The Coming Reformation in American Jewish Identity

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The specter of cataclysmic change, change whose sources are uncertain, whose directions are portentous, and whose ultimate outcome is unknown, haunts the imagination of Jews concerned about continuity and survival in contemporary America. The trends of intermarriage, low birthrate, continued assimilation, and varieties of religious schism and *kulturkampf* spur a collective anxiety that impels attempts to peer into the future. We need to give shape and meaning to what remains a fragmented and hazy apparition.

Calvin Goldscheider and Alan S. Zuckerman have argued that "the power of structural factors (e.g., economic, political, and demographic shifts) over values, ideologies, and preferences" best explains patterns of long-term communal change and the level of cohesion among Jewish communities.[19] Yet we take for granted that in everyday life people make choices about conduct, life-style, and attitudes. The amorphous flow of vast structural forces is mediated through values, ideologies, preferences, feelings, and beliefs—however well or poorly informed they may be. It is through them that people make the otherwise impersonal forces of history personally meaningful. It is also through them that people come to be more than mere victims of historical flux.

I am attempting here to delineate the emerging complex of values, ideas, and preferences through which America's Jews appear to be making their way into the next century and millennium.

Who will be America's Jews a generation from now? How many Jews will there be? What will be their manner of communal and religious organization? In what ways will they express themselves as Jews? What relationships will they have to historical trends of Judaism and to each other as subgroups?

Will there be one united Jewish people, or several deeply fissured? Will there be a large, growing community, or only a small "saving remnant" left behind isolating ghetto walls—with the rest of their cousins long ago having as-

similated into the mainstream of the symbiotic relationship between the Jewries of the Diaspora and Israel? Or will the partnership have long dissolved, with no more ties between American Jewry and Israel than between American Jewry and the Jewries of, say, Australia or South Africa?

These are but the most obvious questions that come to mind as one attempts to imagine the future of American Jewish identification and affiliation.

Responding as a Jewish sociologist who has been involved in the empirical observation of the demography, conduct, and public opinion of America's Jews for nearly 20 years, I project a vision partly rooted in available research and partly in a somewhat wishful interpretation of that research. Others might draw different inferences from the data that describe present-day American Jews. But I take the invitation to imagine as an invitation to wish, precisely because the realities of the moment can result in very different futures. I believe that some of those alternatives are more desirable than others, and that in forecasting social character, culture, identity, and the like, *sof ma'aseh b'machshavah techilah:* real outcomes are often the function of what was imagined in the first place.

American Jewry in the Next Generation

Demographic Revolution

The explosion of intermarriage among America's Jews since the end of the 1960s has stirred a veritable demographic revolution in the Jewish community.

At the dawn of the 20th century, American Jewry was characterized by a growing homogeneity, the result of mass migrations from Eastern Europe. Between 1880 and 1924 approximately two million Jews from the Russian Pale were rapidly resettled in the urban ghettos of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. This resulted in shaping the culture and structure of American Jewry in the image of Jews whose primary concerns were economic survival, social acceptance, and the perpetuation of an ethnic culture with a religious core.

The homogeneity of that culture was further guaranteed by the very low incidence of intermarriage (about three or four out of a hundred), patterns of dense Jewish settlement, and shared experiences of economic, social, and geographic mobility.

The grandchildren of that generation were raised with a high degree of security and advantage, but a rather low degree of familiarity with the social, political, cultural, and religious concerns of their forebears. They have produced a community whose basic Jewish homogeneity—with all the commonalities such homogeneity implies—can no longer be taken for granted. An example from one major Jewish community should suffice to make this point.

In 1984 the Federation of Jewish Agencies of Greater Philadelphia published a study of the Jewish population of its area, which represents the fifth-

largest Jewish community in America. The study estimated that there are 256,000 persons "living in Jewish households" (households in which at least one adult was reported to be Jewish). Based on the figures provided by the study, it has been estimated that as many as 60,000 of those people (about 23 percent) are non-Jews married to born Jews, or are the children of such couples. Another 7,500 people (about 3 percent of the total) in the Philadelphia community were converts to Judaism. In other words, *more than one-quarter* of the households that could be construed in some sense as Jewish did not include two adult Jews who shared common Jewish historical memory or ancestry.

