At a Century's End, At a Century's Beginning

SYMPOSIUM ON THE PROSPECTS FOR JUDAISM AND THE JEWS

CENTENNIAL SYMPOSIUM PAPERS, VOL. 1
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

The American Jewish Committee protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.

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Foreword

In May 2006, the American Jewish Committee celebrated its centennial with an ambitious series of discussions and disputations led by preeminent thinkers and writers on world Jewry and Judaism. The Centennial Symposium, *At a Century's End, At a Century's Beginning: The Prospects for Judaism and the Jews*, gave expression to a Jewish community reckoning with both its past and its future. The symposium began with a memorable May 1 evening at the Library of Congress, as Ted Koppel moderated a conversation with Cynthia Ozick, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Leon Wieseltier, and A.B. Yehoshua entitled, "What Will Become of the Jewish People?" The controversy engendered by Yehoshua's classic negation of the Diaspora is documented in the companion publication, *The A.B. Yehoshua Controversy: An Israel-Diaspora Dialogue on Jewishness, Israeliness, and Identity*.

The publication before you is dedicated to the scholarly papers presented on May 2, 2006, at the Sixth and I Historical Synagogue and the Capital Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. The papers address the central themes of and challenges to Judaism and the Jewish people in this new century, coinciding with the beginning of AJC's second century:

— How different is our religion from the religion of our ancestors? What are the new elements, the new sources of energy, in Jewish belief and practice? (Moshe Halbertal)

— At the threshold of a new century, how much dread should we feel, and how much hope? What are the threats to the Jewish community in the future—external and internal, real and imagined, from our enemies and from ourselves? (Leon Wieseltier)

— What are the sources of authority in the contemporary Jewish community? How do they differ from earlier times, and how will they evolve? (Michael Walzer)

— How have the Holocaust and the State of Israel transformed the meaning of Jewish identity? What is the future of Jewish denominationalism in the United States?(Steven Bayme)

Additionally included here, in recognition of the May 2007 conclusion of the AJC centennial celebration, is a thought-provoking essay by Ambassador Alfred H. Moses, chair of AJC's Centennial Committee, entitled "AJC Centennial Reflections: A View of the Past and a Program for the Future."

Roselyn Bell's comprehensive summary of the symposium proceedings records both the salient points of all the papers and the substantive comments from the renowned respondents, who complemented and contradicted the primary presenters in classic Jewish debate fashion.

Consistent with its role as a thoughtful organization on the American Jewish scene, the American Jewish Committee chose to highlight its centennial celebration with an intellectual reflection on the state of Jews and Judaism. This collection is a record of that public contemplation. History will determine the credibility of its content.

The Forms and Fortunes of Jewish Spirituality: The Role of Spirituality in the Life of the Jewish People

Moshe Halbertal

The question that was posed to the members of this panel is a rather large and important question, which I will redefine slightly: What is the role of Judaism as a religion, as a culture, as a set of practices, texts, and beliefs in the future of the Jewish people? I prefer to formulate the question in this way rather than as the role of spirituality, which is a complicated term which I don't fully grasp.

Let me start with an observation upon which I think we will all agree: Since the rise of modernity, from the nineteenth century onward, there was never a time as good as the present for the ultra-religious groups within Jewish life. A little more than fifty years ago, David Ben-Gurion decided to grant yeshiva students permission not to serve in the Israeli Army. At the time, Ben-Gurion thought he was providing a funeral to a vanishing phenomenon, the ultra-Orthodox community. His assumption, grounded in the secularizing trends of the period, was that the power of secular nationalism would crush the remnant of this mode of Jewish existence—but he was mistaken. I think that had Ben-Gurion known what we observe today—the thriving and flourishing of yeshiva life, at least on the level of quantity of participants—he would not have allowed so massive an exemption.

The occasion of our panel is part of the celebration of the establishment of the American Jewish Committee, which was founded after the Kishinev pogrom, in 1906. A historical anecdote related to that date will highlight the deep shift in the status of the ultra-Orthodox world. The year 1906 was when Chaim Nahman Bialik emerged as the poet-prophet of the Jewish people. He rose to that status after writing his report on the Kishinev pogrom and his great poem, "In the Valley of Slaughter" (*B'Ir Ha'Hareiga*). Bialik was a student of the best Lithuanian yeshiva in Volozhin, and his spiritual transformation and journey, from the yeshiva world to Zionism and *Haskala* ("Jewish Enlightenment"), reflect the general crisis of the elite of the yeshiva world of the time. One sees no such crisis or spiritual earthquake shattering contemporary yeshivot. There are no future Bialiks now occupying the benches of the descendants of those grand Lithuanian yeshivot. The elite of the yeshiva students who now reside in Ponevez and Mir are not threatened at all by the crisis that shook the yeshiva world during the first half of the twentieth century. I wish to shed light on this phenomenon: What happened in the last fifty years, both historically and religiously, and what does that mean for us?

