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## From Integration to Survival: American Jewish Anxieties in Transition

By STEVEN M. COHEN and LEONARD J. FEIN

**ABSTRACT:** Until roughly 1967, the dominant theme of American Jewish history was integration. Could the Jews find here in America the safety that had eluded them everywhere else in their wanderings? And, if so, at what cost to their Jewish beliefs and behaviors? From 1967 onward the theme has shifted. Greater concern is now focused on the maintenance of Jewish identity and commitment. With the shift from the integration of Jews to the survival of Judaism has come a renewal of interest in the meanings and implications of the Jewish experience.

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**D**URING the late 1960s and early 1970s, American Jews experienced what developmental psychologists might refer to as a passage or transition. From the time of their arrival in America, integration into the larger society had been the highest priority on the collective agenda of the Jews, as also, commonly, on their personal agendas. As it was generally understood, the task of integration required, in considerable measure, assimilation to American standards and styles. But, since about 1967, a discernible change of priorities has taken place; Jewish survival—that is, the survival of the Jews as a distinct ethnic/religious group—has become a priority of at least equal, and perhaps greater, concern to many individual Jews and, more particularly, to the agencies and institutions that determine the collective agenda of the Jewish community. This shift has had profound consequences for the political, religious, and cultural life of America's Jews, and also for the symbolic expression of Jewish group identity.

As late as 1973, political scientist Charles Liebman could—correctly—observe that

the American Jew is torn between two sets of values—those of integration and acceptance into American society and those of Jewish group survival. . . . the behavior of the American Jew is best understood as his unconscious effort to restructure his environment and reorient his own self-definition and perception of reality so as to reduce the tension between these values.<sup>1</sup>

Liebman was extending the portrait of Western Jewries that had been drawn by many social historians to the particular

conditions of American Jewry. According to this widely accepted view, traditional Jews had emerged out of the confinement of the social—and sometimes physical—ghettos of pre-Enlightenment Europe to be thrust, willingly or not, into a more secular, voluntaristic, and pluralist modern society.<sup>2</sup> The Jews were a special case of the transition from tradition to modernity because it was not at all clear that the modernizing polities in which they lived were, in fact, prepared to extend them the welcome they offered others. At the same time, there could be no adequate test of the modern welcome unless the Jews were first prepared to offer, as it were, unilateral concessions—giving up their religious particularity, their language, their patterns of social interaction. And very many Jews accepted these terms, imagined or real.

But in Russia, where most Jews lived, no such welcome was even extended. And although it was offered in France, the Dreyfus affair suggested it was not seriously intended. In Austria, repeated outbursts of anti-Semitism belied the sincerity of the welcome. And in Germany, finally, the welcome—accepted there with enthusiasm by the Jews—became a curse.

Only in distant America were the Jews offered—incredibly—tolerance, integration, social advancement, and, not least, physical security. Jewish skepticism regarding the American promise

2. See, for example, Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in Liberal Society* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979); and Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978). For a review of the literature and an application to American Jewry, see Steven M. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity* (New York: Tavistock, 1983), pp. 6-38.

1. Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), p. vii.

led many Jews to suppose that the offer was, in fact, contingent; that America was saying, in effect, that it would not treat the Jews as Jews—that is, as Jews had historically been treated in the lands of their dispersion—if the Jews, for their part, would promise not to behave as Jews—that is, in the idiosyncratic, separatist ways in which Jews had historically behaved.

Much of American Jewish history—until the late 1960s—can be read as the story of the Jewish struggle with the terms of the American offer. Many Jews hastened to fulfill their part of the bargain they supposed was intended, and most of these—some of whom actually converted, more of whom sought to pass—discovered, presumably to their delight, that America kept its word. There were, however, some who chose to test the American promise more fundamentally, whether out of faith in that promise or out of tenacity with respect to Judaism and Jewish interests. These keepers of the faith included not only the Orthodox, who sought as best they could to fence out the modern world, but also the Yiddishists and some of the Zionists—the diverse groups devoted less to the safety of individual Jews than to the survival of Judaism itself.

Most Jews preferred to forgo neither the benefits of the group nor participation in modern American society. Instead, they sought a workable balance between Jewish loyalty and modernity, between authenticity and integration. This balance had theological, cultural, economic, associational, and ideological implications. For some, the intention was merely to hedge the Jewish bet on modernity, lest it prove a chimera; for others, it was a more honest effort to insist on genuine pluralism.