Figures from more recent studies of American Jewish communities point to the same trend, only in greater magnitude. Current projections suggest that there may be as many as 9.5 million people in the U.S. who live in a household that contains at least one Jew over the age of 18, but less than 5 million Jews who live in a household where all the people over the age of 18 are Jewish. These figures put numbers to the fact that Jews who marry non-Jews produce twice as many households as Jews who marry other Jews. Given the rapid rise of intermarriage from the low figures in the early 1900s to over 40 out of 100 marriages by the end of the 1980s, it comes as no surprise that the Jewish community, like the Jewish family, is becoming an *erev rav,* a mixed multitude.

The most vexatious question concerning this demographic trend, which has exercised the American Jewish community since the mid-1970s, is what it portends for both the quantity and quality of American Jewry.

Since the dire but discredited projections of Elihu Bergman,[20] more forecasts have been made as to the dramatic decline of American Jewry as a result of "net assimilatory loss" fueled by intermarriage.[21]

At the moment, however, the evidence is much too ambiguous for such dire predictions. It is just as possible that American Jewry stands at the threshold of a major population explosion, if the majority of its intermarrying sons and daughters opt to remain within the community and bring in their spouses and children.

Which outcome is more likely to be the reality 20 years hence depends on the choices that those individuals make about their own identification, affiliation, and child-rearing. Yet it does not depend on them alone. The outcome also depends on whether Jewish communal policies and practices will encourage or discourage the choices that would bring them into the Jewish community. It is envisioned here that by the early 2000s the mainstream American Jewish institutions—synagogue, Jewish community center, school—will be fully engaged in reaching out to the intermarried families who comprise the American Jewish population in ever-growing numbers.

Although it appears, as we shall see below, that most American Jews are in favor of encouraging "outreach" to the intermarried, American Jewish leaders are divided on the matter, and are particularly divided on just what sorts of policies and practices constitute legitimate Jewish outreach. This division among

American Jewish leaders, particularly within the rabbinate, is fueled by the politicization of the issue in Israel, in the guise of the debate over the Law of Return.

Some of the other facets of American Jewish identity that have been emerging from local and national surveys are what make the image of a burgeoning and ever more heterogeneous American Jewry the future envisioned here.

Decline in Denominationalism

One of the distinctive features of American Jewish identity is its "denominational" character. American Jews are unlike prewar Eastern European Jews, who either classified themselves along a continuum of greater or lesser religious observance or as Zionists, Communists, Hasidim, or *freie* universalists, and unlike contemporary Israelis, who continue to identify themselves along similar lines with a few additional political wrinkles. For the better part of the past century most American Jews have identified themselves with one of four major branches or denominational bodies—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist.

To be sure, both the laity and the social scientists who have studied the community acknowledge that there is nearly as much diversity within each group as there is between them. Nevertheless, the denominational labels have been the convenient identity hooks on which most American Jews have hung their sense of Jewishness.

In a 1954 report on Jewish sociology presented to the Conference on Jewish Relations, Marshall Sklare noted that in his emerging studies of American Jews in suburbia, 80 percent described their grandparents as Orthodox, but only 20 percent described their parents as Orthodox.[22]

In 1970 the authoritative National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) showed that whereas about 40 percent of American Jews identified themselves as Conservative and 30 percent as Reform, only about 10 percent identified themselves as Orthodox. The remaining 20 percent identified themselves as having no denominational preference, or having a preference other than the three most popular branches of American Judaism.

The 1990 National Jewish Population Study shows the Orthodox as having shrunk to 7 percent, and the Conservative movement to 38 percent, while Reform has grown to 42 percent, Reconstructionists 1 percent, just Jewish 5 percent, and other 7 percent. Orthodoxy is still the smallest branch of American Jewry, not counting the Reconstructionist movement, which can properly be seen as a branch only recently separated from Conservatism. Orthodoxy is certainly a far cry from becoming a major force in the life of the great majority of American Jews. Nor does it show any signs of becoming such over the next 20 years.

At the same time, the data on denominational trends also show an alarming decline in the percentage of American Jews who continue to identify themselves

with the two largest branches. Comparing Cohen's 1986 figures[23] with the 1970 NJPS figures, it appears that the greatest growth has occurred among those who regard themselves as "just Jewish" and identify with no particular branch of Judaism. These figures do not suggest a general decline among American Jews' willingness to identify themselves as such. There is no evidence of such a generalized trend toward apostasy or disaffection from Jewishness. Rather, there appears to be a disenchantment among a large and growing segment of the American Jewish public with the denominational labels that have served as the identificational reference points of their parents and grandparents for the past hundred years.