Moshe Halbertal is a professor of Jewish thought and philosophy at the Hebrew University, a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute, and a visiting professor at the NYU School of Law.

Three Past Challenges to the Place of Religion in Jewish Life

To explain this development and to shed light on our general topic, I wish to address three large processes. Explicating them will help us understand the full phenomenon of change in the place of religion and Jewish culture within the life of the Jews.

The first process was a radical change in Jewish forms of secularism. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the rabbinic elite was under attack from three powerful movements. The first movement was Jewish nationalism, which emerged as a secular alternative to Jewish identity. The second movement was the Enlightenment, *Haskala*, and the third was socialism. These three movements, with their immense power, ripped apart the Jewish religious elite. The core of the power of these movements was that they located the life of the individual within a meaningful, larger historical scheme, and they thus challenged the religious picture in a serious way. Jewish secular nationalism located the lifespan of the individual within the great historical narrative of the nation. It offered him meaning beyond the constraints of his finite individual life. The *Haskala* located the individual in an ongoing chain of redemptive progress, with its historical promise of the power of Enlightenment. And socialism, which attracted major portions of the Jewish elite, located the individual within the historical struggle of the working class that pointed toward an eschatological horizon of blissful, just redemption.

All these powerful movements developed a serious, deep alternative to the way in which traditional Jewish life had located the individual in a larger historical scheme. The weakening of these ideologies in contemporary life is one of the major shifts in the history of secularization. With the move from modernism to postmodernism, the larger metanarrative, especially the view of Enlightenment, was undermined. Secularism doesn't offer a challenging alternative ideology to the religious structures. It offers individualism and freedom, unlike the previous movements which placed the individual in a larger scheme and provided meaning that transcended one's finite existence.

In my opinion, there is one movement today in the secular world that will be very powerful in terms of enriching Jewish life, as well as threatening to the religious establishment. The only movement that, rightfully, causes the rabbis and the mullahs to lose sleep is feminism. It is the contemporary movement that poses a moral, historical challenge in the way that its modern predecessors used to do. I believe that the rise of feminism within Jewish life—and not only within Jewish life—is the place to watch in terms of transformation and challenge.

The Shift from Modernism to Postmodernism and its Costs

The shift in the secular culture from modernism to postmodernism has another important implication in terms of the status and role of religion. Religion has been having a very easy time of it in the last decade. After centuries of struggling with the demands and challenges of reason, it has been freed from this burden. Reason is not sitting on its shoulder anymore, because reason itself has declared itself minimal and limited. With the emergence of the postmodernist ethos, the idea of truth as an objective point of view has been replaced by forms of lives and narratives. Reason declared itself decidedly not to have an objective, independent point of view from which religion can be criticized. Instead, under this new perspective, religion can be seen as flourishing like any other narrative, equally valid to science or other forms of inquiry. Basically, everything goes now, and this gives religion unprecedented freedom, a luxury it never had before—not since its encounter with Athens during the medieval period and the challenges it suffered from the rise of historicism and Enlightenment during the seventeenth century. Without addressing the substantive philosophical underpinnings of postmodernism, suffice it to say that this process over the long term has actually harmed religion. It has made religion into spiritual phenomenon, one among many others. By spirituality here I mean a recreational activity, an elevating experience. The denial of a transcendent, ahistorical, acontextual point of view, which gave religion a great space to flourish, deprived religion of its claim to access to such a point. Religion lost within this environment its power to demand, to make claims. It became soft.

The postmodern shift will have a great impact as well on the issue of religious denominationalism within Jewish life. Much of the power of the Reform Movement was dependent upon its alignment with the Enlightenment. This alignment stood as the basis of its rejection of particularism and ritual, and its reinterpretation of Judaism as the universal religion of ethics. I doubt that this point of view, so powerful during the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, has any more gripping force. The denominational distinctions within Jewish life are becoming less and less important. The traditional embarrassment with ritual or particularism disappeared within the Reform Movement. This development might eventually close the gap between the Conservative and Reform Movements and the gap between them and parts of the Modern Orthodox world. Jewish denominationalism has its roots in European Enlightenment, and it might look completely different with the demise of the Enlightenment.

