means in today's world, in my world." Another concurred, asking for "More relevance to issues of today. What do Jewish texts, history, and ethics say about war and ending hunger?"

Not surprisingly, this idea was not well received by those who are already engaged, and was in fact the least attractive option for the engaged respondents (Table 19).

**Table 19: Services With Universal Focus (n=247)**

Services With A Universal Focus	Engaged (~1/month of more)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged (Annuals and Abstainers)					
I would be interested in attending	25%	36%	57%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>55%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>62%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	55%	Abstainers:	62%
Annuals:	55%							
Abstainers:	62%							
Neutral	18%	27%	25%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>27%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>19%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	27%	Abstainers:	19%
Annuals:	27%							
Abstainers:	19%							
I would not be interested in attending	57%	37%	18%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>18%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>19%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	18%	Abstainers:	19%
Annuals:	18%							
Abstainers:	19%							

### **Free/Low Cost Online Courses**

With the growth of the internet and many useful and popular Jewish websites such as Interfaithfamily.com, Jewcy.com, and Nextbook.com, respondents were asked about whether they would be interested in “free or low cost online courses on such issues as Jewish history, Jewish culture, Jewish social justice issues and Jewish philosophy. Courses would be available for both children and adults.” (Table 20)

While about half of the respondents expressed an interest in using free online courses, the interest was far greater among the engaged than the disengaged. That is, online courses appear to be a viable addition for those who are already engaged in Jewish life rather than as a “first-step” into Judaism. Surprisingly, however, one-third of the abstainers expressed an interest. This may be related to the abstainers earlier reported interest in both learning more about Jewish history and their desire to feel more

connected with the Jewish people (Table 10) as well as their reluctance to be included in public religious communities. For many disengaged Jews, a virtual Jewish community may serve as a good first step into Jewish religious life.

**Table 20: Free/Low Cost Online Courses (n=247)**

<b>Free/Low Cost Online Courses</b>	<b>Engaged (~1/month of more)</b>	<b>Moderates (3-9 times annually)</b>	<b>Disengaged (<i>Annuals and Abstainers</i>)</b>	
I would be interested in attending	61%	48%	38%	<div> <div> Annuals: 41%  Abstainers: 33% </div> </div>
Neutral	11%	26%	28%	<div> <div> Annuals: 25%  Abstainers: 33% </div> </div>
I would not be interested in attending	28%	26%	34%	<div> <div> Annuals: 34%  Abstainers: 33% </div> </div>

### **Progressive Clergy To Discuss Work-Life Issues**

The National Institute of Business and Industrial Chaplains is a body of interdenominational chaplains who provide ecumenical counseling for people in business and industry. Such chaplains respond to employee work-life concerns such as ethics and job stress and related issues. Given how much time people spend at work and the growing array of ethical challenges facing modern workers, the survey explored the degree to which respondents would be interested in Jewish chaplains who would engage in such counseling.

Specifically, the survey looked at respondent interest in the opportunity to “confidentially discuss job stress, business ethics, on-the-job romance and other work-life issues with progressive clergy who have business experience and corporate counseling experience.” (Table 21)

Overall, respondents were not particularly interested in such services. While the majority were not averse to such an offering, there doesn’t seem to be any pent up demand either. This is particularly true for abstainers, who show almost no interest in such an offering. Still, half of the annuals expressed an interest in corporate clergy, which may be worth pursuing further.

**Table 21: Progressive Clergy To Discuss Work-Life Issues (n=248)**

Progressive Clergy To Discuss Work-Life Issues	Engaged (~1/month of more)	Moderates (3-9 times annually)	Disengaged (Annuals and Abstainers)					
I would be interested in attending	46%	49%	37%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>50%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>10%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	50%	Abstainers:	10%
Annuals:	50%							
Abstainers:	10%							
Neutral	24%	19%	22%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>14%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>38%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	14%	Abstainers:	38%
Annuals:	14%							
Abstainers:	38%							
I would not be interested in attending	29%	32%	42%	→ <table><tr><td>Annuals:</td><td>36%</td></tr><tr><td>Abstainers:</td><td>52%</td></tr></table>	Annuals:	36%	Abstainers:	52%
Annuals:	36%							
Abstainers:	52%							



## Program Offering Overview

The overview chart below (Table 22) outlines which programs were most appealing to each market segment and which were the least attractive. In this overview, the single greatest differences between the engaged and the disengaged market segments can be readily observed. Overwhelmingly, the engaged want additions to their synagogue worship—most notably with Jewish weekend retreats, free or low cost online courses, and a social justice center. The least appealing idea for this group is changing the services that they already attend—the idea of services with a universal focus was by far the least attractive option for these engaged Jews.