#### INTEGRATION—AND SURVIVAL

Can the Jew expect, in Shylock's words, "to walk, talk, buy and sell with" the Christian without coming to "eat, drink and pray with" him? At the same time, can the Jew refuse to "eat, drink and pray with" the Christian and yet expect the Christian to agree to "walk, talk, buy and sell with" him? A most delicate balance here, and, therefore, a rich diversity of Jewish response, each seeking a way for traditional Judaism—however defined—to adapt to the modern challenge by defining a peripheral, expendable husk that could safely be discarded, and a central, essential kernel to be retained.

Thus—and here we simplify greatly—Reform Jews initially abandoned all that seemed to them excessively separatist, nationalist, legalist, contrary to reason. The abandonment included even the word "Jew," which was, briefly, replaced by the ostensibly more sanitized "Hebrew." In place of these traditional elements, the Reform emphasized the ethical, hence universal, teachings of Judaism, teachings presumably shared with Christians.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, Zionism elevated and developed that which the Reform discarded or deemphasized: the national character of the Jewish heritage, its connection with the land of Israel, the Jewish need for a national home as a response to persistent anti-Semitism, and the rising nationalist spirit of turn-of-the-century Europe.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, most early Zionists denied the centrality of ancient religious law for Jewish continuity in the modern era. In this, Zionism and Reform Judaism

3. Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

4. Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

agreed—and even the modern wing of Orthodoxy was prepared to divide Jewish life into essential and expendable spheres, although, obviously, it drew the line in a very different place from that of both the Zionists and Reform Jews. In the modern Orthodox view, the law was the law as of old, but all the stylistic amendments that had collected over the years could safely be discarded. Dress, language, cultural involvements—these were peripheral.<sup>5</sup> The more traditional Orthodox argued, in effect, that style and substance could not safely be separated, that to discard the one would endanger compliance with the other.

But the prevailing post-Enlightenment view was that all fundamentalist traditions would soon crumble, that they would not be able to withstand either the momentum of modernity or its blessings, much less its evident good sense. If the Reform sought to find Zion in America, and to eviscerate Jewish history by effecting a doctrine called the Mosaic persuasion—a kind of bloodless theology in harmony with America's progressive spirit but not with the sweaty facts of Jewish history and culture—Conservative Judaism, an American invention, sought the best of all worlds. Conservative Judaism modified the liturgy—but did not, as had Reform, whether by praying in the vernacular or shifting the Sabbath to Sunday, make it Protestant. It loosened the bonds of ritual and argued that the law is an evolutionary corpus, requiring periodic amendment. These were, in both style and substance, very American views, and the hope and intention was that they would permit genuine continuity with

Jewish tradition, a continuity the Conservative leaders did not imagine would be possible for the unmodern, even antimodern, Orthodox, or for the un-Jewish Reform.<sup>6</sup>

Even the fabled political liberalism of the Jews can be understood, in part, as an effort to resolve the integration-survival dilemma. For the victory of liberalism would mean a reduction in church influence and also in unbridled nationalism, both sources of anti-Semitism; it would mean tolerance and civil liberties for all; it would, by ameliorating poverty, ensure the domestic tranquility without which anti-Semitism was virtually—so most Jews believed—a forgone conclusion. At the same time, the language of liberalism was the language of the prophetic tradition. Hence the battle for liberalism could serve both to preserve the vocabulary of Judaism and to ensure the safety of the Jews.

The urge to integrate was most powerful among second-generation Jews, who formed the largest segment of adult American Jewry from roughly 1935 to 1975. Their parents, the immigrants, were still—purposefully or not—tied to the tradition. And their children, as we shall see, were sufficiently comfortable in their Americanness to feel free to rediscover the tradition. But for the second generation, it is as if they actually chose to abide Hansen's law. So they sought to forget—quite often, with their parents' enthusiastic approval. And they did not require elaborate ideological systems to frame their forgetting.

In significant respects, it was as if America were, to both the immigrants and their offspring, a faith as much as a

5. Charles S. Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life," *American Jewish Year Book*, 64:21-98 (1965).

6. Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

place. Had America not perceived itself as the new Zion? Did American writers and political leaders not imagine that this was God's new promised land, hence Americans God's new chosen people? Jews could not easily shed their sense of chosenness—but how much more enticing, in the end, to be chosen as an American—progress, freedom, expanse, wealth—than to be chosen as a Jew—discrimination, poverty, pogrom! In this regard, it is interesting to note how neatly the American civil religion suited the Jewish purpose, offering a set of rituals and symbols that were familiar in style and, because not Christian, acceptable in substance. Thanksgiving is perhaps the very best example of this—a quasi-religious ritual, Jewish in form and in purpose, and not at all un-Jewish in content. Imagine, for example, what it would have meant had the Pilgrims found wild boar rather than turkey.