The Rise of the State of Israel as the Civic Religion of the Jews

The second shift that has had an immense impact on the role of religion in the future of the Jewish people has to do with the role of the State of Israel as the civic religion of the Jews. We are confronting a rather dramatic change in this respect. Jewish identity is not mediated anymore, as it used to be, through affiliation with the State of Israel. That is true not only about Diaspora Jews, but is true as well about Israelis, who feel more and more that their identity as Jews is not fully satisfied just by being Israeli citizens. In the previous generation of Jews, affiliation and identity were based on the large historical dramas that were so overpowering—the Holocaust and the birth of Israel. Jewish identity rested upon a basic emotional sense of solidarity attached to the historical fate of a people.

This sense of primary gut identity of the earlier generation can no longer capture the younger generation. They are seeking something deep about what it is to be a Jew. There won't be any substitute for Jewish life but serious Jewish learning, serious Jewish literacy. It is not clear what form it will take. Let different forms of Judaism flourish! But they must be based upon what we were for so many generations—an interpretive community, wherever that interpretation takes us. Given this new phenomenon, another point has to be made. Without this shared literacy, I doubt whether there will be a deep future connection between Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jews.

The second process can be summed up as the end of the large historical dramas that defined Jewish identity, solely and exclusively, for our parents' generation. This change has been coupled with a new quest for learning and literacy that will define and enrich what it means to be a Jew in the future.

The Transformation of the Arab-Israeli Conflict from a Political to a Religious Conflict

The third process that will define the future role of Judaism, to my view, is closer to home to me as an Israeli, but it is not only about Israel. It is a geopolitical issue facing the Jewish people. In the last ten to twenty years, we have witnessed the transformation of the Arab-Israeli conflict from a political conflict into a religious war. The conflict is carried on now by movements like Hezbollah and Hamas and by a state such as Iran that define their message in Islamic terms rather than in Palestinian or Arab national terms. Among other factors, this new development has occurred because relatively moderate forces used the religious radicals as leverage against Israel. Yasir Arafat used Hamas against Israel in his ongoing refusal to not monopolize power, and the Syrians are using the Hezbollah as their whip against Israel, acting from Lebanese soil.

What eventually happened was that the relatively moderate elements became enslaved to their own more radical instruments; they were

riding on a tiger that they could not control. By now Hamas controls the Palestinian people, while Hezbollah is slowly emerging as the strongest force in Lebanon. This use of religious extremists as leverage against the other side has played out as well in Israeli policy. We Israelis were part of that same game; we used our religious extreme rightists as a whip, and today it is not clear that we are not prisoners of these groups. We are in trying times because of this.

What is the significance, religiously and politically, of the transformation of the political conflict into a religious war? One problematic consequence has been the enlargement of the scope of the conflict. Israel is not only engaging in a battle or conflict with the Palestinian people, but slowly, slowly—God forbid—the conflict is redefined as a Jewish-Muslim struggle. That is definitely something we ought to try to avoid if we can have some impact on the process. Besides enlarging the conflict, this transformation brings with it one feature that is central to the core of a religious challenge. A careful analysis shows that the religious element serves to absolutize relative claims. It endows political, relative interests with the aura of the sacred. While water, security, and territory are divisible, the sacred is indivisible. If something is defined as sacred, it means that it is not up for compromise. The emergence of religion as the constitutive aspect of the conflict has the effect of both globalizing and absolutizing the issue.

Examining this process from the perspective of my own religions convictions, I see such absolutization as the ultimate form of idolatry. If to be a Jew is to deny idolatry in the name of something transcendent, beyond us, the function of religion in a deep sense ought to be: to relativize absolute claims rather then absolutizing relative claims. That is a particular sensibility that we have to put forward in a time when, in God's name, bloodshed and atrocities are being brought upon us. We who have borne witness to God in our lives have to stand up to that. This, in my view, might be religiously the deepest challenge facing Jewish civilization today. Rather than transforming the conflict into absolute global war through the medium of religion, we ought to provide an alternative in which the religious voice will serve in the opposite direction—relativizing absolute claims, in the name of the transcendent God whom we worship.

In conclusion, if we dare ask what sort of role Judaism will play in the future of our people, we have to be aware of these three processes that have shaped the place of Judaism within contemporary life: the dramatic change from modern to postmodern culture, and its impact on secular rival ideologies and religion; the erosion of the place of the grand historical narrative, the Holocaust and the birth of the State of Israel, in shaping Jewish identity, and the subsequent quest for literacy and education as the base for such an identity; and, what I believe is the highest challenge facing our civilization religiously, the transformation of a political conflict into a religious war. It is at that point that the abuse of religion might serve as the most brutal form of perversion and defilement of the notion of the sacred.