**Table 22: Program Overview By Most And Least Popular Options**

	<b>Engaged (~1/month of more)</b>	<b>Moderates (3-9 times annually)</b>		<b>Annuals (High Holiday Only)</b>	<b>Abstainers (Never attend)</b>
<i>#1 Most Attractive Program</i>	Liberal Jewish Weekend Retreats (72%)	Liberal Jewish Weekend Retreats (62%)		Jewish Life Cycle Center (65%)	Services With Universal Focus (62%)
<i>#2 Most Attractive program</i>	Free Online Courses (61%)	Social Justice Center (54%)		Services With Universal Focus (55%)	Jewish Life Cycle Center (43%)
<i>#3 Most Attractive program</i>	Social Justice Center (59%)	Progressive Clergy To Discuss Work-Life (49%)		Progressive Clergy To Discuss Work- Life (50%)	Free Online Courses (33%)
<i>Least Attractive Option</i>	Services With Universal Focus (57%)	Services With Universal Focus (37%)		Liberal Jewish Weekend Retreats (47%)	Liberal Jewish Weekend Retreats (62%)

In stark contrast to the engaged, the disengaged do not want additive programs. For the disengaged, services with a more universal focus are extremely appealing, and the creation of a life cycle center might afford them the opportunity to express their Jewishness in a more personal and private manner.

Where does this leave us in terms of new opportunities to engage the disengaged and for further study? What are the best opportunities for synagogues to leverage in order to actively appeal to this untapped market? These questions will be turned to next, in Chapter Five: Implications.

## CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

In both their words and actions, disengaged American Jews have expressed dissatisfaction with synagogue life. While their displeasure does not appear to be a permanent barrier to future synagogue attendance, the disengaged need to be convinced that a new synagogue experience would somehow be different from their past experiences.

This is not to suggest that all progressive synagogues should change their ways to appeal to this market—such a strategy would be detrimental to those engaged Jews who are largely satisfied with synagogue life. Further, many of the proposed changes may be theologically or culturally inconsistent with the existing vision of the synagogue. In addition, it should be noted that disengagement is not a permanent status for all of the disengaged. Some will change their relationship to the synagogue over time simply by having children and growing older.

Still, for those new and existing synagogues that wish to better serve this market, there are a number of opportunities to explore. These efforts can be described within what is known as the marketing mix, also known as the Four P's of Marketing: Product, Price, Place and Promotion.

## PRODUCT

In marketing, product decisions surround functionality, quality, appearance, support and other elements that correspond to the essence of the product or service. With respect to the synagogue, product decisions refer to the delivery of programs and services: Do they meet the needs and expectations of the target audience, and if not, what changes are necessary? With respect to product issues, the disengaged in this study have one overarching recommendation: *Provide Services And Programs With Meaning and Relevance* (see, for example, Tables 6, 7 and 9).

In their study of moderately affiliated American Jews, Cohen and Eisen (2000) found that the moderately affiliated Jews they reported a longing to find meaning and purpose in their lives, and a desire to find this within the framework of Judaism. But while Cohen and Eisen's moderately engaged respondents were able to augment their private search for meaning with synagogue participation, the disengaged do not have the same opportunity. Less than one-third of the disengaged say that synagogue services are meaningful to them (compared to 89% of the engaged and 84% of the Moderates) and two-thirds would attend more frequently if they were.

In practice, implementing this finding in a community setting is difficult—the quest for meaning is a profoundly individual undertaking. Nevertheless, there is much a synagogue can do in this regard. While there is no one-size fits all solution, and some of the recommendations below will be inappropriate for some congregations, the ideas are consistent with the comments from the disengaged.