The communal agenda of second-generation Jewry reflected its collective insecurity as well as its concern for integration. For decades, central Jewish philanthropic institutions spent large portions of the funds they collected from the Jewish community on social services for non-Jews. The most particularistic endeavors—Zionism, the fight against anti-Semitism—were recast in American terms. There was an enormous pride in those Jews who made it in quintessentially American ways, even when those ways were manifestly un-Jewish. So, for example, most Jews took a very dim view of boxing—but were delighted at the success of Barney Ross. Perhaps the combination of pride and anxiety was best captured in the title of a children's book that was popular in the mid-1940s: a collection of tales of Jewish soldiers and sailors of note, entitled *The Jews Fought, Too*. So, too,

for years one leading Jewish intergroup relations agency issued pamphlets and filmstrips that sought to demonstrate— theoretically to Gentiles, but as surely to Jews—how much Jews were like other Americans, how even their holidays could be understood in general American terms.

This being America, several plausible alternatives were available to the unalloyed integrationists. They could convert, of course, but conversion was an extreme choice, widely seen by other Jews as an act of betrayal, sure to cause pain to one's family. But America permitted a kind of nonsectarian identity, especially in its academic and literary subcultural communities. To become an academic was to join a thoroughly respectable community—indeed, a community that was as committed to redemption as were the Jews: "The truth shall make you free," and so forth. So in the academy, where religion was generally held in disdain, one could do sacred work without having to be Jewish. And one's parents could scarcely complain of their son—rarely, back then, their daughter—the professor, even if the grandchildren were deprived of a Jewish education.

Most Jews who sought integration in modern America were, however, perfectly willing to retain and sustain their Jewish connections, and hence Judaism itself, so long as these did not become impediments to their central objective. And, off to the side but enormously energetic, there was also that minority of Jews for whom Judaic purposes still had a very high—sometimes the highest—priority. Most Jews might well have felt more comfortable if this minority had disappeared, but it would not. It persisted, often as a rebuke, sometimes as a temptation. In the end, it

articulated an option that became newly attractive in the late 1960s.

IS THERE SURVIVAL  
AFTER INTEGRATION?

The renewed interest in and emphasis on Jewish survival may be attributed to a variety of factors. By far the simplest, and surely the most direct, is that by the end of the 1960s, a very large number of Jews had made it in America.<sup>7</sup> In this context, making it means considerably more than economic success alone—although that success, too, fed the growing sense that the problem of integration had been solved.

For decades, Jews have led the American population in educational attainment, professionalization, and income. These trends, in fact, dramatically accelerated among the third generation, which came demographically to dominate adult American Jewry sometime around 1975. One recent analysis of American elites demonstrates that, with just 2 to 3 percent of the population, and 8 percent of the college-educated over-40 male population, Jews constitute about 20 percent of the most elite sectors of American society.<sup>8</sup> In his forthcoming study of American Jewry, Charles Silberman notes that about a quarter of the wealthiest 400 Americans are Jewish, as are roughly two-fifths of the richest self-made millionaires. About 8 percent of each house of Congress is Jewish, and Jews are now entering sectors of corporate power once reserved exclusively for white Gentile Americans.

7. "The Jewish Community in Change," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 58: 4-11 (Fall 1981).

8. Richard Alba and G. Moore, "Ethnicity in the American Elite," *American Sociological Review*, 47(3): 373-83 (June 1982).

In addition to the actual fact of Jewish achievement, the conditions that have surrounded and promoted that achievement, its environment, have helped reduce integrationist anxieties among Jews in the last decade or two. America has grown increasingly latitudinarian, increasingly tolerant of diversity in virtually every realm—family, sexual preference, leisure, culture, group identity.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the American ethos has come to accept, if not actually to celebrate, ethnic variety and—of special importance for some Orthodox Jews—serving religious beliefs as well.

Perhaps even more important to the Jewish perspective, the anger of the 1960s, expressed in burning cities, in the emergence of assassination as a form of political expression, and in student riots—riots in which the children of Jews were active participants and sometimes leaders—led, inevitably, to a disenchantment with America as faith. Having so recently learned that radicalism was a god that had failed, and many having concluded in the wake of the Holocaust that the real God, too, had failed, Jews were now learning that America was no more dependable a god. Quite possibly, the growing literature on America's failure to rescue Jews during the Holocaust, and, more precisely, on Franklin Roosevelt's failure, contributed to this disenchantment.