American Jewry at the Start of a Century: What Should We Worry About Next?

Leon Wieseltier

Because it is so rich, and because it is so pledged to controversy, Judaism is notoriously lacking in the fixity that believers, and even scholars, often demand. But if one wishes to determine the status of a concept or an emotion or an activity within the ocean of our tradition, perhaps the most reliable way is to search through Jewish law. The inscription in *halakha* of a particular mode of thinking and feeling and doing is a certain mark of its significance. And sure enough, the body of Jewish law includes a codification of worry—concrete instances in which worry becomes an obligation, and a general principle that justifies this obligation.

D'varim ha'asurim mishum sakana, "Things Forbidden Owing to Danger," is how Jacob ben Asher, in Spain in the fourteenth century, entitled a small section of *Yoreh De'ah*, the part of his great code that treated ritual law. It is impossible not to read this section wryly. It includes injunctions against leaving potable liquids exposed to the air for very long; and against eating foods that are disgusting, and fish and meat together, and soft fruits and vegetables into which an insect may have squirted various fluids; and it asks that the observant Jew stay away from all human sweat, which it deems poisonous, and that one refrain from putting coins in one's mouth, and from depositing beverages and cooked foods under the bed (where an "evil wind" rules), and from inserting a knife into an *etrog*, because somebody might fall on it and die.

Leon Wieseltier is the literary editor of the *New Republic* and author of *Kaddish*, among other books.

All this is very advanced worrying. What we have in these statutes, drawn from a variety of Talmudic sources and reproduced in more distilled form by Joseph Karo in the *Shulhan Arukh* in Safed in the sixteenth century, is the imagination of catastrophe in the realm of the commonplace. Or to put it differently, we have here the legitimation of worry by law. The reason is given by Jacob ben Asher: "An individual must take care to guard strictly against such possibility, because [the ancient rabbis] were stricter about the possibility of harm than about the possibility of transgression." In contemporary legal parlance, we might describe this as the precautionary principle of the rabbis. We are here in the realm of worst cases; and not only probable ones, but also possible ones. Disaster must be contemplated, and provided against. Or as Moses Isserles, in Krakow in the sixteenth century, said more succinctly: *sakanta hamira me'issura*, which might be translated as "danger is graver than sin."

An entire mentality flows from such a formula. Most obviously, the sensitivity to danger is a practical consideration, a requirement of prudence. Immanuel Kant was not the only observer to remark that Jews did not drink as much as their non-Jewish neighbors because they could not permit themselves the insensitivity of drunkenness. They need their wits about them. And more loftily, self-defense, survival, is itself a moral duty.

But the centrality of worry to Jewish life reflects not only the concrete circumstances of the various communities in the exile; it reflects also certain spiritual inclinations. We might even defend Jewish worry as an expression of Jewish philosophy.

For example: Worry is the appropriate emotion to accompany a linear view of history. In such a view, which is the pioneering Jewish view, meaning is premised upon the desirability of a particular outcome, which will come once and for all. Except for those who will live at the end of days, a linear understanding of history provides only an obscure view of the future, and this obscurity may be difficult to bear. A cyclical view of history, by contrast, is more transparent and more fatalistic, and therefore less anxious. Cycles are their own consolation. One may dread what is coming, but one knows what it is. It makes no sense to worry that this is the world's only spring, or to hope that this is the world's only winter. Repetition makes worry a little redundant, as it makes hope a little redundant. Worry is hope's twin. The salience of hope in Jewish religion and Jewish culture is well known; and worry may be expected to be just as salient.

