

II *Jewish Continuity—Will Our Grandchildren Be Jewish?*

A COMMUNAL RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE 1990 CJF NATIONAL JEWISH POPULATION SURVEY Toward a Jewish Life Worth Living

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The highest priority of our federations must be providing the resources to enable every American Jew to experience a creative, intense confrontation with the best of what Jewish life represents. It can be implemented through a national action plan that provides a new relationship with synagogues and funding for programs within the synagogue setting that target moderately affiliated families. However, the window of opportunity is closing rapidly and we must act now to strengthen our gateway institutions.

With much wisdom comes much grief and he who increases knowledge increases pain.
—*Kohelet*, 2, 16

In the morning sow thy seed
And in the evening, let not thy hand rest.
For thou knowest not which will succeed
Whether this or that
Or whether both of them will be alike good.
Truly the light is sweet and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to see the sun.
—*Kohelet*, 6, 7

INTRODUCTION: THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF JEWISH LIFE

During Succot and Simchat Torah, my family and I enjoyed the mitzvah of *lulav* and *etrog*. We danced with the Torah; we sat around a dinner table in our Succah with guests and talked about Jewish life and Israel and Crown Heights and, of course, demographics and the fate of our people. We listened to *Kohelet* chanted as

it has been for a thousand years on the intermediary Shabbat between Succot and Simchat Torah. This was a good time to consider this latest population study, its implications for our Jewish future, and, most important, the steps we must take now—the steps we should have been taking for the last 20 years—as individuals and as a community. It was a good time to remember that Jewish life cannot be summarized in equations and numbers.

The debate over numbers—the size of the Jewish community in the next century—is becoming sterile and may yet become counterproductive. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) can give us a good idea of the state of our Jewish people today, but it really cannot tell us much about the future of our American Jewish community. The “optimists” and the “pessimists” may debate whether 42 or 52% of our youngest cohort are marrying non-Jews without conversion, and they may argue over whether 33% or 42% are raising their children in another religion, but they really have no idea what the cumulative impact of mixed marriage will be on the Jewish future.

- Do we really know what kind of Jewish identity will emerge from mixed married¹ households—even among households who say they are raising their children as Jews?
- Do we really know what dynamics will begin to shape the American Jewish community when 60% of all Jewishly identified households are mixed married?
- Do we really know what will happen to *current* rates of mixed marriage when a *majority* of Jews are marrying non-Jews without conversion? What will the impact be when in-marriage is the exception, rather than the rule? Will we reach a “tipping point” after which we will see geometric growth in mixed marriage rates?

The answer is—we do not know—but nothing in these numbers gives me reason for optimism.

Let us think a bit about our current mixed marriage households and what kind of Jewish future they are likely to produce. According to Dr. J. Alan Winter's unpublished analysis of *young* (under 45) married households, which focuses on core Jews and core Jews married to non-Jews:

- Only 17.6% of young mixed married households belong to a synagogue (compared to 59% of young intra-married households).
- Only 17.2% of young mixed married households with children between age 6 and 17 are giving their children a Jewish education (compared to over 56% of intra-married households).
- Only 11% of young mixed married households give *any* gift to a UJA campaign (compared to over 43% of intra-married households).

Although it is difficult to predict the impact of these numbers on the Jewish identity of future generations, I think that the nightmares of the pessimists deserve at least as much consideration as the dreams of the optimists.

My own personal nightmares came alive in two *New York Times* articles that appeared during Succot 1991—the first about life in the small Jewish communities of Mississippi and the second about “lifestyles” of mixed married couples. Both are instructive.

The article on the Jews of Mississippi ended with the following story:

Often the contradictions are never quite resolved.

After meeting with the Lums at the synagogue, Mr. Hart had lunch with Celia Starnes, one of two descendants of the Jewish community left in town.

Mrs. Starnes is married to a Baptist, but wears a gold necklace with her first name in Hebrew. She does not go to synagogue, but when Mr. Hart asked if she was observant, she answered, “In my heart I am.”