### *Revisit the liturgy*

Liturgical reforms have been part and parcel of synagogue life throughout Jewish history. As scholar Ismar Elbogen has identified in his classic work: *Jewish Liturgy, A Comprehensive History*, liturgical innovation has been a constant in our history—from the earliest additions of the *Amidah* and *Shema* to the evolution of the medieval *piyyut* tradition to modern prayer book reform in Germany and America. Today there is liturgical innovation even in the most traditional circles to deal with new historical circumstances of the Jewish people, and for those synagogues who wish to engaged the disengaged, their liturgy should speak to congregants in a thoroughly modern and relevant voice. If synagogues wish to meet the needs of this highly dissatisfied population, tinkering with gender neutrality and developing interpretive translations with contemporary resonance may be insufficient.

For the abstainers, meaningful liturgies might borrow strategies from the Jewish Humanist tradition, where the liturgy is less focused on God, Torah and Israel and more focused on universal human values, pressing social concerns, and modern life. For the annuals, poetry and liturgy that speaks about our role in society would go far. As annual Aaron explained “I think services and structure is a good thing, but the services should be socially grounded and relevant to today’s society.” Or Rick, who explained “the fact is that the presentation from the bema is not filled with inquiry or wonder—it’s rote and ritual. I’d like some inquiry and meaning.” These ideas do not refer to the sermon alone, but to the service as a whole.

### *Reduce Hebrew*

As many Reform congregations are adding more Hebrew to their liturgy, this recommendation runs counter to the prevailing trend and may be ineffective for the engaged. But the disengaged are not finding meaning and relevance in a language they do not understand. While occasional Hebrew is a fine reminder of tradition and links the congregant to the larger Jewish people past and present, over-utilization serves to create distance between the disengaged congregant and the meaning of the words spoken or sung. Rabbis and others can decry the lack of Hebrew literacy, but in the meantime, the disengaged are not well-served by liturgy they can not comprehend.

### *Revisit how Torah is utilized*

For the disengaged, the Torah service is less about grappling with the meaning of life's uncertainties and more about rote and ritual. While listening to readers chant Torah is a meaningful experiences for many engaged Jews, the disengaged report that this is an example of an archaic ritual in a foreign language that does not speak to their lives.

The Torah service is a intensely ritualized event that has deep historic roots and is the highlight of the service for countless Jews. At the same time, the very rituals that are deeply meaningful to engaged Jews are inconsistent with the values of many of the disengaged. Elements such as walking around the congregation with the Torah while congregants seek to kiss and touch it, holding the open Torah portion in the air while claiming that this is the document from Moses, and having a Gabbai ensure that no

words are mispronounced all create a certain ethos around the Torah that appears inconsistent with the desires of the disengaged to have a service relevant to their lives. While talented rabbis for generations have sought to make each Torah portion seem relevant to the news of the day, this may not be enough for some disengaged Jews.

Options for creating a “disengaged friendly” approach might center around structuring the Torah service as a springboard to discuss how these stories served earlier generations as they grappled with meaning, and show how they can be used for the same purpose today. While this might require skipping verses, interjecting examples of other societies’ relevant myths and legends, reading portions outside of the proscribed order in order to better reflect the news of the week, and so on, the experience a reconstituted Torah service could help the disengaged better relate to its function.

#### *Frame Services and Sermons around Meaningful and Relevant Topics*

Church “seeker services”—those services designed to attract the unchurched, have moved sharply away from the traditional sermons against temptation and sin and evil and moved toward discussion of ethical business, spiritual parenting, living with fear in an uncertain world, and so on. Services—not just sermons—can be arranged topically, with relevant readings, music and discussions building around relevant Jewish themes and issues of the day rather than arranged around the fixed order of the siddur.

Changing the nature of the synagogue product to meet the needs of the disengaged does not mean watering down content—to the contrary, the disengaged are convinced that the product is watered down too much as it is. Rather, a synagogue service for the

disengaged is likely to be an intellectual, participatory, and relevant, and in the end, one hopes, a meaningful experience for the disengaged Jew.