There is a certain comedy, of course, in the intensity of Jewish worry. Consider only the sayings of the mothers. Sidney Morgenbesser (a Columbia University professor of philosophy known for his wit) once told the story of the morning his mother said to him, as he was leaving the house: "Sidney, it's chilly outside, so put on a jacket. If you don't put on a jacket, you'll get sick and I'll die." And when many years ago, I asked my own mother why she worries all the time, she responded mordantly, without missing a beat, that "it shows an interest." I would insist that there is a philosophical principle in this maternal morbidity. We might say that worry is the regular expression of the Jewish belief in attachment—to the family, to the people, to the world. About the Jewish attachment to the world, which is Judaism's most radical feature, a great deal can be said. Suffice it here to say only that attachment makes one not only stronger, but also weaker; not only more fearless, but also more fearful. For the Eastern religions, the weakness that comes with attachment and the fear were the most decisive spiritual facts; but Judaism will have none of that. It harbors no dream of withdrawal. It demands a belief in the reality of the world, and a commitment to its preservation, and an interminable engagement with it—*l'hatmid kiyum ha'olam*, as one medieval writer put it: "to perpetuate the existence of the world." We are enjoined to show an interest. We may be neither careless nor carefree. But the more intensely you care about something, the more regularly you contemplate the possibility of its loss. Even the most durable attachment is haunted by a suspicion of the fragility of things. In such cases, is it possible to be fearful but not overly fearful? Can the appreciation of risk be distinguished from the exaggeration of risk? Perhaps Jewish worry is just more evidence of the essential vulnerability of love.

What Jews Worry About—the External and the Internal

So what, then, have Jews worried about, and what should we worry about next? Speaking in coarse generalities, we have worried, throughout our history, about external dangers and internal dangers; and our sense of our prospects has always consisted in an assessment of the balance between the external dangers and the internal dangers. The external dangers were discrimination, persecution, and extermination. The magnitude of each of these threats varied in different times and in different places in the exile; but even if one does not accept what Salo Baron famously called "the lachrymose conception of Jewish history," the Jews were never entirely free of these fears, and a measure of lachrymosity always had a foundation in reality. Even when Jewish life in the exile was not miserable, it was precarious. The internal dangers were sectarianism, heresy, apostasy, and ignorance; crises of conviction and crises of competence. Jewish historians have studied the former more than the latter; a great book remains to be written about the history of the literacy of the People of the Book. I will return to this point in a moment.

So there were threats to Jewish life and threats to Jewish truth, however undogmatically the latter was construed; and there were times when Jews regarded the threat to truth as more urgent than the threat to life. We had our own martyrs, too. Most of us no longer share the worldview of our martyrs; but if we cannot speak about them with the same condescension or derision with which we speak of the martyrs of other faiths, it is because we still share the old sense that our values may be worth dying for.

As anybody will have observed who has studied the medieval literature of the Jews, the remarkable fact about Jewish culture in the exile was its ability to deal with both these threats simultaneously, without the struggle against one hobbling or halting the struggle against the other. From the virulence with which the internecine intellectual wars were fought within the Jewish world, you would think that the people who fought these wars lived in perfect security, and needed to attend only to the refinements of their faith, without concern that their divisions would be misunderstood or exploited by others; but, of course, this was never the case. A feeling of sovereignty, an air of freedom, suffuses the legal, metaphysical, and ethical texts of the Jews in the traditional communities, but they were not, at least externally, sovereign and free. These are not the writings of persecuted individuals, even though the individuals who wrote them often were persecuted. The spiritual autonomy of the Jews was steadily asserted against the absence of physical or political autonomy.

And the pressures and perils from the outside did not significantly interfere with the development of the individual and collective spirit on the inside. The texts to which I have just referred are astoundingly devoid of the traces of adversity. Their subject, directly or indirectly, manifestly or latently, is only rarely anti-Semitism and the hostility of the surround-

ing world. They are not obsessed with their circumstances. And they never use their circumstances as alibis for moral or philosophical relaxation. Though Jewish historians have in recent years discovered more anger in medieval Jewish literature than we had previously known or acknowledged, it is still not an angry literature. Somehow we managed to insulate the spiritual struggle from the physical struggle. Or to put it differently: the Jewish will to survive notwithstanding, we were never merely survivalists. This was because we regarded our survival as the survival of our idea; we justified the necessity of our physical being with the necessity of our spiritual being. We never wished to survive except as what we were, and what we still had to be.

To paraphrase the most famous formulation about Jewish self-defense in the twentieth century, we resisted our inner enemies as if we had no outer enemies and our outer enemies as if we had no inner enemies. This is still the better part of wisdom, especially in this age of the rampant politicization of Jewish identity. As a consequence of the ferocious dramas of the twentieth century—the destruction of European Jewry and the creation of the State of Israel—but also as a consequence of the historicism that has overwhelmed the self-interpretation of all modern individuals and nations, the meaning of Jewish life has in recent decades been formulated in collective and eschatological terms of one variety or another, and Judaism has become increasingly experienced as membership in a movement or a party or a cause or a lobby. The still small voice has almost vanished from Jewish life now. In this way, we have allowed the part to become the whole, and lost our ancestors' equilibrium, their extraordinary skill for balancing the needs of the people and the needs of the soul.

