

tolerable when Israel was at risk. But Israel is no longer at risk, and failures that were tolerated in a time of emergency become unacceptable during more ordinary times. So we have our own homework to do and our own reforms to press. □

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NEEDED: A BALANCED VIEW OF CHARITABLE GIVING

Paula Hyman

As an engaged American Jew, and a student of Jewish history, I concur by and large with John's assessment of the problems confronting American Jewish philanthropy. My contribution to this discussion, however, will be most useful if I offer some qualifying remarks from the perspective of an outsider to the inner workings of the Federation, who is personally attracted to targeted giving, although I do participate in my local community's campaign (New Haven, Conn.).

The mobilizing symbols that activated Jewish giving in the past generation have lost their saliency because the problems that they addressed appear to have been solved. All that we have heard [however] points to the need for the Federations to combat vigorously the conventional wisdom that the traditional recipients of Jewish philanthropy no longer need us. There are still Jews in both the United States and Israel beset by the classic problems of poverty and adjustment to a new society, and eager for assistance. Most American Jews know very little about them. We would all benefit from a well-constructed public relations campaign to make visible the vulnerable Jews who are being served by Federation and its constituent agencies.

Still, many of us who are concerned with the issue of Jewish continuity hope that efforts in our families, synagogues, and schools will produce a natural sense of Jewish identity, an American version of that which emerged among east-European Jews, both traditional and secular. The best example of that sort of identity which I can give is a remark of my twelve-year-old younger daughter, a remark that I occasionally present to my students at Yale as a demonstration that being a Jew is not exactly parallel to being a Presbyterian. My daughter complained that she couldn't write an essay (for a non-Jewish teacher at her Solomon Schechter day-school) on what being a Jew meant to her because, she stated in one definitive sentence, "I am a Jew like I am a girl." I wish that I knew what in the combination of day-school, summer camp (which she disliked), many visits to Israel, and family culture accounted for her identity formation, but, like my sociologist friends, I do not. As much as we know

about the positive influence of day-school education, summer camps, and Israel experiences, we still need additional studies that investigate their impact on the long-term Jewish consciousness of their alumni to decide what array of options we should provide our youth. Most importantly, those studies should include controls for family background. Before we invest in trips to Israel for all American Jewish teenagers, for example, we ought to investigate the impact of such trips on adolescents whose families would just as soon they traveled to Italy as to Israel (assuming the ticket to Italy were free or subsidized), not just their impact on those who come from families already highly committed Jewishly.

Most importantly, we do need to create live communities that provide meaning for their members, communities that act Jewishly in any number of ways, through study and/or social action, or ritual or active philanthropy. This vision of community, not surprisingly, given the personal backgrounds that John and I share, builds on the model of the *havurah*, particularly in its early days. Such communities are small-scale, face-to-face, personal, and experiential. Federations and their constituent agencies, by definition, are not. But they can facilitate the formation and survival of such communities, as the New York Federation has begun to do through its competitive grants program to individual institutions, including synagogues.

Those who seek, in John's words, "compelling communities, inspired and inspiring communities," are not likely to look for them in the context of Federation institutions, not only because of problems of size and bureaucratization. The Federation model of an all-embracing consensus itself seems to promote homogenization, or perhaps in this setting, the term *pareve* would be more appropriate. The decision to find communal consensus by suppressing discussion of important political and religious issues [e.g. women's equality] creates a bland, and more importantly, artificial unity.

THE CASE FOR PRIVATE DESIGNATED GIVING

We might all be better off if the slogan "We are one," which has been abandoned in Israel-Diaspora dialogues, were to be shelved as well in the internal discussions of the American Jewish community. We are a diverse community, divided on many issues; there are many versions of "Jewish meaning" in the modern world. Many American Jews seek communal institutions that not only view Jewish diversity as a fact of life, but recognize pluralism as an important value in itself. Conflict and debate among those who take their Jewishness seriously can yield productive change. Let me give you one historical example. The absence of government control of religion and of Jewish communal unity in the United States in the nineteenth century, in contrast with the situation in the German

states, enabled the different denominations of modern Judaism to flourish here on a scale that was impossible in Europe. Though we are not one, we can come together around issues of common concern. A pluralistic vision of community might encourage the Federation to cast its philanthropic net more broadly, to actively embrace programs that some might view as controversial. The New Israel Fund, for example, has brought to the fore such issues as religious pluralism, women's rights, and democracy in Israel as appropriate concerns for American Jews seeking to strengthen Israeli society. In doing so, it has shown that there are attractive small-scale organizations dedicated to solving social problems that elicit enthusiastic responses on the part of donors.

