All scholars agree that originally Christianity was a form of Judaism. Why shouldn't Jewish Christianity also be recognized today as a form of Judaism? All expressions of Judaism in this country, from Reform to Reconstructionist, realize that Jewish Christianity is an impossibility, an oxymoron, a union of contradictory elements. The institution of a category of "God-Fearers" will inevitably weaken this position. Enough confusion has already been caused by the Lubavitch belief in a dying messiah. Let us keep Judaism and Christianity distinct. Any identity system that we construct will have its share of anomalies, paradoxes, and puzzles; let us learn to live with the absence and the presence of "half-Jews." +

Building community

Arnold Eisen

Two principles have guided my thinking about the direction of Jewish communal policy in recent years.

First, we need to build and strengthen communities of Torah: groups of Jews bound to one another in ties of tangible obligation, and engaged in serious dialogue of varied sorts with Jewish history and traditions. Without such communities, I am convinced, the "Jewish community" in the sense in which we usually use the term will remain for most Jews at best a historical connection about which they feel profoundly ambivalent, and at worse a fiction trotted out for purposes of fund-raising and the evocation of tribal loyalties. And if that is so, appeals for commitment and belonging will largely continue to fall on deaf ears, and for good reason.

Choosing To Belong

The second guiding principle is that, for better and for worse, Jewish communities will for the majority of diaspora Jews remain voluntarist and partial. In a world of near-infinite choices, Jews must be persuaded to choose the covenant. Guilt, slogans and glitz will not persuade them, particularly when individual Jews can and do choose to join or leave formal affiliations at many points in the life-cycle. They also can and do belong, if they belong, to more than one Jewish community at the

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same time, and have both Jewish and non-Jewish loyalties. Overwhelmingly, the identities of American Jews are now hyphenated to the core.

The combination of these two principles means, I think, that if our communities are to succeed they must be pluralist. As regards non-Jews, rabbinic teaching holds that the world contains not only Jews and "idolaters" but the great majority, "children of Noah," who are no less entitled to respect. As regards the Judaism of other Jews, that is the relation to Torah that defines their communities, rabbinic teaching holds that "these and these are the words of the living God."

More than *prudence*, or "ways of peace," dictates that we should be as inclusive as we can without falling prey to a corrosive relativism of "anything goes." There is a *good* to be found and served. Acceptance even of those who refuse to accept us—at the same time as we say no to unquestioned wrongs and falsehoods—is doubly imperative. Intelligence and humility can usually help us tell the difference.

These principles to my mind underlie the first three fundamentals of the "statement on Jewish continuity" (signed by 23 Jewish leaders and academics): Torah, peoplehood and community. However, they also provoke questions of utmost importance on which Jews who accept those three can and will inevitably disagree, as for example when it comes to the statement's last two points about covenant and outreach. How shall we prioritize the use of scarce communal resources in order to build and maintain our communities? And where shall we draw the line-sometimes clear, often fuzzy-between authentic outgrowths of Jewish history and traditions, and claims to continuity which we find specious? Most often, the issues dividing us will be instrumental rather than definitional: e.g., "inreach" versus "outreach," or attitudes toward intermarrieds, or relations between synagogues and Federations or JCC's. It is our strong interest as a community to keep disputes on that level.

A Taxonomy Of Change

To that end, I have formulated five criteria designed to help me define the range of legitimate innovation-within-continuity—and so, indirectly, to prioritizate communal funding. What conditions must be in place if we are to have strong communities of Torah in the sense of the term that I have indicated?

First, there must of course be communities, lots of them, encompassing major differences of outlook and behavior. The physical needs of Jews must be supplied by other Jews (Federation's historical mission) if the conviction of community is to be credible. The faces of Jews

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must also be "raised up" by and to other Jews. We have an obligation of spirit to all those inside our communities. The confirmation of their belonging must be palpable.

Second, there must be learning, lots of it, at many different tables. Torah must be brought to life as Jews variously live it, and vice versa; our study needs to be enlivened by the diverse experiences of the world Jews bring to the text from their families and workplaces. The less we know of Torah, the more we will be angry and defensive at charges that the tradition does not belong to us. The more we know, the more such charges can be shrugged off as senseless, for they will be.

Third, the experience of community and the encounter with Torah require time and space of our shaping, reflective of our commitments. Institutional cooperation, historically in short supply, is needed to provide and link these times and spaces. But so is the willingness of Jews to step aside from the majority culture long enough to see what their tradition looks like from the inside. Camps, schools, Israel trips and other frameworks in which tradition and community are encountered whole are expensive to maintain but invaluable in the sense of identity they confer.

Fourth, the language and grammar of tradition must be retained and enhanced: not merely the literal languages in which Torah has been studied and lived (though we need them too, and especially Hebrew) but the figurative grammar that has for over two millennia rendered us distinctive. I mean, for example, the fact that we are a people and not merely a religious affiliation; that our Torah therefore does not define a belief system but a way of life, a culture; that our commandments comprise a praxis involving heavy doses of both ritual discipline and social justice: that Jews are responsible not merely for one another but for our share of the world as a whole; that we are heirs to a rich and demanding history; that we recognize an eternal yet actual center called Jerusalem, Zion, the Land of Israel, which we do not merely pray for but build.

Finally, we are committed to God-wrestling. We are "Israel," after all. The point is not individual belief in this or that concept of God. That could never be commanded, least of all today. I mean rather our collective obsession with the "why's" of existence, the quest for transcendence, the struggle versus idols. To give up on these is to break with a long history. To argue about them is to join it.

I hope we will not shrink from the long tradition of argument over these matters, which arguably includes *Pirke Avot*, chapter four of Tractice *Kiddushin* in the *Babylonian Talmud*, and the controversy over the Hamburg Temple in 1819. Too much is at stake in this dispute

to recommend silence, even if awareness of how long it has been at stake gives one a certain humility about the chances of resolution. The aim should be a network of communities of Torah strong enough to contain these arguments—and the education of many more Jews learned enough to conduct them at a high level. +

Endthoughts

Approaching yahrzeit

Anne Brener

In a few days it will be a year since my Father's death. A full year since I stood, leaning on the voices of his community. Voices that had been accustomed to joining my father's voice in prayer, surrounding me, reciting the words of the *Kaddish*. Voices strong at first, then softening as the week wore on and I made the words my own, finding my way again to the Mourner's Path.

A year—some of the longest days I have lived yet all of them over in a flash. And here I am at the end of it, wanting to slow it down—not wanting to relinquish yet another level of intimacy with my Dad.

This morning from the back of the *shul*, through the wide lacy spaces in the *mechitza*, I noticed the hands of some of the men who had come to pray—most of them my father's peers. Their hands, like my father's, show history. Eighty-five-year-old hands belonging to the men who respond "Amen" as I come to the end of this path and say the words in my own strong tones from the back of the room.

In the reverie of silent prayer I explore one of those hands. It is familiar. I am lost in the furrows of the knuckles and the configurations of the age spots. I imagine it belong to my Dad. I want to hold it.

My eyes follow the fingers, traveling through the hairs growing near the wrist, up the arm to the shoulder and come to rest on a face that is not my Dad's. I am startled. This is a hand I have never held. This hand reaches out to me in comfort, yet it is not the too-sure hand that guided and rebuked me at other turning points.

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