In short, there appears to be a decline in associational Jewishness, as expressed in denominational identification, and a corresponding increase in what Thomas Luckmann might have called invisible Jewishness: a privatized sense of longing, belonging, and meaning that is more psychological than communal, more felt than articulated. Such invisible religion, as Luckmann called it, draws from the same wellspring of collective symbols and memories as institutionalized religion. But it refuses to be constrained by the boundaries and social controls of the formal institutions (such as synagogues, Jewish organizations, schools) that claim to specialize in the perpetuation of the particular system.[24]

Perhaps of equal importance is the apparent divergence between the official positions of Reform and Conservative Judaism and the opinions expressed by large segments of their members on key issues of Jewish identity.

In a special follow-up analysis of his 1986 survey sample, Steven Cohen looked into the opinions of American Jews on the much debated issue of patrilineal descent.[25] The position, taken by the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, maintains that the children of mixed marriages can be presumed to be Jewish even if their mothers are not Jewish and they did not undergo conversion to Judaism, as long as the father is Jewish and the child is raised as a Jew. Both the Orthodox and Conservative movements have taken very strong stances against this position.

Cohen reports that a little over 80 percent of those who identify with one of the denominational branches of Judaism have at least heard about this debate. By contrast, only about 60 percent of those who do not identify with one of the branches and only about 60 percent of those who are not members of a synagogue know about it. The percentage of people who accept the patrilineal definition of Jewish identity seems to follow denominational lines fairly closely: 12 percent of the Orthodox, 47 percent of the Conservative, and 83 percent of the Reform accept the patrilineal definition of who is a Jew. About 70 percent of those without a denominational label also accept the patrilineal definition. It is instructive to note, however, that less than half the Conservative respondents in Cohen's sample subscribed to the standard of their movement on the issue.

Moreover, when the question is phrased in terms of whether the respondent "would be upset if your child married a patrilineal Jew," the numbers change

considerably. First, Cohen asked: "Would you be upset if your child married a non-Jew?" The affirmative response to this question was 85 percent for the Orthodox, 68 percent for the Conservative, 39 percent for the Reform, and 38 percent for those respondents who described themselves as "just Jewish." Of those who reported no synagogue affiliation, only 22 percent indicated that they "would be upset" by their children marrying non-Jews.

When Cohen asked the question, "Would you be upset if your child married a patrilineal Jew? the affirmative response was: 78 percent for the Orthodox (indicating a high degree of consistency), but only 33 percent for the Conservative (an even greater divergence from the standards of the movement), 11 percent for the Reform, and 11 percent for those who did not subscribe to a denominational label. Of those who reported no synagogue affiliation, only 7 percent indicated that they would be upset if their children married patrilineal Jews.

From these figures, it appears quite clear that except for the Orthodox (who are a small minority), the great majority of American Jews, including Conservative Jews, have widely accepted patrilineal descent as the basis for Jewish identity. Thus, the Conservative movement, which has taken a very strong stand against the patrilineal position, must face the reality that the majority of its members vote differently in their hearts, and that their children may vote very differently in their ultimate mating choices.

The Reform movement is in a somewhat similar situation with respect to its position on rabbis officiating at marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew. In a 1987 study of some 2,700 delegates to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform) biennial convention, Mark Winer, Sanford Seltzer, and Steven Schwager found that the respondents to their survey were evenly split on whether to agree or disagree with the statement: "A rabbi should officiate only if the prospective bride and groom are both Jewish."[26] This is in spite of the fact that the movement has gone on record advocating against rabbis officiating at mixed marriages. Upon further questioning, the research found that though the great majority of respondents were opposed to rabbis officiating at a mixed marriage if the wedding were to be held in a church (90 percent), or if the couple said that they wanted to expose their children to both religious traditions (63 percent), the majority of the respondents approved of rabbinic officiation if the couple joined the temple (53 percent), or if the couple promised to raise their children as Jews (58 percent).

In short, the popular attitudes of members of both major movements of American Judaism reveal serious departures not only from historic concepts of the meaning of Jewish identification, but also from the currently professed positions of those movements. These divergencies will exert great pressure on the major movements for change in their understanding of Jewish identification: a pressure for greater acceptance of process and syncretism in the development of Jewish identity. At the same time, they are very likely to increase disaffection

from the existing patterns of denominational Jewishness over the next 20 years. Such departures pave the way for the emergence of greater schism, new movements, and counter-movements.