And though her children were not raised as Jews and the three oldest are practicing Baptists, she said she thought her youngest daughter, who lives in Jackson, was open to Judaism. At least she hopes so.

“I think she's Jewish by instinct,” she said.

The second article ended as follows:

When Mr. Beckoff announced his engagement to Melissa, a Lutheran, his parents asked him to leave their house. But time and two other family interfaith marriages have eased

¹Throughout the article, the term “mixed marriage” refers only to intermarriage without conversion.

the apparent strains. Any boys born in their marriage will be Jews, any girls will be Lutheran. "It's the only way we could compromise," Mrs. Beckoff said.

Paul and Marilyn Bornstein, both divorced and with children from previous marriages, occasionally attend temple and mass together. They light the Menorah and decorate the Christmas tree. She cooks no pork, and they share a passion for bagels and lox.

Larry and Bobbie Bruskin agree their sons will be Jewish and their daughters Roman Catholic. Mrs. Bruskin overcame initial tension with her mother-in-law by creating many occasions to shop and eat together. Mr. Bruskin attended mass last Easter, and Mrs. Bruskin has gone to temple.

Now that they've been married an entire month, the Bruskins confront Christmas No. 1 together. "We'll probably have a Christmas tree," said Mr. Bruskin. An elbow in the ribs prompted an amendment. "We'll definitely have a Christmas tree." In return, last month the new Mrs. Bruskin ran out and bought a Jewish cookbook.

These stories made me think about what we will gain and what we will lose in our brave new world as a community and as individuals. They also made me cry. These stories evoke such strong feelings because they take us beyond the realm of statistics and into "real life." They help us confront the human costs of mixed marriage to individuals and to families. It's comforting to know that there may be the same number of people who call themselves Jews in 50 years as today. Yet, that will be cold comfort if those Jews do not include our own children or grandchildren.

Although sociologist Steven Cohen writes that "it is reasonable to assume that out-married couples are, in fact, producing Jewish children at a rate that is likely to have little impact either way upon the Jewish population size in the next generation" (Cohen & Berger, 1991), we may well ask what kind of Jewish population he envisions, what kind of Jews he thinks will populate the next generation, or what is his evaluation of the quality of the Jewish life they will live.

Tragically, the debate over the 1990

NJPS to date has avoided any real discussion of the quality of Jewish life. The survey may or may not indicate a decline in the number of people who call themselves Jews in the next generation, but even today, less than half of America's Jews say that being Jewish is "very important" in their lives and less than a third say they are very attached to Israel. Jewish commitment, Jewish knowledge, serious religious belief—all appear to be declining in each succeeding generation for all but the most intensively involved quarter of our Jewish people.

Increasing the number of Jews who answer "yes" to the question, "Are you a Jew?" in a Jewish population study must not become the overarching goal of Jewish communal policy. We must ask ourselves whether we would rather have a Jewish community of 100,000 committed, knowledgeable Jews who find joy and meaning in their Judaism or 200,000 households raising their boys as Jews and their girls as Christians and who say they are "not attached" to Israel and that being Jewish is "not very important" or "not important" in their lives.

Raising a Jewish child with a Jewish heart and a Jewish mind, with Jewish commitment and Jewish knowledge, and with an understanding of Jewish history and Jewish culture is very complicated in twentieth-century America. Raising a Jewish child who has confronted the God of Israel, as well as the people of Israel, is particularly difficult. Every Jewish parent who cares knows how difficult this challenge is and how often we fail—even with the best of intentions.

Raising a Jewish child will be even more difficult in the twenty-first century. Clearly, mixed married households trying to raise Jewish children will face complications, challenges, and difficulties that are hard to imagine or predict. We have to face the possibility that each successive generation of mixed married households will have a somewhat more watered down definition of what we mean by "raising a Jewish child." And we must ask ourselves when this mix will become indistinguishable from the Ameri-

can ocean in which we all swim. A family in the year 2075 that lights a candle in a little jar on Yom Kippur "because Grandma did" will be interesting from an anthropological point of view—but it won't be Jewish.