American Jewish giving to the New Israel Fund does not endanger the Federation or the concept of communal philanthropy. Rather, it is the transformation of the meaning of philanthropy itself for many donors, what I would consider a decline in the content of contemporary *tzedakah*, which is of greatest concern. Perhaps the time has come to raise the question of the philanthropic goals of the American Jewish community and of Jewish givers. A generation ago a youth revolt [by some of us] led to the placing of Jewish education much higher on the communal agenda than was ever the case before. Now, many Jewish philanthropic dollars seem to be driven by the needs of givers, rather than by consideration of those in need. The lines are blurred between the recipients and the donors: they are often one and the same. In the case of educational programs this is not a particular problem since education is fundamental to the future of the community. Not so, in my view, when funds are collected in the name of *tzedakah* are invested in athletic facilities for a Jewish Community Center patronized by the affluent (both Jewish and non-Jewish). This is not an attack, incidentally, on all JCC's and Y's, but only on those whose Jewish content is minimal. In some communities, such as mine, the financial bail-out of a JCC that has not lived up to its membership expectations has drained scarce resources from all other communal institutions, including day-schools and social service agencies. At the same time, the contribution of this particular JCC to the continuity agenda of the Jewish community has not even begun to be demonstrated.

John has pointed to another element of strategic philanthropy on the part of donors: the tendency to invest in fashionable institutions, such as the 92nd Street Y or the Jewish Museum, rather than in agencies combatting poverty and drug addiction or assisting Russian immigrants in Brooklyn. Moreover, for many Jews non-sectarian institutions will always have a greater cachet than any Jewish institutions ever could. As an adherent of a policy of strategic giving myself, I am hardly in a position to criticize donors who have a specific goal in mind and want to know precisely where their money is going. Nor do I think that Jews should donate only to Jewish institutions. But strategic Jewish philanthropists must recognize that specifically Jewish needs will be met only

by Jewish institutions and that the Federation is the only organization that can balance the competing claims of the better and lesser known Jewish institutions, or of agencies that serve the poor and the elderly and those that are dedicated to education and culture.

INDIVIDUALISM IS NOT A JEWISH VALUE

The decline in Federation campaigns has its roots in an American cultural phenomenon as much as in the specific situation of American Jewry. There has always been a tension in American culture between individualism and collective responsibility for those who have failed to thrive in the competitive American marketplace. Alexis de Tocqueville described American society in the early nineteenth century as one in which "each person, withdrawn into himself, behaves as if he is a stranger to the destiny of all the others. His children and his good friends constitute for him the whole of the human species." Tocqueville's assessment was extreme, but, bearing it in mind, it is no accident that the United States came so late to the concept of the welfare state and has with so little anguish rescinded its key features in our own day. The rampant individualism of American society was tempered by the role that successful "public men" and some women played in large-scale philanthropy. A sense of civic responsibility no longer animates sufficient numbers of the American elite to counter the stronger call of individualism. In turning away from the tradition of philanthropy geared to the needs of the dependent and the desperate, American Jews are simply reflecting a trend in the larger American society of which they are a part. But there is a special irony for Jews. Individualism is not a Jewish value. The Torah recorded God's command to the Jews to become "a nation of priests and a holy people," to create a good society. Economic and social justice, elaborated by the prophets, was central to that message. Throughout history, the family and the community were the basic units of Jewish survival. Individual success had little meaning when other members of the collectivity remained vulnerable to persecution or were in distress.

If we are to strengthen the sense of mutual responsibility we must become comfortable as a community in publicly dissenting from some elements of American self-understanding. That involves a shift in Jewish self-identity vis-à-vis American culture. For the past two centuries, American Jews have contended, in a variety of ways, that our Jewishness was simply another form of expressing American values. Classical Reform, after all, proclaimed that Judaism was a universalist religion conveying the purest version of ethical monotheism. Zionism made Jews better Americans, argued Louis Brandeis. Even those secular Jews who struggled against oppressive elements in American

society, such as radical labor activists in the first decades of this century and liberal supporters of the civil rights movement of the 1960's, saw an affinity between their sensitivity to injustice as Jews and the best of American ideals. We have convinced ourselves and our children in the course of the past two centuries that there is no conflict between our Jewish and American identities. Yet, if we are to maintain our institutions and a sense of purpose, we must now struggle as a community to articulate clearly those Jewish values that differentiate us from American mainstream culture, alongside the American values we embrace. I can think of no better place to begin as we enter the twenty-first century than with a communal debate about the meaning and goals of Jewish philanthropy. □