Affiliation and Participation

In addition to the pattern of identification with the three largest denominational bodies, most American Jews are thought to have expressed their identity by belonging to and participating in the activities of synagogues and other Jewish organizations. In fact, however, only about half of America's Jews report that they are affiliated.

Citing figures from 1953, Will Herberg noted that in a nationwide survey only about 50 percent of American Jews replied affirmatively to the question: "Do you happen at the present time to be an active member of a church or a religious group?"

The NJPS of 1970–71 found that only 47 percent of its respondents reported belonging to a synagogue. In Cohen's 1986 survey, about 51 percent of the respondents indicated that they belonged to a synagogue.

Given the apparent stability of the rate of synagogue affiliation over the past 30 years—hovering around the fifty percent mark—there is little reason to expect any significant rise or fall in that proportion. But given the significant demographic revolution currently under way, there is every reason to expect that the mixture of people who comprise synagogue-affiliated families will include ever greater numbers of intermarrieds, non-Jews, half-Jews, and patrilineal Jews.

Attendance at synagogue services, like affiliation, has also shown a certain constancy over the past 30 years. A January 1956 Gallup poll dealing with attendance at religious services asked a cross-section of Americans: "Did you happen to attend any Sunday or Sabbath services during the last twelve weeks?" While 82 percent of Catholics and 68 percent of Protestants answered the question in the affirmative, only 44 percent of Jews did so.[27]

In 1970 the NJPS report showed that only 18 percent of America's Jews attend synagogue services "regularly," while 28 percent indicated that they "never attend," another 28 percent indicated that they attend only on the High Holidays, and the remaining 26 percent indicated that they "attend occasionally."[28] The 1986 Cohen study found that about 26% of the nationwide sample of American Jews reported attending synagogue services "at least once a month."

While synagogue attendance might have been somewhat more common among America's Jews in the mid-1950s (probably owing to the postwar baby boom), it was certainly lower than the incidence of affiliation even then. It was also lower than the incidence of religious service attendance among non-Jews. The decline from 44 percent reported by Gallup in 1956 to the 26 percent figure reported by Cohen in 1986 may also be more apparent than real because of the

phrasing of the questions. The Gallup question that generated the 44 percent figure inquired into religious service attendance "during the last twelve weeks." When Gallup asked the question in terms of religious service attendance "in a typical week during the last year," the pattern of response was: 74 percent for Catholics, 42 percent for Protestants, and only 27 percent for Jews—a figure that is virtually identical to Cohen's finding some 30 years later.

Taken together, the figures on synagogue affiliation and attendance show a remarkable stability over the course of the past 30 years. It is possible, of course, that the influx of former Christians into the community may increase synagogue attendance as well. But the prospect seems unlikely to affect the overall rate of synagogue attendance. The central forum for Jewish expression is likely to continue to be the Jewish home, and central acts of identification are likely to continue to be carried out within the private lives of those who consider themselves Jewish. However, as we shall see below, those acts are more likely to be acts of the heart and mind than of deeds linked to the formal mitzvah system of institutionalized Judaism.

The Sliding Practice of Jewishness

Ceremonial and routine practices comprise the daily conduct that constitutes a distinctly Jewish life-style. Over the past few decades, a succession of local and national Jewish community surveys have used several practices as indicators for total Jewish expression. On the whole, studies of Jewish practice indicate greatly diminished Jewish activity within the daily lives of most American Jews.

In his 1986 survey, Cohen found that 84 percent of his respondents had attended a Passover seder in the past year, and 82 percent reported lighting Chanukah candles. But only 20 percent use separate dishes for meat and dairy (a requirement for a kosher home). In his 1983 survey, Cohen also found that only 34 percent of respondents light Sabbath candles at home.