**UNAFFILIATED JEWS AND
MIXED MARRIAGE:
A TROUBLING VISION OF THE
JEWISH FUTURE**

Of course, our Jewish future will bring us Jews with a wide range of attachments to the Jewish people. There will be committed Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews who will be the most successful carriers of our tradition; there will be a significant "moderately affiliated" (in Steven Cohen's terms) Jewish community; and there will be a very great many mixed married and religiously unaffiliated, self-identified American Jews, along with their children and grandchildren, who will identify themselves and be identified by a bewildering variety of categories and descriptions.

All these categories exist today and were beautifully described in Steven Cohen's (1989) very detailed and useful monograph, "Content or Continuity?", based on the 1989 Survey of American Jews of the American Jewish Committee. It should be required reading as a companion piece to the 1990 NJPS; the difference is in the proportions.

If the current trends continue, the first category—Orthodox and highly committed Reform and Conservative Jews, now about 25% of American Jewish households—may well retain its share of the American Jewish community, while the proportion of "moderately affiliated" Jews (now roughly 50% of households) will probably shrink dramatically, and the third category—religiously unaffiliated Jews (now about 25%)—will become a clear majority of all American Jewish households.

Any significant decline in moderately affiliated Jews, combined with concomitant growth among religiously unaffiliated Jews, will have serious consequences for the

American Jewish community. Religiously unaffiliated Jews ("JNRs" in the 1990 NJPS and "Just Jewish" in Cohen's 1989 National Study of American Jews) are strikingly different from and far less Jewishly committed on almost every scale than are moderately affiliated Jews.

For example, in the 1990 NJPS,

- Only 5% of "JNRs" subscribe to a Jewish periodical compared to 28% of "JBRs" (people who report their *religion* as Jewish).
- Only 11% of JNRs have visited Israel compared to 31% of JBRs.
- Only 12% of JNRs attend High Holiday services compared to 59 percent of JBRs.

The differences between JNRs and JBRs are also very striking on such critical questions as "How important would you say being Jewish is in your life" and "How emotionally attached are you to Israel." In most cases, the attitudinal profiles of JNRs are closer to JCOs (Born, raised Jewish—converted out) than to JBRs! It is therefore not surprising that religiously unaffiliated Jews are more likely to produce children who marry non-Jews without conversion.

In a 1986 study of Jews over age 50 in Cleveland (*From Generation*, 1986), 15% of Orthodox parents with married children, 31% of Conservative parents with married children, and 36% of Reform parents with married children reported that at least one was married to a non-Jew without conversion. In contrast, 63% of religiously unaffiliated parents with married children reported that at least one was married to a non-Jew without conversion.

"JNRs," "religiously unaffiliated Jews," "unaffiliated," "just Jewish"—they are identified in different ways by different studies, but they share common characteristics. They rarely join synagogues or give their children a Jewish education. They give much less to Jewish charities. Consistent with the other statistics, they are much less committed to raising Jewish children, much less committed to Israel and, most important, *much harder* to find, *much more*

difficult to touch emotionally, and *far more expensive* to reach educationally or in any meaningful way. They are our toughest targets—the best hidden and the best defended. Creating a strategy to touch, involve, and motivate the American Jewish community may *seem* difficult today, with 70 to 80% of American Jews dutifully passing through a congregational gateway when their children are between 8 and 13 years old, but compare that to what it will be like if 50% of America's Jewish households are religiously unaffiliated.

This generation of American Jews represents a window of opportunity for planners and educators—all we need to do (but have thus far failed to do) is concentrate our energy on young families entering the congregational gateway. Yet, if I am correct, *the window is rapidly closing*—a mixed marriage rate of 40 to 50% in the youngest cohort of American Jews combined with a general decline in Jewish commitment among moderately affiliated Jews may shut it forever and foreclose for us our most cost-effective strategic options for strengthening the education, commitment, and identity of American Jews.