At the same time that Jews, along with many other Americans, were experiencing massive disorientation, an event took place that reminded Jews of an older, and perhaps more dependable, orientation. Israel's Six Day War—and, more particularly, the weeks of terror that preceded the war, weeks during which visions of a new Auschwitz were

9. See, for example, *Public Opinion* 6(6) (Nov.-Dec. 1983).

commonplace—provides as precise a point from which to take our analytic bearings as history ever offers.

During those weeks, one could almost sense the old Jewish integrationism battling with the new survivalism. There were Jews who energetically sought to act in the classic manner, delegating certain of their number to intercede quietly at the highest levels of government. And there were others who, perhaps aware of the politeness of American Jews during the Holocaust, favored mass demonstrations.

In the event, the war itself was so like a medieval morality play, with good and evil so precisely identifiable, and the world so enthusiastically pro-Israel, that the old inhibitions crumbled. And the sky did not fall; on the contrary, Israel experienced a spectacular victory. And the noisy Jews of the mass rallies in America—and Europe, for that matter—were not punished; on the contrary, they became, vicariously, heroes. If the weeks before the war had reminded the Jews of Jewish vulnerability, the week of the war provided them, for the first time, the experience of Jewish triumph. Both were profoundly moving experiences; together, they opened the door to a new sense of Jewish pride, to a new awareness of the emotional richness of Jewish identification.

The 1973 Yom Kippur War lacked the exquisite drama and emotional clarity of the 1967 war, but it pointed in quite the same direction. And by now, of course, ethnic identity was not merely an accepted aspect of American life; it was almost a faddish preoccupation.

All these events and developments helped shift the focus of Jewish concern from integration to survival—a shift, as we have said, that has had profound consequences for many aspects of Jew-

ish communal, religious, cultural, and political life.

#### SIGNS OF THE NEW SURVIVALISM

The story of American Jewry since 1967 is the story of a growing preoccupation with Jewish survival. The signs of that preoccupation abound. In the religious sphere, for example, we find considerable movement in both Reform and modern Orthodox circles toward the classic religious traditions. Modern Orthodox rabbis, thinkers, and congregants report a sense of having lost out to the more religiously fundamentalist, politically conservative, and socially insular traditionalist Orthodox elements.<sup>10</sup> Reform Judaism has restored much Hebrew liturgy to the worship service, has established parochial schools, and—in a reversal of its antipathy toward Zionism—has formally joined the world Zionist movement.<sup>11</sup> Trends in the Conservative movement are harder to document. Most observers detect a growing polarization, as a more traditionally-oriented minority leans increasingly toward the modern Orthodox to its religious right, while the larger number of rabbis and congregants moves toward liberalization of ritual and liturgy.<sup>12</sup>

The Jewish philanthropic world has undergone a similar revolution. There is no longer talk of using Jewish philanthropic dollars to serve Gentile purposes.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the extent of specifically

10. Charles S. Liebman, "Orthodox Judaism Today," *Midstream*, 20: 19-26 (Aug.-Sept. 1979).

11. W. Gunther Plaut, "Reform Judaism: Past, Present and Future," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, 27(2): 1-11 (Summer 1980).

12. Lawrence J. Kaplan, "The Dilemma of Conservative Judaism," *Commentary*, 62(10):44-47 (Oct. 1976).

13. Charles S. Liebman, "Leadership and Decision-Making in a Jewish Federation: The New



Jewish utilization of centrally supported services has become one important criterion for the award of communal funding. Simultaneously, philanthropists have been providing more funds for Jewish education of all sorts, and especially for that most nonintegrationist institution, the day or parochial school. Indeed, we now find that the philanthropists as individuals have become increasingly involved in personal ritual practice<sup>14</sup>—an unthinkable development just two decades ago—even as the less religiously observant have tended to drop out of the Jewish philanthropic enterprise.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, new professionals in Jewish communal services are not only personally more ritually observant; increasingly, they are graduates of new training programs specifically designed to combine professional training with the study of Judaica.<sup>16</sup>

The shift from integrationism to survivalism is evident also in the symbolic realm. American symbols have largely receded from Jewish public life. In their place, we find considerable investment in Israel and the Holocaust.<sup>17</sup>

Fascination with the Holocaust is one of the most striking developments of the last 15 years. Courses on the

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York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies," *American Jewish Year Book*, 79: 149-69 (1982).