Hasty conclusions about the recency of any declines in the level of observance among America's Jews can be avoided by recalling some of the earlier studies of different communities around the country. For example, a 1955 study of the Orthodox community of Milwaukee found that 66 percent lit Sabbath candles and 62 percent had separate dishes for meat and dairy. But in the same sample it was found that 66 percent ate meat in nonkosher restaurants, and 88 percent would handle money on the Sabbath. Moreover, only about 2 percent indicated that their married sons were as observant as they were.[29]

In their 1963 survey of the Providence, Rhode Island, Jewish community, Sidney Goldstein and Calvin Goldscheider also found a steady slippage of observance from one generation to the next. For instance, with respect to the weekly lighting of Sabbath candles, they found a wide disparity between the immigrant (first) generation (61 percent), their second-generation children (37 percent), and their third-generation grandchildren (25 percent). They re-

ported similar disparities with respect to having separate dishes for meat and dairy (53 percent among the first generation, 25 percent among the second generation, and 16 percent among the third generation), as well as with respect to bringing only kosher meat into the home (62 percent among the first generation, 34 percent among the second generation, and 19 percent among the third generation).[30]

Interestingly, attendance at the Passover seder and lighting of Chanukah candles seems to have been fairly impervious to change—at least in terms of the frequency with which Jews reported those observances.

One Jewish activity that seems to have increased appreciably over the last 20 or so years is travel to Israel. According to the NJPS of 1970, about 16 percent of America's Jews had visited Israel at least once. According to Cohen's 1986 survey, the number was about 33 percent. Though various crises in Israel and the Middle East have in the past cut into the travel of American Jews to Israel, there is reason to expect that over the next 20 years ever larger proportions of American Jews will visit there at least once. The declining significance of Eastern Europe as the reference point of Jewish ethnicity can only help to bolster the ethnic magnetism of Israel.

These fragmentary glimpses of the life styles of America's Jews provide little reason to differ with the assessment offered by Marshall Sklare in the mid-1950s. The practices that continue to have the widest appeal are those that are joyous, do not require rigorous devotion or daily attention, do not require a high degree of separation from one's non-Jewish neighbors, and are in some way connected to life-cycle transitions. There is little reason to expect any change in this pattern in the next 20 years for the masses of American Jews.

Change is most likely to occur in the specific observances that may yet emerge in conformity with Sklare's general principles. Some of these observances, which have not yet surfaced in the data of Jewish community surveys, include such ceremonies as baby-naming (for daughters especially), conversion, and adult bat and bar mitzvah (particularly for women who came of age at a time when bat mitzvah ceremonies were not yet popular).

Another area of change not yet documented by community surveys is that of consumption habits aimed specifically at expressing and enhancing their identificational impulses of American Jews. The erstwhile preference for kosher-style foods and Yiddish humor has been augmented, if not replaced, by the acquisition of Judaica (largely from Israel), the frequenting of restaurants run by Israeli and Russian immigrants, political activism on behalf of Israel, travel to sites of once-thriving Jewish communities in the Old as well as the New World, and the watching of films, plays, and television productions of Jewish cultural relevance.

These forms of Jewish self-expression are consistent with Sklare's general guidelines, but they also build upon the consumerist tendencies of a highly gentrified Jewry. This Jewry seeks to express its commitments not merely with a

bow toward tradition, but also with the élan of educated good taste. This tendency to express Jewishness with the good taste of a sophisticate is of particular relevance to a population whose majority within the next 20 years will benefit from high levels of postsecondary education, high levels of discretionary income, and a relatively low birthrate—making investment in quality of life a key personal and familial value.

Looking Beyond the Numbers

Up to this point the futurology in this presentation has closely followed available data concerning patterns of Jewish identification. Yet such a cautious approach to the future is severely limited. Therefore, the remainder of this essay looks at some wider social forces, both structural and cultural, in terms of their possible/probable impact on Jewish identification in the next 20 years.

The Role of Women

Probably no social force has had a greater impact on our understanding of human identity than the growing equalization of the roles of men and women. With the large-scale entry of the postwar baby-boom generation of women into higher education and then into the labor force, Americans as well as people the world over need to adjust their gender-based role expectations. Given the high mobility aspirations of Jewish women in particular, this aspect of the sexual revolution has resulted in an influx of women into the rabbinate to the point where some can now envision the large-scale feminization of that profession much as education and social work became feminized several decades earlier.

But of course the number of women seeking to enter the rabbinate is minuscule compared to the number of their sisters who have sought careers in the other major professions, such as medicine, law, accounting, and business management. While these trends have produced considerable stress within both the American Jewish family and the American synagogue, it is quite possible that over the next 20 years they may, in fact, have a salutary effect upon American Jewish identity.