What requires further study is the possibility of a vicious cycle with stunning ramifications for American Jewry. Steven Cohen, in his excellent 1985 article, "Outreach to the Marginally Affiliated," commented on the "family life cycle" pattern of Jewish life, affiliation, and identity. Put simply, young singles tend to be religiously unaffiliated and somewhat alienated from Jewish life. Sooner or later, most marry and have children, at which time raising those children "in the faith of their fathers/mothers" suddenly becomes important. They then affiliate with a synagogue providing *both* a Jewish education for their children and an opportunity (generally not fully realized) for congregations and the community to reach out and deepen this moderate affiliation at this critical moment in time.

Clearly, a mixed marriage has a tendency to break this delicate cycle. Mixed married couples tend not to affiliate religiously,

and so they produce Jews who (whatever they are raised) will be less likely to marry other Jews or care as deeply about Jewish life as their in-married/religiously affiliated cousins.

This analysis leads to two conclusions. First, increased mixed marriage may be the key factor in a larger trend that will lead to a far smaller proportion of American Jews affiliating with congregations. Since congregational affiliation seems to be a critical part of the cycle that maintains Jewish life in America, growing mixed marriage and declining religious identity tend to reinforce each other with disastrous implications for the American Jewish community.

Second, we may need to take a closer look at mixed married households that are members of congregations. Households that are members of congregations, whether mixed married or in-married, may be much more similar to each other (and much more Jewishly identified) than they are to Jews who are religiously unaffiliated. In fact, the division in American Jewish life between mixed married and in-married Jews may be less important than the division between religiously affiliated and religiously unaffiliated Jews. Affiliated, mixed married households have made a commitment to Jewish life. Though the intensity of this commitment may vary, the act of affiliation itself provides an opportunity for the congregation and the community to deepen the household's involvement and encourage conversion.

AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

This analysis, of course, is merely a prelude to a discussion of the steps that I believe we must take *now* while we still have a (rapidly closing) window of opportunity.

From Counting Jews to Strengthening Judaism: A Jewish Life Worth Living for Every Jewish Family

The dialogue generated by the 1990 NJPS must shift from a debate about the number

of Jews in the next century toward the creation of national and local strategic plans aimed at providing every Jewish family and child with the "resources" (again in Cohen's terms) to lead a full, rich Jewish life. No matter what we do, *some* Jews will assimilate, *some* Jews will "check out" of the Jewish people emotionally, *some* Jews will simply stop caring. These are all personal tragedies. They become a communal tragedy if we make their choice easy by failing to provide them with the basic knowledge and experience that make Jewish life worth living and that might make them stop and ask, "What am I about to lose—for me and for the generations that will follow me?"

Ensuring a creative, intense, joyful confrontation for every American Jew with the best of what Jewish life represents must be the highest priority of our federations—a priority that must be implemented through a new relationship with our congregational movements and new funding for specific targeted programs within the congregational setting. This is the minimum that our Jewish community and our congregations owe our people—the knowledge, the feeling, the *resources* to experience Judaism in its totality: the people of Israel, the Land of Israel, the God of Israel, the Torah of Israel. Every Jew in America has a right to reject any or all of these categories, but every Jew who, by the grace of God, still walks through a synagogue gateway has a right to the full and complete experience that he or she will need to decide what kind of Jewish life to lead.

Slowing the Growth of Assimilation and Mixed Marriage: Believing in Ourselves

We *must and can* take steps to prevent the geometric increases in mixed marriage that now seem likely in the future. To do so, we must first believe that *we can* make a difference and that we should try to make a difference.