14. Jonathan Woocher, "The 'Civil Judaism' of Communal Leaders," *American Jewish Year Book*, 82: 29-51 (1980).

15. Steven M. Cohen, "Trends in Jewish Philanthropy," *American Jewish Year Book*, 80: 29-51 (1980).

16. Bernard Reisman, "Managers, Jews or Social Workers? Conflicting Expectations for Communal Workers," *Response*, 13(3): 41-54 (Aug. 1982).

17. Jacob Neusner, *Stranger at Home: The 'Holocaust,' Zionism, and American Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

subject are the most popular Judaica offerings on college campuses. By most reckonings, the topic is the most frequent subject of newly published titles in English-language Judaica. Several communities have established Holocaust memorial centers, and there seems to be no end in sight to the movement to erect some sort of memorial in community after community. Direct-mail fund raisers report that one major Holocaust museum and study center regularly achieves one of the highest response rates, if not the highest, in mail solicitations of potential Jewish contributors. United Jewish Appeal missions to Israel now often include a stopover in Poland as Jews increasingly adopt the from-ashes-to-rebirth metaphor as their summary of recent Jewish history.

The Holocaust is, of course, a shattering rebuke to modernity. Whether or not it is consciously perceived as such, it cannot be easy for a people fascinated with the Holocaust to retain their naive faith in the blessings of modernity. The decline of that faith, as also of the passion for America—once the last, best hope of mankind, now a troubled and often clumsy giant—is apparent in Jewish attitudes toward a variety of institutions and symbols. One senses—for we enter here the realm of intuition rather than data—a diminished enthusiasm, or, more accurately, a diminished confidence in the principal social institutions, such as the public school and the polling place, as paths to redemption. This growing skepticism, lapping over into cynicism, is doubtless shared with other Americans of these unsettling times. What, then, of the Jewish faith in liberalism, the underlying ideology of social and communal redemption?

JUST AS LIBERAL,  
LESS PASSIONATE

The erstwhile political liberalism of the Jews has been a subject of considerable controversy of late. Both the fact of that liberalism and its value have been debated. In significant respects, the debate—especially at the value level—has been coincident in time with the shift from integrationism to survivalism.

The starting point of the argument that the time has come for Jews to turn from their earlier commitment to liberalism is that Jews are now sufficiently well integrated to be able to turn from making friends to influencing people—from, that is, doing good to defending group interests. Depending on the style of the argument, it may be observed that the effort to do good benefited the Jews very little. The example usually introduced as evidence of that proposition is that for all the help Jews proffered blacks during the prime time of the civil rights movement, they have now not only been abandoned by the blacks, but have learned that anti-Semitism is more common among black Americans—and especially among educated black Americans—than among others.

But even where the ingratitude of others is not cited, the matter of Jewish group interests is. "Is it good for the Jews?" used to be thought an unacceptably parochial question. Perhaps it might be indulged by an as-yet unasimilated immigrant generation that could not view the world from other than a Jewish perspective. But for the children of that generation, "Is it good for the Jews?" became the stuff of Borscht Belt humor, not of sociopolitical understanding.

And now a new generation of Jews comes to announce that "Is it good for the Jews?" is an entirely reasonable,

indeed self-respecting, standard according to which the sociopolitical realm may be assessed. Some even insist it is the only appropriate standard.

How, they ask, can a Jew be opposed to a strong America, or support *détente*, given the Soviet Union's treatment of the Jews and its anti-Israel behavior? Why should a Jew support affirmative action, which is scarcely distinguishable from quotas, a system of selection with such bitter memories for Jews? Given Israel's needs, ought not a Jew support American interventionism abroad, so the precedent is there if Israel, heaven forbid, ever needs to call on it? And in any case, considering that Jews are as affluent as they are, why should they not support the party that favors wealth?<sup>18</sup>

These arguments might be supposed to have particular appeal to a generation turning from integration to survival, from the desire not to be noticed to an insistence on claiming its due.

Yet withal, those who have anticipated and those who have urged a massive rightward shift in the Jewish political understanding have been disappointed. The most that can be said of the political opinions—and behaviors—of American Jews is that they have moved along with the rest of the nation—which means that they remain considerably to the left of the ever-changing national center.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, in the congressional elections of 1982, about three-quarters of all Jews supported Democratic candidates. While 59 percent of the nation was

18. See, most recently, Irving Kristol, "The Political Dilemma of American Jews," *Commentary*, 73(7): 23-29 (July 1984).