The large-scale entry of Jewish women into the labor force over the past 20 years has meant that many more Jewish children are exposed to a greater amount of Jewish fathering, since as a result Jewish fathers have been compelled to take a greater share in child rearing. Whatever small advantage in Jewish education Jewish fathers have had over Jewish mothers (and there is evidence of some), it can be expected that children's greater exposure to their fathers may have a positive effect on their Jewishness 20 years hence.

The large-scale entry of Jewish women into the labor force has also compelled modern Jewish families to make greater use of early child-care services, as well as the services of available Jewish grandparents. To the extent that they have made use of child-care services under Jewish auspices or made use of Jew-

ish grandparents, there is every reason to expect a favorable impact upon the Jewish identification of their children over the course of the next generation.

The equalization of the role of women in the synagogue, culminating in the elevation of women into the pulpit, has resulted in increased opportunity and interest in serious Jewish learning and self-expression on the part of the female half of the Jewish population. At the very least, that trend has increased by 100 percent the number of Jews who might seriously engage in the social production of Jewish identification from the pulpit and from other venues.

Increased Market Demand on Leisure Time

The increased education and economic well-being of American Jews has made them an ever-growing target of merchants of leisure-time use. From health clubs to unique cultural programs to exotic vacations, Jews, as an elite market segment, are more susceptible than ever to the general purveyors of leisure-time products and services. As an increasingly aging community with a great deal of disposable income, they are also much sought after by those who market to the retirement population. The value of the Jewish community as a market segment is bound to present a serious challenge to the traditional Jewish institutions (centers, synagogues, clubs, fraternal organizations, and the like), which must now compete for the time, money, and loyalty of their constituents. Such competition will inevitably produce Jewish products, services, and experiences that will serve to enhance the character of Jewish identification, even as they expand the range of choices in the manner of Jewish self-expression.

The Growth of the Electronic Frontier

Jewish institutions and the patterns of Jewish identification in 20th century America have developed largely out of the encounter between the traditions of an ancient religious system garbed in the ethnic cloak of premodern Eastern Europe, and the challenges and opportunities of modernity, urbanization and suburbanization, economic advancement, and education. Each of these encounters represented a frontier for Jews as individuals and as a community; each was a locale and milieu where we had not been before. In each, Jews sought to integrate their desire to retain some of the valued aspects of their heritage with the opportunities that the wider society had to offer. Indeed, the shape and form of contemporary American Jewish identity is the mark of how well Jews have mastered these frontiers.

However, most of the challenges faced by American Jews have been personal, posed by a non-Jewish world to Jews as individuals. Whether educational opportunity, career opportunity, or residential opportunity, Jews approached each frontier as a challenge uniquely addressed to them. Yet getting into the best school or the best firm or the best neighborhood was seen by each individual, and indeed by the Jewish community as a whole, as not merely a wonderful personal achievement, but as a collective Jewish achievement. Having successfully

met the personal challenges, many thought that the collective well-being of Jewry was also secured. For the better part of the past 40 years, that equation has held fast.

The tremendous diffusion of television, VCR, computers, and other forms of electronic technology provide a profound challenge to Jewish identity. This challenge complicates the encounters between tradition and modernity, science and religion, ethnicity and mobility—all important encounters playing themselves out within the lives and psyches of individual Jews and shaping Jewish identity patterns for much of the 20th century. The challenge in the coming decades will be a collective one. It no longer involves integrating the Jew into various new frontiers. Now it is integrating the information flow necessary to perpetuate Jewishness into the massive flows of information to which all modern Jews now have access.

Most Jews are inundated with a flow of symbols, images, and ideas of every imaginable kind in their professional, personal, and recreational lives. Their identity, like all human identity, is shaped by the interplay of individual psychic economy with those information systems. The successful reproduction, perhaps even reconstruction, of Jewish identity in the coming generation will depend very heavily on the capacity of the Jewish community to transmit information to its members within the varied informational facilities that individual Jews now have at their fingertips.

Uncertainty and Hope

Even as one attempts to develop answers to the questions about the Jewish future, several caveats loom large on the intellectual horizon. First, there are the chastening words of Rabbi Yochanan of the Talmud, *Bava Kama* (12b): "From the time that the Temple was destroyed, the gift of prophecy was taken away from the prophets and given over to fools and children." There is a certain element of childishness in believing that just because one would like desperately to envision the future one has, in fact, done so.