What Has Changed with Modernity

But, of course, our predicament is no longer their predicament. For the Jews, something really changed, and for the better, in modernity. The names of those changes are Israel and America, the restoration of sovereignty in a national state and the revolution of pluralism in a democratic state. Our brethren in Iran, and in Argentina, and perhaps in France—though in the matter of anti-Semitism there is at last a distinction to be made between government and society—and, most ominously of all, in Russia, may regard their situation as continuous with the situation of their ancestors; but we, in the United States and in Israel, may not. The traditional picture of the Jewish position in the world—tense, exposed, fragile, anomalous—does not any longer describe our situation here. We are not Jews who live by our nerves. And insofar as our brothers and sisters in Israel still live by their nerves, it is in part because they have chosen, in accordance with their ethical sensibilities, not to avail themselves of all the force at their disposal, and because they prefer a political solution to the problem that torments them; but even in Israel in the age of

jihad there is no denying that a normal life for Jews has been brilliantly achieved. So the question of what we should worry about next cannot be given the old answers.

In saying so, it will be clear that I hold the optimistic view that the Jews of Israel and America have once and for all escaped what we used to think of as the Jewish fate, the Jewish doom. I certainly do not mean to deny the existence of external threats. Not at all. Israel faces a grave strategic threat in the nuclear program of Iran—but it is the only strategic threat that Israel now faces, the fevers that are sweeping some of the Islamic world notwithstanding. The peace with Egypt has withstood two intifadas and an American invasion of Iraq. The peace with Jordan is secure. Syria is wicked in the old way, but it will not fight a war alone. The Saudis are afraid of everything and everybody. Saddam no longer rules Iraq. The Soviet Union is still dead. And the Palestinians, even under Hamas, will never destroy Israel, though Israel must destroy the terrorists and the structures of terrorism. And Israel is spectacularly strong.

Again, I do not wish to be misunderstood: There are dangers. But these dangers no longer add up to the Jewish doom. They do not add up to the grounds of the ancient fear. The results of recent elections in Israel would indicate that a majority of Israelis have rejected a politics of pessimism, even though their Palestinian interlocutors have done their best to justify such a politics. As for the Jews of the United States, there is still anti-Semitism here, to be sure, but it is without force and without legitimacy. The virulent anti-Zionism on American campuses can hardly be mistaken for the attitude of American society toward the Jews and their interests. I do not think the point needs belaboring. Though there is always work for the Anti-Defamation League to do, ADL Jewishness is looking increasingly anachronistic. To be a Jew was never to be only an anti-anti-Semite; and in America especially, self-defense cannot furnish the substance of Jewish identity. Whether or not the barbarians were, in the poet's words, a kind of solution, the barbarians (or most of them) are not at the gates.

Why Our Internal Weaknesses Are Paramount

But as I say, in the spirit of David Ben-Gurion's resolute observation, we have always fought all the dangers at the same time. My own view is that the most considerable cause for Jewish worry in the years to come will be our internal infirmities and not our external ones; but even if you do not agree that the greatest threat is to be found within the gates, it is hard to deny that a great threat is to be found there. I am speaking now about American Jewry, and about what it has done to the Jewish civilization that it inherited. We are the barbarians within the gates. The amount of Judaism, of Jewish tradition, that is slipping through our fingers in these almost unimaginable conditions of security and prosperity is greater, by many orders of magnitude, than what was lost by our ancestors in their

conditions of peril and misery. Between every generation, not only in circumstances of war but also in circumstances of peace, much is always lost. Only a small fraction of the works of the human spirit ever survives the war against time. But American Jews have become time's allies in the erosion of what has come down to us.

The achievements of American Jewry have so far been primarily communal, institutional, political, social, financial, organizational; but they have not yet been primarily spiritual, philosophical, artistic, or literary. To be sure, the American Jewish contribution to the thought and the art and the literature of the United States has been extraordinary, but that has never been our first responsibility. Our first responsibility is what we do for, or to, ourselves—how we develop the resources of our tradition internally. And the standard by which we must judge ourselves, and by which our children and our historians will judge us, is not an American standard, even if we are also Americans; and it is not even an American Jewish standard. It is a Jewish standard, *the* Jewish standard: the standard of our tradition. I take it to be a fundamental principle of Jewish life that it is by our tradition that we must measure ourselves. So the questions that we must ask ourselves are these: How does what we have created compare to what we inherited? Did we add to our tradition or did we subtract from it? Did we transmit it or did we let it fall away? Did we enrich it or deplete it? Among the great Jewries, what is our distinction?