It is wrong to say, as some have said, that there is nothing we can do, as a com-

munity or as individuals, to affect the trend toward increased mixed marriage. Everyone has a favorite story of a Hasidic Jew whose ten children all married non-Jews or a person who had no interest in Jewish life who now has grandchildren who are rabbis. Surely, there are such cases. However, these cases defy the clear evidence of many studies and much research. Orthodox Jews are half as likely to have mixed married children as Conservative or Reform Jews, and Conservative or Reform Jews are half as likely to have mixed married children as religiously unaffiliated Jews. Involved Jews are less likely to have mixed married children than uninvolved Jews. Parents who strongly oppose mixed marriage are far less likely to have mixed married children than those who are not strongly opposed. Our actions do not make all the difference, but they *do* make a difference.

Clearly, we can also make a difference as a community. The stronger the relationships we create in each religious gateway to Jewish life—each temple and synagogue—the more likely we are to attract and hold religiously affiliated Jews who are then more likely to have children who will marry other Jews who can experience, enjoy, and understand Judaism in all its beautiful complexity. We *can* make a difference. *If* we value Jewish life, *if* we want our children and grandchildren to experience a rich and full Jewish existence—religiously, intellectually, emotionally—*if* we want to break the cycle of mixed marriage, nonaffiliation, disinterest, and increasing mixed marriage, we can, we must, we will develop plans that can shape our Jewish future.

Toward a Workable Strategy: Moderately Affiliated Jews and Gateway Institutions

We must focus our resources on moderately affiliated Jews (whether mixed married or in-married) and gateway institutions—primarily synagogues and Jewish Community Centers (JCCs). The 1990 NJPS reinforces with new data the fact that most American Jews continue to affiliate with

congregations over time and provide a Jewish education for their children. As long as this window of opportunity remains open, synagogues continue to be the place where funding and programs can make the greatest difference.

This is not to say that resources should not also be used to strengthen and expand the inner core—our most highly committed population. This can be accomplished through intensive adult education or, more important, by communal policies that aim at expanding the proportion of youngsters receiving a day school education. Although the main battle for the Jewish future will need to focus on retaining moderately affiliated Jews, the fate of the Jewish community will also depend on our ability to draw significant numbers of moderately affiliated Jews into the highly committed core.

The Right Programs in the Right Context for Families, Children, and Teens

We must provide the families, children, and teenagers passing through these gateways all the experiences that we know can inspire and empower them as Jews. These experiences are *not* a mystery. They are the same experiences that we have been discussing since 1969. What has been missing is the commitment to make them a standard part of every child's and family's passage through the Jewish community and an understanding that the best organization and framework we have for these activities are our congregations and temples—with JCC preschools providing an important alternative gateway.

Developing Effective Strategies for "Universal" Family Education

Since the vast majority of Jewish parents affiliate with a congregation or JCC preschool during their children's school years, the point in time when parents enroll their children in a Jewish school is our best opportunity to reach out to parents to increase their personal commitment and involve them in the Jewish educational process. By

enrolling the child in a Jewish supplementary school (most commonly a congregational school), the parent has already taken an important first step in creating a connection to Jewish life. In addition to being a critical time in the development of a relationship between the family and the school, the years of early parenthood may also be a period of maximum psychological readiness in the Jewish life cycle.

The time of congregational affiliation in particular is a critical moment in Jewish life—a moment in which congregations have a strategic opportunity to reach out to strengthen the religious character of the Jewish home, deepen the spiritual values of parents, and make them partners in the Jewish education of their children. Congregations therefore need to develop careful inreach strategies, with most resources and efforts focused on incoming families with school-aged children. By targeting each incoming class, the task of family education becomes manageable, and it also becomes possible to focus enough resources on the 50–100 families involved to make a real impact.

Federations could, for example, provide up to half the cost of a full-time trained parent and family educator for larger sized congregations and JCC preschools to enable them to provide a personal contact for each incoming family, a required in-depth intake interview, a personalized "contract," and a family education program that fits each family's own needs and lifestyle. In this way the community can strengthen the critical link between families and congregations and help parents recognize that raising a Jewish child may require an increased commitment to and an understanding of Jewish life, religion, and culture.