Then there are the caveats of history. Most of us, attempting in 1938 to imagine the Judaism and Jewries of 1948, or 1958, or 1988, would have made very poor visionaries. There is little reason to expect that we will be any better at envisioning just how we will look in 2008. Fifty years ago neither my parents nor my grandparents imagined that their lives as Jews would be radically altered in a matter of just a few short years, first by the Holocaust (they were deported from Budapest in the spring of 1944), then by the birth of the State of Israel (where my grandparents settled in 1948).

Self-fulfilling or self-negating prophecies, catastrophes, and unanticipated consequences are among the familiar pitfalls that plague the would-be futurologists among us. The concepts of self-fulfillment and self-negation caution us that we may bring about historically unnecessary outcomes by imagining they will

naturally flow from existing trends. Alternatively, we may waste our energies attempting to thwart some historical inevitability because we find it highly undesirable.

Unanticipated (and unintended) consequences are the often undesired, unexpected, and highly inconvenient results of some of our most well-intentioned activities. In helping to bring about a highly desired condition, or in working toward avoiding some highly undesirable one, we fail to notice what sociologists have called the *latent functions* of our purposeful activities. We can readily point to a number of hotly pursued Jewish activities that have had unanticipated and unintended consequences in the last 50 years.

For example, the intense focus on fighting anti-Semitism; or the "edifice complex" of the 1950s, which led Jewish communities throughout the United States to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in buildings; or the headlong emphasis on the integration of Jews into the mainstream of American society; and even the focus on the centrality of Israel and the commemoration of the Holocaust, have had such "downside" consequences for contemporary Jewish culture as religious illiteracy and massive indifference on the part of young adults.

There is also the caveat of conceptualization, which cautions us to notice that the terms contained in our questions do not remain static over time. We would like to think that the meaning of words like religion, community, and identity remain more or less the same over long periods of time. In fact, we know they do not. Thus, at least a part of our difficulty in imagining the future of Jewish identification and affiliation stems from the fact that we cannot envision just what these terms might mean to our grandchildren 20 years from now.

The Caveat of History

Marshall Sklare recalls that as progressive a Jewish leader as Isaac M. Wise—who believed that the future of liberal Judaism lay in the New World and not in the Old—was appalled to discover upon his arrival in New York City in 1846 that "there was not one leader who could read unpunctuated Hebrew or had the least knowledge of Judaism, its history and literature . . . ignorance swayed the scepter and darkness ruled."[31] For that reason, the famed Rabbi of Slutsk, Jacob David Wilowsky, visiting New York in 1900, declared to his listeners that any Jew who migrated to the New World was a sinner. Judaism had no chance of survival in the New World. In much the same spirit, the famed Chatam Sofer decried modernity some two generations earlier: "All that is new is forbidden by the Torah."

Had more of Eastern European Jewry followed the visions of the Slutsker or the Chatam Sofer, many more would have perished in the ashes of the Holocaust, and Israel might never have been reborn.

The visions of the radical reformers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries have fared no better: witness the stands taken by the Reform movement on such

matters as Zionism, the use of Hebrew, the bar mitzvah, and the role of spirituality and ritual in Jewish life.

The purpose of these reflections obviously is not to cast aspersions on the limitations of the religious leaders and Jewish visionaries of yesteryear. Rather, it is to remind us of the perils of trying to predict how Jews will fare in the future, and what courses of collective and private action are most efficacious in advancing the cause of Jewish survival and creativity. The ruptures of modern Jewish history, and the suddenness with which they can occur, have made even short-term predictions appear foolish. On the other hand, some of the unanticipated consequences of certain long-term communal strategies have yielded surprising results.

For example, the emphasis on the bar mitzvah as the primary object of Jewish education may well have been a key factor in prompting adolescents to drop out of Jewish education as soon as they achieve that rite of passage. On the other hand, the ethnic and civil rights ferment on the college campuses in the 1960s and early 1970s, coupled with the decline of secularism, has been clearly associated with the flowering of Judaic studies programs in American universities. Thus the assertions of ethnicity in general American society and the breakdown of the traditional liberal arts curriculum paved the way for the rebirth of Jewish education in a new and unexpected locale—a locale that until the late 1960s had been regarded as the setting par excellence for Jewish assimilation.