## **PRICE**

There are a number of formulas that synagogues use to set their dues structures. For example, while some congregations have flat fees for membership, others segment by age (i.e., different prices for different age cohorts), family status (i.e., discounts through the bundling of family memberships) income (i.e., higher prices for families of greater means) and length of membership (e.g., building funds for certain years of membership). Other financial considerations include whether or not the synagogue charges for adult education programs, high holiday tickets, religious school, etc. In all, there are significant differences in the price charged for synagogue memberships across and within geographic markets.

While price is always a factor among consumers to some degree, it is not the primary driver for attracting the disengaged. Among the abstainers, only one-third suggest that lowering prices would attract their attention. This number is higher among annuals, but is only a factor for about half of this group.

While issues of pricing should be explored with ongoing research, at present it does not appear to be a significant deterrent from synagogue usage. After all, aside from the high holidays, congregants are not typically asked to pay to attend services, so there is nothing stopping a disengaged Jew from attending synagogue services and not paying



dues. While changing the dues structure might impact membership to some degree, it is unlikely to have a major impact upon stimulating attendance.

This being said, money is a factor: The disengaged suggest that synagogues appear have a preoccupation with money, and it is this perceived preoccupation that deters this population. That is to say, while it is not the price that turns away this population, it is the perceived fixation with revenue that they find objectionable. The implication here is to explore how the synagogue approaches money—do high holiday services preach about the congregation's financial needs? Are synagogue bulletins, newsletters, and websites filled with information about who donated how much and just how expensive everything is? Are synagogue presidents regularly asking for increased pledges in their Friday night remarks? Are prospective members told how much membership costs before they ask? By cutting back on the presence of financial communications, synagogues will be less likely to convey the image of being preoccupied with finances. While congregants need to be assured that the synagogue is fiscally responsible, constant reminders of fundraisers, dues, donations, grocery discount cards, naming opportunities and the like can be overwhelming.

## **PLACE**

Place refers to both the synagogue itself and any other channels of service and product distribution. This includes the internet as well as any “nontraditional” places for synagogue services, such as movie theaters, community centers and churches. While

this research effort did not deeply explore the nature of place, two intriguing “place-oriented” implication emerged.

First, the disengaged are interested in interacting with each other and moving away from the frontal aspects of synagogue, and synagogue space can be designed to reflect this attitude. Lawrence Hoffman (1999) discusses this in terms of *sociofungal* (space that separates people from each other) and *sociopetal* (space that connects people with each other.) “Hard architecture, straight lines of pews, social distance between each other and lecture-like seating arrangements designed for frontal presentations drive people away from each other and discourage a sense of community” (p. 233).

Synagogues committed to attracting the disengaged can work to improve the sociopetal, community-oriented aspects of the worship space. Ideally, congregants would be able to face each other to some degree as they engage in more participatory services.

The second issue is the Internet. Particularly among the annuals, online classes may prove to be a valuable resource. While this may or may not translate into increased synagogue usage, it appears to be an intriguing idea for many annuals, and merits additional study.

## **PROMOTION**

Promotion refers to communicating and selling. This study did not actively explore how the disengaged would prefer synagogues to promote themselves, but the respondents did highlight the important role that friends and family play in promoting

synagogue attendance. Over half of the disengaged would attend service more frequently if friends and family encouraged it. Synagogues would do well to explain this to their members, encouraging them to bring friends and family with them more frequently. While this may be perceived as a non-normative behavior, it may be the single best tool to attract the disengaged.

Another promotional idea to explore is the issue of what is communicated during High Holiday services. Annually, it appears, are often under the impression that the High Holiday services reflect the ethos of services throughout the year. Given the added formality of the high holidays, this is probably not an appropriate impression for most American synagogues.

On the one day that synagogue leaders have the opportunity to address disengaged Jews, little is done to excite this population about the programs and services throughout the rest of year. While the ineffective strategy of castigating the congregation for not showing up more often seems to be waning, there needs to be better communication at this time about the exciting and meaningful events that will occur throughout the year. Rather than relegating this task to a board member on the bema or a flyer on the chairs, perhaps a compelling video could play in the hallway demonstrating exciting programs from the previous year.