19. Steven M. Cohen, *The Political Attitudes of American Jews, 1984* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1984); Alan Fisher, "The Myth of the Rightward Turn," *Moment*, 8(10): 22-26 (Nov. 1983).

voting for Ronald Reagan, only 30 to 32 percent of the Jews followed suit. In a national survey of Jewish adults conducted just a few months prior to the 1984 elections,<sup>20</sup> we learned that

- self-defined liberals outnumbered conservatives three to two, the reverse of the typical findings in national surveys of all Americans;
- Jewish Democrats outnumbered Jewish Republicans by over four to one, as compared to a three-to-two margin nationally;
- on domestic questions, most Jews favored affirmative action but not quotas; gun control and also the death penalty; equal rights for homosexuals; an end to the building of nuclear power plants; government aid for abortions for poor women; and church-state separation on issues such as public school prayer and tuition tax credits for parents of private and parochial school students; and
- on foreign affairs, a majority of Jews favored dovish policies toward the Soviet Union, including a bilateral nuclear freeze, cutbacks in U.S. military spending—but no reduction in military support for Israel—and staying in the United Nations.

In most instances where comparisons with recent nationwide studies of public opinion have been undertaken, Jews emerge as decidedly more liberal on a variety of issues, including gun control, abortion, school prayer, tuition tax credits, the nuclear freeze, and defense spending.

20. Cohen, *Political Attitudes of American Jews, 1984*.

One of the reasons observers so often mispredict and misinterpret the political leanings of the Jews is that they focus on the attitudes and behaviors of the most Jewish Jews—the more observant, the more ethnically segregated, the more organized. These are, indeed, considerably more conservative than the socially integrated—although still Jewishly identified and active—Jews. It would, however, be a serious error to infer from the views of the more Jewishly active that political conservatism has become, in any sense at all, the normative position of the established Jewish community or of a majority of the Jews. As reflected in the pronouncements of the major Jewish organizations, and in the behavior of Jews in general, that has simply not been the case.

Yet another reason for the assumption that Jews have already moved to the right or soon will is the decline in liberal rhetoric and passion within the Jewish community. One hears less appeal to the traditional slogans, in part because of the shift from integrationism to survivalism that we have been discussing, in part because of trends in secular America. Whether it is inertia or policy that keeps the Jews liberal even as liberal affect wanes, we cannot say—but the liberal inclination of the Jews has plainly survived the decline of liberal rhetoric.

#### UNITED ON ISRAEL, DIVIDED ON POLICIES

Israel's continuing peril has been both a stimulus to the release of survivalist energies and a focus for the expression of those energies. Between 1970 and 1984, the proportion of American Jews who had visited Israel grew from 15 percent to nearly 40 percent—and al-

most one of every six American Jews has visited Israel more than once.<sup>21</sup> The Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War—but not the war in Lebanon—each spurred giving to the United Jewish Appeal to much higher levels. And Israel has also been the focus of dramatically heightened political activity, especially among the affluent. The main pro-Israel lobby, the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee, has increased its membership and its financial resources severalfold and is regularly cited by observers as one of America's most effective lobbies. In addition, there are several dozen political action committees that have been organized to support pro-Israel candidates.

In their commitment to Israel's safety, the Jews have shifted—again, mirroring both shifts in the general society and their own shift from integrationism to survivalism—from the politics of discrete intercession to a more muscular model, in which power and pressure supplement the prayer and pleading of old. The overwhelmingly dominant view among Israel's Jewish supporters in America is that what's good for Israel is good for America, and that is the view they press most insistently on American policymakers. But they are not reluctant, when necessary, to invoke more proximate rewards and punishments in lobbying on Israel's behalf.

The profound commitment to Israel's welfare should not, however, be mistaken—as it often is—for agreement

with all of the policies of the Israeli government. And conversely, expressions of opposition to particular Israeli policies do not necessarily imply a lessened concern for Israel's security. In a 1983 survey, four out of five agreed that "if Israel were destroyed, I would feel as if I had suffered one of the greatest personal tragedies of my life," and a six-to-one majority agreed that "Jews should not vote for candidates who are unfriendly to Israel." But the sample split almost evenly on the questions of whether "Israel should offer the Arabs territorial compromise on the West Bank" or whether Israel should maintain "permanent control over Judea and Samaria." A two-to-one majority favored the suspension of settlements in the West Bank to encourage peace negotiations and a four-to-one majority agreed that "Israel should talk with the PLO if the PLO recognizes Israel and renounces terrorism."<sup>22</sup>

Thus, although Jews feel deeply attached to Israel—or say they do—they are not nearly so attached to Israel's policies. Does this mean that survivalism has its limits? Or does it mean that there is a genuine difference over the policies that will best ensure the survival of the Jews, on the one hand, and of their state, on the other?