Our distinction, I believe, is that we are now the first Jewry in the history of our people almost all of whose wounds are self-inflicted. Such a distinction is the mark of a great happiness; but it is also, because of the nature of those wounds, the mark of a great disgrace. I understand that there are encouraging religious and cultural developments in many quarters in our community: a slight increase in day school enrollment; a high level of Jewish studies in the universities; an energetic Jewish journalism; a new Judaic hipness; and so on. All this is to the good, obviously. But will we acquit ourselves of our sacred duty to our tradition—not only to its survival, but also to its substance—with these things, even if they are animated by enthusiasm and even love? Surely the quality of Jewish identity in America matters as much as the quantity.

The Illiteracy of American Jewry

Consider only the bleakest of our failings. I refer to the illiteracy of American Jewry. The American Jewish community is the first great community in the history of the exile that believes that it can receive, develop, and transmit the Jewish tradition *not* in a Jewish language. By an overwhelming majority, American Jews cannot read or speak or write Hebrew, or Yiddish. American Jewry is quite literally unlettered. The assumption of American Jewry that it can do without a Jewish language is an arrogance without precedent in Jewish history. Absent Hebrew, the Jewish tradition will not disappear entirely in America; but most of it will certainly disappear.

To be sure, the linguistic history of the Jews is a complicated story. There was almost always a problem of illiteracy in Jewish life. Aramaic owes its near-canonical status in Judaism to an ancient Jewish indifference to Hebrew. The synagogues of ancient Judaism included among their officials a figure called the *meturgeman*, or translator, who rendered the prayers or the Torah reading into Aramaic (and also into Greek), so that the assembly would understand the meaning of the Hebrew words. Complaints about the ignorance of Hebrew, and castigations of the ignorance of Hebrew, or of the low level of the knowledge of Hebrew, run throughout medieval and early modern rabbinical literature. Of course, I do not mean to deny the validity or the utility of translation, which was also a primary activity of Jewish intellectuals throughout the centuries. Translation has always represented an admirable realism about the actual cultural situation of the Jews in exile. Whatever the linguistic delinquencies of the Jews, their books must not remain closed to them. And yet it is impossible to deny that a terrible decline, a decline by orders of magnitude, has taken place.

I will give only one comparison, a famous attempt to correct this modern inadequacy. In the late 1770s and early 1780s, Moses Mendelssohn produced his momentous and notorious translation of the Torah into German. It became known, for its exegetical portions, as the *Biur*. It was a remedial enterprise for what he called "the common man," or the ordinary Jew of his day. In the prospectus to his project, Mendelssohn wrote: "We, God's people, who are dispersed in all the lands of Greater Germany and grew up under the impact of the language of the dominant peoples 'came down' and there is 'none raising us up.' [Those are phrases from *Lamentations* and *Jeremiah*.] For the ways of our holy tongue have been forgotten in our midst; the elegance of its phrases and its metaphors eludes us; and the loveliness of its poetry is hidden from our eyes." And so Mendelssohn set out "to render the Torah in the German tongue as it is spoken today among our own people"; and he did this, not least, as he wrote in a letter to the philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, for the purpose of educating his own children. When Mendelssohn's translation appeared, it was bitterly condemned by important rabbis in Central Europe as a surrender to German culture, as an expression of defeatism. But here is the rub, I mean for American Jews. Mendelssohn's revolutionary translation was not produced in German, strictly speaking. It was produced in what became known as Judendeutsch. That is, the Torah was translated into a German that was published in Hebrew characters. Which is to say, it may have been conceived as a response to a crisis of Jewish literacy, but it was premised on a degree of Jewish literacy that we, the Jews of the United States, no longer possess. Were a contemporary translator in America to render the Torah into English the way Mendelssohn rendered the Torah into German, on the correct assumption that the ways of our holy tongue have been forgotten in our midst, such a translation would be useless to the vast majority of the Jews for whom it was designed. They simply could not read it.

How American Jewry Takes on the Characteristics of its Host Culture

Various Jewish cultures have often taken on the characteristics of their various host cultures, and American Jewry is no exception. This is not simply a matter of "assimilation," which is not always an illegitimate or injurious process. Gerson Cohen (former chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary) used to speak quite confidently, and quite rightly, about "the blessing of assimilation in Jewish history." (Even Zionism was inspired in part by the non-Jewish nationalisms around it.) The effect of an influence matters more than its origin. There have been fructifying influences from outside and desiccating ones. Sometimes the ideas and the manners of the external surroundings have made us more rigorous and sometimes they have made us more relaxed. In America, in matters of the spirit, they have invariably made us more relaxed.