## **WRAP UP**

The disengaged have any number of reasons for not attending synagogue—ranging from the most substantive to the most minor. Assessing the reasons for their disengagement is extremely complicated as it can involve ideology, politics, social situations and lifestyle.

While their rationale for disengagement may be diverse, they have demonstrated that as a group there are some commonalities about what might bring them back in. Most importantly, this population has not turned their backs on synagogue life—they have simply not found synagogues that speak to them as modern Jewish men and women searching for meaning and purpose.

For those synagogues that are so inclined, this target market is within reach. Services can be created that speak to their sensibilities; communities can be built to sustain their involvement. With commitment, perseverance, and ongoing research, there is no doubt that we can reach the disengaged and, following the words of Franz Rosenzweig, bring these Jews “from the periphery to the center, from the outside in.”

## APPENDIX A



### The 2005 Jewish Life Study

1

Thanks for taking five minutes to complete our survey! All respondents who complete the survey will be entered into our drawing for one of three \$25 Starbucks giftcards. Enter your email address below so we can contact you if you win. Your email address will be kept strictly confidential.

2

Are you Jewish?

☐ Yes

☐ No

3

How old are you?

☐ Under 18

☐ 18-34

☐ 35-54

☐ 55-74

☐ 75+

Marital Status

☐ Single, never married

☐ Separated or divorced

☐ Married/long term partnership with someone Jewish

- ☐ Married/long term partnership with someone non-Jewish
- ☐ Widowed

---

5

Do you have any children who live with you? (check all that apply)

- ☐ I have one or more children age 5 or younger
- ☐ I have one or more children between ages 6 - 18
- ☐ I have no children under 18 who live with me

**SUBMIT** 

Survey Page 4 of 7



The 2005 Jewish Life Study

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6

Thinking about Jewish denominations, which if any do you consider yourself to be? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Reform
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Orthodox
- ☐ Reconstructionist
- ☐ Humanistic
- ☐ Renewal

- ☐ Secular
  - ☐ Just Jewish
  - ☐ Other, Please Specify
- 

7

Are you currently or have you recently been a member of a synagogue?

- ☐ Yes, I'm currently a synagogue member
- ☐ No, but I've been a member in the past five years
- ☐ No, I haven't been a member of a synagogue for at least five years

8

About how often did you go to any Jewish services over the past 12 months, NOT INCLUDING specifically attending someone's life cycle event, such as bar mitzvah, funeral, wedding, etc.?

- ☐ Only on the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and/or Yom Kippur)
- ☐ A few times (3-9 times)
- ☐ About once a month
- ☐ 2 or 3 times a month
- ☐ About once a week
- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Don't Know

9

About how often did you go to someone's Jewish life cycle event over the past 12 months, such as bar mitzvah, funeral, wedding, etc.?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ One or two times

- ☐ 3-7 times
- ☐ 8-12 times
- ☐ At least once a month
- ☐ Don't Know

10

About how often did you attend a Jewish program or activity (not including synagogue services) over the past 12 months (such as a Jewish-oriented lecture, social action program, book club, etc.)

- ☐ Never
- ☐ One or two times
- ☐ 3-7 times
- ☐ 8-12 times
- ☐ At least once a month
- ☐ Don't Know



The 2005 Jewish Life Study

11

What has been your most recent experience with synagogues?

1  
YES

2  
NO

N A

Synagogue services are usually inspirational for me

1

2



Synagogue services are usually meaningful for me

1 2 3

Synagogue services are usually boring for me

1 2 3

Synagogue services are usually irrelevant to me

1 2 3

Synagogue services are usually intellectually stimulating for me

1 2 3

Synagogue services are usually comforting for me

1 2 3

Synagogues usually offer valuable volunteer or social action opportunities for me

1 2 3

Synagogues provide good opportunities for me to socialize with people I want to be with

1 2 3

Synagogues are usually good places for me to hold my Jewish life cycle events (e.g., wedding, baby naming)

1 2 3

I usually have positive experiences when I attend synagogue services

1 2 3

I usually have negative experiences when I attend synagogue services

1 2 3

12

Would you attend Shabbat services more frequently if...