We cannot say. But we can note that feelings of threat and vulnerability play a major role in provoking hard-line responses by Jews in the United States—and in Israel, too. In four annual surveys from 1981 to 1984, the most hawkish responses came during the height of hostilities in Lebanon, in August 1982.<sup>23</sup> And no

21. Steven M. Cohen, *Attitudes of American Jews towards Israel and Israelis* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1983); and Gary Tobin and Julie Lipsman, "A Compendium of Jewish Demographic Studies," in *Perspectives in Jewish Population Research*, ed. Steven M. Cohen, Jonathan Woocher, and Bruce Phillips (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984).

22. Cohen, *Attitudes of American Jews towards Israel*.

23. Steven M. Cohen, *A Survey of American Jewish Public Opinion in the Aftermath of the Israeli/PLO War in Lebanon* (New York: Amer-

matter when, those Jews who see other Americans as more anti-Israel are more likely to oppose compromise with the Arabs. Thus, concern for Israel is wrapped up with and expresses a more widespread concern for Jewish survival, a concern that revolves not only around the Jews of Israel but around the Jews of America as well.

FEARS FOR THE FUTURE OF  
AMERICAN JEWRY:  
ILL-FOUNDED ANXIETIES

The concern—"obsession" may be more accurate—with Jewish survival is evident in the repeated references of rabbis, educators, fund raisers, and lay leaders to the demographic, cultural, and spiritual crises that allegedly threaten the Jews. These references are the most pervasive theme of Jewish public discourse.

At their center is concern for the stability and continuity of the Jewish family. It is commonly assumed that Jewish-Gentile intermarriage rates are inexorably climbing, and that the offspring of such marriages—or, at least, their grandchildren—will be lost to the Jewish community. Moreover, this line of thinking goes, fewer Jews are marrying early—if at all—and, of those who are, most will have fewer children than did their parents. They will surely reproduce at a rate far below that required for replacement. Hence there is an immediate threat to the actual physical survival of the Jews.

That demographic threat is seen, at least in part, as a reflection of broader trends affecting the Jewish commitment

of the young. Nostalgic recollections of the Jewish life of the European *shtetl* or the immigrant neighborhood suggest an erstwhile richness against which the secularized present appears utterly anemic, hence doomed. The nurturing environment of yesteryear is no more; Jews are now safe, but Judaism is profoundly threatened. Jewish culture cannot be sustained by Judaic illiterates; and as Jewish culture wanes, so, ultimately, must the Jews themselves, who will no longer find a compelling motive to stay Jewish.

In short, the survivalists focus our attention on the threats to Jewish life, both quantitative and qualitative, and on the link between the two. They argue that without drastic intervention, the number of Jews will dwindle, and there will be a more rapid decline still in the numbers of communally and ritually active Jews in particular.

A full examination of this line of thinking and of the evidence on which it rests is beyond our present scope.<sup>24</sup> But as the survivalist temper is so central to an understanding of American Jewry today, it is well to pause for a moment to cite some recent findings that bear rather directly on the matter.

Jewish outmarriage—marriage of a born Jew to a born Gentile—seems to have risen to a rate of one in four nationally, where it has now rested for several years. The estimate obscures dramatic regional variations. Recent studies suggest a rate of 12 to 13 percent in New York City and Miami, 39 percent in Los Angeles, and 57 percent in Denver.<sup>25</sup> The 25 percent overall figure

ican Jewish Committee, 1982); idem, "The 1981-1982 National Survey of American Jews," *American Jewish Year Book*, 83:136-59 (1983); idem, *Political Attitudes of American Jews, 1984*; idem, *Attitudes of American Jews towards Israel*.

24. Steven M. Cohen and Calvin Goldscheider, "Jews, More or Less," *Moment*, 9(8): 41-46 (Sept. 1984).

25. Charles Silberman, untitled study of American Jewish life, forthcoming.

is considerably below the popular estimate among Jews, which is closer to 40 or even 50 percent. Moreover, the assumption that the outmarriage statistic is essentially an estimate of the number of Jews annually lost by Judaism is wildly off the mark. In fact, intermarriage may result in net gains to the Jewish population—albeit typically to the less observant segments—as a result of conversion to Judaism, a rather widespread practice, especially among Gentile women marrying Jewish men, and as a result of the tendency of most Jewish women who marry out to raise their offspring as Jews.<sup>26</sup>

The tendency for highly educated Jewish women to delay childbearing, especially evident in the 1970s, has often been perceived as a portent of lower birthrates, hence ultimately of negative population growth. Recent research, however, finds that Jewish women in their late thirties have an average of more than two children, a level adequate to ensure demographic replacement.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, fears of a less ritually observant or less communally involved younger generation also seem unfounded. Once young adults marry and have children, their participation levels in these areas match those of their elders.<sup>28</sup>

Those who reject the gloomy prognoses for Jewish life in America can point as well to other signs of health and vitality. These include an upsurge in the publishing of books of Jewish interest; tremendous growth in the number of college students enrolled in Judaica courses; widespread participation by

upper-middle-class young adults in political action on Israel's behalf.