Jewish Youth: Jewish Experiences as a Foundation for Jewish Life

After the need to involve young parents, the next most important transitional moment in Jewish life occurs during the teen years. Here again, the congregational setting can provide a very effective environment for

experiencing Jewish life and for cognitive Jewish learning. *Retreat programs, intensive Jewish summer camping, youth group activities and trips to Israel* are all effective programs that provide the extended time, the role models, the social reinforcement, and, in Eric Erikson's terms, the "locomotion," the sense of movement and activity that preteens and teens need to learn and grow in a positive and joyful way. A key objective of communal policy might therefore be to provide resources for congregations to make these highly effective "beyond the classroom" environments a standard part of every youngster's life experience. Each one of these experiences has proven effective by itself. Combining two or more for each child in the context of a total congregational/religious experience and the kind of parent education described above can have a *cumulative* impact that may be far more powerful and effective.

Therefore, Federations should implement a relatively simple and concrete series of policy objectives:

- an educational trip to Israel for every American Jewish teen, with congregations, families, and federations sharing the cost through programs such as the Israel Incentive Savings Plan
- an intensive Jewish campaign/retreat program for every American Jewish teen, with federations providing incentives to congregations to make a camping experience an integral part of each youngster's Jewish education
- a Jewish youth group experience for every American Jewish teen, with federations providing part of the funding for congregations to hire trained full-time youth workers

The Other Gateway: The College Campus

In addition to the synagogue, the other nearly universal rite of passage in Jewish life is a college education. This means that we

can easily locate and, perhaps with more difficulty, reach nearly every Jewish young adult at a critical moment in his or her young adult life. College is a time of exploration and a time when young adults form important lifelong relationships, including, in some instances, marriage. It would clearly be in the interest of the American Jewish community to exert maximum effort in reaching this critical population.

Unfortunately, federations provide relatively little support for Hillels and other campus activity. Moreover, at a time of shrinking resources, we seem to be allowing the entire structure of communal support for campus activity to deteriorate as the national B'nai B'rith Hillel organization goes through a crisis in its institutional life.

Incredibly, at the same time that we argue about the number of Jews in the year 2000, we are allowing our support for campus activities to collapse! This amounts to criminal negligence on the part of our national Jewish community, and future generations will judge us harshly for our failure. An American Jewish community that can create a \$40 million national "collective responsibility" plan for Soviet resettlement and a billion dollar loan guarantee program can certainly create a national plan to serve college youth. We need to ask ourselves why we haven't and move quickly to redeem our Jewish future.

Programs for Jewish Singles

Since contact with other Jews has a significant impact on the choice of marriage partners, the Jewish community must make a larger investment in programs for Jewish singles. Doing so will not be easy since few effective program models exist. Moreover, singles outside the college campus tend to be unaffiliated and far more difficult to reach than young married households. New cost-effective models will need to be created through our JCCs, which can involve singles in attractive high-status programs.

Outreach to Mixed Married Households in the Context of Jewish Life

We must confront the challenge of mixed marriage where we have the greatest chance of success—again at the congregational gateway. The Reform movement has invested significant resources in creating a comfortable environment for mixed married households while, at the same time, continuing to discourage mixed marriage. This has been a difficult line to walk, but the Reform movement has had some success; as a result, at least 18% of young mixed married households (according to Winter's analysis) are congregationally affiliated—mostly with Reform congregations. We must focus communal resources on supporting those mixed married families who have made the difficult choice to raise their children as Jews and have taken the critical step of affiliating with a congregation to actualize their desire. If Reform congregations—it is hoped with federation resources and support—can provide a meaningful spiritual Jewish experience for their in-married young families *and* their mixed married young families, we will have a chance of attracting more families. Once again, the key will be the quality of Jewish life generated by the congregation for *all* its congregants. We must ask ourselves what the point of "outreach" is if the institutions to which we are attracting the unaffiliated and mixed married lack the staff and the resources to create warm, nurturing, intellectually stimulating programs for each incoming congregant. If federations do not join with congregations to provide the resources for this difficult challenge, we will have little chance of making an impact on any mixed marrieds whom we might (at great expense) be able to attract.