1 2 NA  
YES NO

The services were shorter

1

2

The services were more meaningful

1

2

The sermons were better

1

2

The services were more spiritual

1

2

You felt more competent with your prayer skills

1

2

You felt closer to God

1

2

Your family wanted to go more often

1

2

More of your friends would go

1

2

People were friendlier

1

2

Child care was available

1

2

13

If I could change one or two aspects of synagogue services to make services more appealing to me personally, I would:

--

14

Which statements apply to your Jewish friends and immediate family members?

1	2	3	
MORE THAN I DO	LESS THAN I DO	ABOUT THE SAME AS I DO	N/A

Most of my immediate Jewish FAMILY MEMBERS attend synagogue services

1                      2                      3                        

Most of my immediate Jewish FAMILY MEMBERS participate in organized Jewish activities (not including the synagogue)

1                      2                      3                        

Most of my Jewish FRIENDS regularly attend synagogue services

1                      2                      3                        

Most of my Jewish FRIENDS regularly participate in organized Jewish activities (not including the synagogue)

1                      2                      3                        

15

I might attend more Jewish programs or events (not necessarily synagogue services) more frequently if I thought that attending would help me (check all that that apply)

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Become more well informed about social justice or public policy issues

                                                                                                  

Become a better person

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Lead a more meaningful life

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Make the world a better place

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Meet and interact with like-minded Jews

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Learn more about Jewish history and/or culture

1      2      3      4      5

Become better connected with the Jewish people

1      2      3      4      5

Be comforted

1      2      3      4      5

16

How do you feel about Jewish Clergy? (e.g., Rabbis, Cantors)

1      2      3      4      5  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

Jewish clergy typically understand the world in which I live

1      2      3      4      5

Jewish clergy often intimidate me

1      2      3      4      5

I enjoy interacting with Jewish clergy

1      2      3      4      5

Jewish clergy are typically accepting of me and/or my lifestyle

1      2      3      4      5

Jewish clergy are authoritarian

1      2      3      4      5

Jewish clergy care about their congregants

1      2      3      4      5



17

Financially speaking, I would join a synagogue or attend more frequently if (select the one answer that is most accurate):

- ☐ Annual dues were less expensive
- ☐ I could pay only for those programs or services that I used
- ☐ Participation was free
- ☐ Financial issues are unrelated to my decision to use or join a synagogue
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other, Please Specify

\_\_\_\_\_

18

Financially speaking, I would attend more Jewish programs or events if (select the one answer that is most accurate):

- ☐ They were less expensive
- ☐ They were free
- ☐ Financial issues are unrelated to my decision to participate in Jewish programs or services
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other, Please Specify

\_\_\_\_\_

In which of the following VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES do you regularly participate?(check all that apply)

- ☐ Volunteer at my child's school

- ☐ Volunteer at a non-Jewish religious-based organization
  - ☐ Volunteer at my synagogue or other Jewish organization
  - ☐ Volunteer at a hospital/senior center
  - ☐ Volunteer for a nonreligious political, cultural, or other nonprofit organization
  - ☐ I do not regularly volunteer
  - ☐ Other, Please Specify
- 

---

20

In which of the following SELF-IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES do you regularly participate?(check all that apply)

- ☐ Attend a self-help or support group
  - ☐ Attend a non-Jewish religious-based self-improvement group or activity
  - ☐ Attend a Jewish-oriented self-improvement group or activity
  - ☐ Attend life skills/leadership training/adult education class
  - ☐ Use a health club
  - ☐ I do not regularly participate in self-improvement activities
  - ☐ Other, Please Specify
- 

---

21

In which of the following SOCIAL ACTIVITIES do you regularly participate? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Participate in group sports
- ☐ Attend non-Jewish religious-based social functions
- ☐ Attend Jewish-oriented social functions
- ☐ Dine out with friends

- ☐ Attend weekend excursions with friends and/or other families
- ☐ Participate in a social club (dinner/dance/book/etc.)
- ☐ Attend live theater, musical performances, or sporting events
- ☐ Participate with others in a craft/hobby club
- ☐ I do not regularly participate in social activities
- ☐ Other, Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_

22

These are the last questions of our survey. How do the following alternatives appeal to you?