The point here is not whether American Jewry is or is not holding its own in demographic, religious, cultural, and political terms. The point, instead, is that communal leaders typically choose to cite the more pessimistic prognoses and to ignore more promising analyses. In so doing, they link themselves to a distinguished tradition, for the animating rhetoric of Jewish life in the recent past has been the urgent need to save the Jews—to save Israel's Jews from their Arab enemies, to save Soviet Jews from their brutal government, to save Ethiopian Jews from oppression and starvation—and, consistent with all this, to save American Jews from assimilation.

It is easy to trivialize the argument, to accuse the obsessive survivalist of depending on enemies to sustain the Jewish effort. If there be no obvious enemy without, then focus on the enemy within; and, incidentally, in this way, draw the attention of the audience to yesterday's enemies, whose defeat has surely been only temporary. But the point the survivalists make, however much it depends on faulty evidence, is more serious. Jewish life, in the wake of the Enlightenment and of the Holocaust, in the wake of the surprise of safety in America and danger in Israel, suffers these days from an understandable intellectual and ideological confusion. There is massive dissensus regarding its rationale, its commitments, its purpose. Amidst such confusion and dissensus, the enemies of the Jews provide a consensual rallying point. In America, the Jews have finally learned that the enemy is not the pogromist at the gates but the erosion of will within.

But by resting their argument on faulty data, the survivalists risk the

26. Steven M. Cohen and Paul Ritterband, *Identity, Family and Community: The Jews of Greater New York* (tentative title), forthcoming.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

credibility of their case, and risk, as well, missing the evidence of a turn from survivalism toward meaning and purpose.

AFTER SURVIVALISM:  
A SEARCH FOR  
MEANING AND BELONGING?

The evidence is admittedly weak and scattered, but the case can be made nonetheless, that significant numbers of American Jews have begun a search for a new central ethos to complement, if not supplant, the survivalism we have been describing.

We have already referred to the recent growth in Jewish studies courses and in other expressions of substantive Jewish purpose. More generally, we now witness a gradual shift in emphasis from the preoccupation with numbers—with Jewish quantity—to a concern with meaning—Jewish quality. The much noted *havura* movement—small groups of Jews, within or outside the synagogue framework, who meet regularly and frequently for purposes of prayer, study, or simply fellowship—is one expression of, and response to, this concern. So, too, is the renewed emphasis on Judaic programming in the Jewish community centers, once powerful exponents of integrationism.

At the deepest level, the concern for integration and for survival now merge. There is a growing belief in elite circles, and a growing sense more popularly, that integration into America permits, and perhaps even requires, a healthy sense of identity—in this case, group identity. The old universalist slogans still have power for some, but they are not nearly as generally potent as they were a few decades back. The disen-

chantment leads some to an insular particularism, but more seem to accept that particularism need not mean withdrawal from the commonwealth. Instead, it implies a reformulation of the terms of the American social contract, a shift from America as a nation of unhyphenated individuals to America as a collection of groups. Social pluralism, once an abstract notion defended by a small minority, now emerges as the popular normative perception.

And, simultaneously, Jews in growing number have come to suppose that the quantitative threats they face are perhaps best addressed by an emphasis on the qualitative possibilities they enjoy, that the best assurance of Jewish survival is the development of a community that offers its members opportunities for personal fulfillment not easily found elsewhere. Once the safety of individual Jews has been assured, the continuing communal emphasis on Jewish survival becomes stale. It gives rise to a redundant ideology, in which the community seeks to survive—in order to survive. The irony of such an agenda is that it may well be self-defeating, because in its preoccupation with survival it is led to deemphasize the ideological, cultural, philosophical, theological, and political debates that may well be the most powerful inducements to Jewish identity, and hence to Jewish survival.

This recognition, in one form or another, is now growing in all branches of American Jewry, and its growth suggests that the coming decades will mark a definitive move beyond the search for integration, beyond the search for survival, into a vigorous search for meaning, for purpose.

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