The Caveat of Conceptualization

Since Alexis de Tocqueville surveyed the cultural landscape of America in the mid-nineteenth century, observers have concurred that this land is populated by a nation of joiners. Membership in a church or synagogue, club, fraternal organization, political party, recreational fellowship, and so forth is essential to most Americans' sense of social placement. Will Herberg was perhaps the first to describe in detail how the dispersal of Jews to suburbia in the postwar baby-boom era combined with the American penchant for "associationalism" in his brilliant social commentary, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1955). That combination produced a community whose identity and commitment was embodied in formal organizations and expressed primarily through formal affiliation. Later case studies of suburban life, such as John Seeley's *Crestwood Heights* (1956), Herbert Gans's *The Levittowners* (1967), and Marshall Sklare's "Lakeville Studies" (1968), all confirmed the salient points first noted by Herberg:

1. The move to suburbia, coinciding as it had with the coming of age of the third generation of American Jews, was accompanied by a high degree of anomie, secularism, and root-seeking.
2. Because this condition affected all Americans regardless of religious or ethnic background, it became more acceptable for Jews to "reconnect" with their own heritage instead of seeking to blend into a culturally amorphous America.

3. The move to suburbia also coincided with the growing affluence of American Jews, as well as the break-up of the traditional family (in its extended and nuclear variations). The building, staffing, and organizing of ever-larger and more multiservice synagogues and community centers became a principal component of Jewish collective activity throughout the 1950s and 1960s. For the individual, affiliation became the primary act of religio-ethnic affirmation.

The trend toward an associational expression of one's sense of religious and ethnic belonging mirrored both the sectarianism that characterized America's predominantly Protestant majority, and also the consumerist attitude with which Americans had come to view all their wants and needs, including their religious preference. To identify entailed buying into particular institutions.

This trend toward associationalism also altered the way in which both the typical Jew and students of Jewry had come to view the nature of Jewish identity. In sum, the nature of Jewish identity has been transformed from an ascribed status that adheres to the person by virtue of birth to an achieved status that one must attain through voluntary effort.

For the masses of Eastern European immigrants, who comprise about three-quarters of the ancestors of modern American Jewry, Jewish identity was an inexorable existential fact to which they were heir by virtue of being born. While its particular religious, educational, political, or aesthetic contours might vary, one's Jewishness was neither optional nor a matter of degree on some hypothetical continuum. For the vast majority of immigrant Jews, as well as for most of their children, residential concentration in urban ghettos; occupational concentration in such industries as clothing, jewelry, real estate, or retailing; shared fears of anti-Semitism and shared liberal political responses to that fear all served to reinforce the givenness or tacit existential necessity of Jewish identity.

For their suburbanized children, and even more so for their grandchildren, joining and participating in the formal activities of synagogues or of Jewish philanthropic and cultural organizations became the acts of faith par excellence by which they affirmed their Jewish identity. In the absence of those formal ties, Jewishness becomes vague, amorphous, and tenuous, not only in the eyes of others, but in their own eyes as well.

But even as associational and denominational ties have weakened, there is reason to believe that an appetite for the symbolic universe of Judaism and *yiddishkeit* remains. This appetite is reflected in the conversations of Jews who flock to Woody Allen movies or films like *Crossing Delancey,* or to the wildly popular one-man show of Jackie Mason. We see it reflected in the conversations of Jews who marry non-Jews and then enter "self-help" workshops to understand why it is that they feel so much stress as to how they will raise their children.

Significantly, the social science that has grown up in the past 30 years seeking to describe and explain the nature of contemporary American Jewish identity has been largely, if not exclusively, the product of American Jewish social scientists who have come of age concurrently with the transformation of the community. Even as they (we) grew into adulthood and acquired professional identities, most were trained in a discipline that sought to operationalize modes of consciousness, feelings, sensibilities, and dispositions by means of objective measures of conduct. Thus, the associationalism that had come to characterize modern Jewish identity in the experience of the typical American Jew of the postwar era found its social scientific adumbration in Jewish community surveys that have come to measure "Jewishness" by means of behavior and attitude scales and other social yardsticks pegging identity to belonging. We have been far less adept at picking up the quiet signals of the invisible Judaism that continues to animate Jewish identity alongside or independently of formal affiliations or the public and private acts that are generally considered the appropriate operational expression of one's Jewishness.

Consequently, any attempt to peer into the future, whether 20 or 50 years hence, to imagine the shape and nature of Jewish identification, must grapple with both the factual implications of the current measures of Jewishness and the question of what those measures may have missed hitherto in conceiving of Jewish identity.