1 I would be VERY interested in attending	2 I would be SOMEWHAT interested in attending	3 Neutral	4 I would PROBABLY NOT be interested in attending	5 I would DEFINITELY NOT be interested in attending
--	---	--------------	---	---

Occasional liberal Jewish weekend retreats (tailored for singles, couples, and families) that include optional age-appropriate activities such as social action, outdoor activities, music, meditation, Jewish holiday workshops and current event discussions.

1      2      3      4      5

A progressive Jewish Social Justice Center that promotes grass-roots social justice ventures, Jewish communal life, and life-long learning. The Center would serve individuals and families interested in fun and meaningful individual and social transformation.

1      2      3      4      5

A warm, inviting Jewish Lifecycle Center (non-synagogue) where individuals and families can design and hold personal customized life cycle events (weddings, bar mitzvahs, baby namings, etc.) and have access to progressive rabbis for personal life needs.

1      2      3      4      5

Synagogue services that are less focused on God, Israel, and Hebrew, and are more focused on meaningful conversations about universal values, pressing social concerns and modern life.

1      2      3      4      5

Free or low cost online courses on such issues as Jewish history, Jewish culture, Jewish social justice issues, Jewish philosophy, etc. Courses would be available for both children and adults.

1      2      3      4      5

Opportunities to confidentially discuss job stress, business ethics, on-the-job romance and other work-life issues with progressive clergy who have business experience and corporate counseling experience.

1      2      3      4      5

---

23

If you could create one new Jewish program, service or activity that would appeal to you, what would it be?

--

---

24

Would you like to have a role in designing any of the above ideas? If yes, provide your contact information here. Your contact information will not be shared for any other purpose.

Name	<input type="text"/>
Street Address	<input type="text"/>
City	<input type="text"/>
State	<input type="text"/>
Zip	<input type="text"/>
Email Address	<input type="text"/>
Phone Number	<input type="text"/>

---

25

If you would like to have survey results emailed to you, please write your email address here.

--

---

Thanks so much for your time. If you have any questions, feel free to email our principal researcher, Mark Rothschild, at [mrothschild@huc.edu](mailto:mrothschild@huc.edu) or call him at 513-477-8218.





## APPENDIX B

Hi [name]

I'm leading an important research study on American Jewish life and your input can make a major difference. What would you change about synagogue services to make them more appealing? If you could create one new program or service targeted toward Jews, what would it be? These are some of the questions we're asking to learn what new programs and services might better meet the needs of today's diverse Jewish population.

Can I trouble you to help out in two ways?

- 1) Below is a link to an online survey that takes less than ten minutes to complete. Whether you're an active synagogue member or haven't participated in organized Jewish life for years, your feedback is critical. Could you click on the link and complete the survey either right now or within the next few days? The survey is confidential, there's a chance to win some free Starbucks gift certificates (!) and, most importantly, your feedback can have a significant impact on the development of some innovative new programs and services.
- 2) In several days I'm going to send you a second email asking you to forward the survey link to several of your Jewish friends. In particular, we're interested in hearing from folks who aren't at all active in organized Jewish life. Their opinion—like yours—is critical to the success of this effort.

This pioneering study is being conducted in conjunction with the Hebrew Union College-University of Cincinnati Ethics Center. The individual responses are strictly confidential, and no one will be contacted without their explicit permission. I hope I can count on your support. You'll even be able to see the survey results when the study is complete.

Here's the link for you to use to complete the survey:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/survey.zqi?p=WEB224CSMCDPM2>

If you have any questions or comments, please give me a call or reply to this email. I'll send you the second email in about 5 days, but in the meantime please click on the link and complete this survey.

Thanks so much!