Any communal strategy for dealing with this challenge of reaching mixed married Jews must—if it is to be worthy of being called a strategy—stipulate where and how significant numbers of mixed marrieds are

to be reached at an acceptable cost. Reform congregations are already the institution of choice for most mixed married Jews who choose to affiliate. I believe that congregations, along with JCC preschools, continue to be—at least for the near future—the logical choice for most communal investment.

The JCC Gateway

For some families, JCC preschools can serve as a gateway to Jewish life and as a bridge to congregational involvement if they have the resources to provide a meaningful intake and parent and family education process. Working with JCCs and coordinating the work of JCCs and congregations in these critical areas can provide an important opportunity for increased involvement of mixed married households.

Toward a New Communal Covenant Between Federations and Congregations

Federations must strengthen their relationships with congregations as a high priority communal policy, and both federations and congregations must take the role of the synagogue in Jewish life more seriously. Congregations are our most broadly based communal institution; they involve far more young Jewish families (in-married or mixed married) than any other Jewish organization and probably more than all of our other institutions combined. Most importantly, congregations and their national movements are uniquely positioned to strengthen and integrate all of the experiences most likely to affect Jewish identity and Jewish living. They are the primary gateways for young Jewish families; their afternoon and weekend schools educate the vast majority of Jewish children; their camps, youth groups, and Israel experiences dominate the market for these services and are generally among the most effective offered; and, of course, most day schools are religiously affiliated.

Congregations must be viewed and must

view themselves as pivotal educational institutions in Jewish life. Properly conceptualized, structured, and funded, they can use the powerful tools that are already part of their national movements in a coordinated fashion to develop integrated strategies that can create a sense of real Jewish community and greatly enhance the Jewish experience of their members.

Since most congregations do not have the resources or manpower for this additional sustained effort, new resources, more and better trained staff, new strategies, and redefined missions may all be required. Federations must provide the resources that congregations need to "reinvent" themselves to meet the challenges of the very complex Jewish world revealed in the 1990 NJPS.

Federations simply cannot deal with the challenge of Jewish continuity without taking advantage of the opportunity for intensifying the affiliation process for Jews passing through this most critical gateway to Jewish life. Congregations must therefore move from the periphery of federation concern to a far more central position. Only through the development of closer ties and funding relationships between congregations and federations can we hope to maximize the potential of the congregation as a gateway to Jewish life for all Jewish families—in-married and mixed married alike.

TOWARD A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

All of these steps will take great national and local commitment and resources at a time when the American Jewish community seems overwhelmed by the overseas challenge and the debilitating effects of the recession. Moreover, our record as an American Jewish community—as federations and as congregations—in providing a vision and an action plan has not been good.

If we follow our pattern as a national

community, we will spend a year debating the meaning of these statistics, 6 months mourning in the ashes of our community or patting ourselves on the back for our great success, and then we will launch dozens of half-hearted experiments without follow-up or replication before sinking back into our collective torpor. We can then wake again in 10 years to count the new bodies littering the landscape of the Jewish future, along with the menorahs and Christmas trees in the homes of our children and grandchildren.

Of course, we can do it differently this time. We can follow up on the effort already begun by the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education and create a full-scale national process to review these issues and an aggressive national work plan with real objectives and timetables. Like Jonah, we can wake ourselves from our collective sleep and carry the message of repentance and change. On this score, I too am an optimist. I believe that with the help of God we can and will emerge to shape our future for the sake of our children and grandchildren, for the sake of our communities, and for the sake of our holy Jewish people.

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