Mark

Mark Rothschild  
5050 Muirwoods  
Cincinnati, OH 45242  
(513) 477-8218

## **APPENDIX C**

### **2005-2006 Jewish Life Study**

#### **Cincinnati Focus Group Protocol**

Tuesday August 9<sup>th</sup> 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm at the Blue Ash Public Library, located at 4911 Cooper Road.

The following questions will provide the framework for the focus group discussion. While questions that are not listed here may be asked in order to follow up on participant responses, the focus group discussion will center on these main questions. The introduction and debriefing statements will be read to participants.

#### *Introduction (5 minutes)*

The purpose of this follow-up study is to better understand what, if anything, synagogues could provide to better serve those Jews who are not highly engaged in synagogue life.

Everything that you say here will be kept confidential, and your names and other identifying information will not be used in any report coming from this research.

We have a limited amount of time, so I might have to interrupt from time-to-time to keep things moving.

To begin, tell us your name, how often on average you attend synagogue a year, not including to attend weddings and other ceremonies, and what are the main reasons why you don't attend more often?

(RECORD)

#### *Transition 1: Brainstorming Session (10 minutes)*

Our first exercise will be a brainstorming session. Some ideas that we will say will be great, others may not be. The key is just to have ideas. You can build on each others ideas or just call out new ones.

Let me give you an example of how this works. If we were going to design a brand new style of alarm clock that would offer great features, what are some examples of what that alarm clock might do? (give group some examples, such as "turn on the coffee machine" and "give me a backrub instead of a buzzer", then let group call out a few)

Terrific. Using this same technique, if you could create a new type of synagogue that would offer great features that appeal to you, what would that synagogue do?

(RECORD)

*Transition 2: Marketing Discussion (5-10 minutes)*

- Do you think synagogues do a good job marketing themselves to you? Why or why not?
- How could they do a better job?

*Transition 3: Survey Follow Up Questions (15-20 minutes)*

One of the most common statements we heard in our survey research from folks who don't attend very often is that they might be inclined to go more often if synagogue services and programs were more meaningful. Do you agree with this, and if so, what does meaningful mean? How could synagogues be more meaningful to you?

(RECORD)

Follow-Up : (RECORD ALL)

- Do you believe that synagogues could help you live a more meaningful life? How?
- People also talked a lot about relevance. Why does "relevance" matter and how might services be made to be more relevant? Is this the same as "meaningful" or different?
- Other folks who are not involved with synagogue life have said that they wished services weren't so "frontal," and that they could participate more. Do you agree and if so, what does this mean?
- Would you like someone else to lead services or programs besides the rabbi or cantor? Who should lead?

*Transition 4: Program Design (30 minutes)*

We are going to move now to designing three types of alternative synagogue programs that have been most popular among survey respondents who are not regular synagogue goers: We will spend 10 minutes per program.

*Key questions*

- a. Let's begin with the Jewish Life Cycle Center. In our survey a significant number of non-synagogue goers liked the idea of "a warm, inviting Jewish Lifecycle Center (non-synagogue) where individuals and families can design and hold personal customized life cycle events

(such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, baby namings, etc.) and have access to progressive rabbis for personal life needs.”

- i. Does this idea make sense to you?
  - ii. What would a Jewish Life Cycle Center look like?
  - iii. What might you use it for?
- b. How might the synagogue develop services and programs less based on God, Torah and Israel and more of a universal focus? What would make this a Jewish experience?
  - i. Would services include traditional prayers?
  - ii. Would you like them to be just with people your age group or across the board?
  - iii. Why would such a place hold appeal?
- c. New Alternative?
  - i. Based on some of the ideas we called out in the beginning of this session, can you think of any other

programs or events that would appeal to you?

(read list of ideas and RECORD new comments)

*Transition 5 (Time permitting) Friends and Family*

We have been told repeated that by nonusers that they would be

inclined to go more often if their friends would go more often.

- Is this true for you?
- What might entice your friends or family to attend more frequently?

*Ending question (5 minutes)*

What else would you like to share before we close? Is there anything else that you would like organized Judaism to offer you or your family?

*Debriefing (5 minutes)*

I would like to thank you for your participation. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this research. Do you have any questions for me?

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