Consider only the ethnicization of the Jewish difference in recent decades. Psychologically and sociologically, it has increased the comfort of American Jews by conferring upon us a post-melting-pot multicultural parity; but it has also made our Jewishness smaller and more tribal and even more biological. (There is something deeply embarrassing about the nonmedical fascination with Jewish genes.) It has also led to a kind of internal relativism in our understanding of the Jewish tradition. For an anthropological definition of Jewish identity, which is what ethnicity is, all expressions of Jewishness are equally valuable if they are equally authentic. I love Maimonides and you love Matisyahu (the Hasidic reggae singer), and we are happy Jews together. But there are more important and less important elements of Jewish culture; and the quality of our identity depends upon our recognition of these distinctions, upon the preservation of a hierarchy of values. If Matisyahu were to disappear, we would survive, and even flourish; but if Maimonides were to disappear, the impoverishment, direct and indirect, in the short term and in the long, would be incalculable.

In other ways, too, we have overly Americanized ourselves. It is not surprising, in this consumerist paradise, that in their tamperings with their religion, American Jews often behave like consumers, adding what affirms their sense of things and subtracting what contradicts it. We live in a famously voluntarist society; but consumerism must not be mistaken for voluntarism. Consumerism is a corruption of voluntarism, because it replaces reasons with tastes. Judaism, and Jewishness, is not a taste. This preference for revising the tradition in accordance with our needs we now call customization, which is really the removal of all dissonance from one's experience of one's world. Many examples of customization in American Jewish life could be given. But surely the fact that we have inherited languages and liturgies and rituals that do not conform to contemporary meanings is not a justification for scanting or discarding them. This is not just a matter of our custodial honor, though that, too, is real: We have a solemn obligation to preserve what is left of our religion, all

the material and immaterial productions of our tradition that somehow escaped oblivion and made it all the way to us.

But, as I say, this is not just a formal fidelity to the past. The Jewish heritage, precisely because of its strangeness to modernity, its inconvenience to us, poses challenges that we must not be too cowardly to face. It is not only to our descendants that we owe an explanation of what we believe. We owe such an explanation also to our ancestors. And there is no better way to clarify one's beliefs than to try to explain them to one's ancestors. We have the right, and the duty, to refine and to redact our tradition, but not capriciously, not narcissistically. The Jewish tradition would have vanished a long time ago if it were without flexibility; but we should not hide our own willfulness, our own sloppiness, our iPod Judaism, behind the tradition's ability to adapt.

There are two ways in which we can educate our children, two instruments of identity with which we may equip them. One is conviction, the other is competence. I have no doubt that the future of Jewish existence in America will be determined more by Jewish competence than by Jewish conviction. We cannot teach our children what to believe; or rather, we can try to teach them what to believe, but we can never be certain of the success of our effort. They will believe what they wish to believe. We cannot control their belief. Indeed, we must be grateful for their freedom of mind. But it is not an illusion of control to think that we can permanently arrange matters so that our children will never be shut out of their own books, out of their own quarrels. If we cannot make sure that we will be followed by believing Jews, we can make sure that we will be followed by skilled Jews. Competence provides a Jew with some protection against an unreflective and purely tribal conformism. And competence leaves a Jew favorably disposed to conviction. A competent Jew is not destroyed by his questions, because he can look for the answers himself. He, or she, has the tools. Knowledge, too, is a form of sovereignty, and from this variety of self-rule we can be banished only by ourselves.

There is another way of describing the internal dangers to which I have been alluding—the ignorance, the illiteracy, the easy eclecticism, the happy politicization, the satisfaction with external accomplishments. We may say that, about these essential dimensions of Jewish life, American Jewry has stopped worrying. Its pride has been curiously, and selectively, shot through with indifference. So here, I suppose, is what we should worry about next: We should worry about the end of worry. Now there is a betrayal! When we stop worrying, we should start worrying.

The Jewish Community: Old Models, New Models

Michael Walzer

Ever since the fall of the Second Commonwealth, the organization of Jewish communities in the Diaspora has been one long experiment or, better, a series of experiments, in sustaining a common life without state power. In order to explain the difficulty of the experiments and the fact that they are, at best, only partially successful, we need to focus for a moment on that phrase "without state power."

Five things are absent from Jewish life in the Diaspora. First, we do not have the power to raise an army or a police force for self-defense. Second, we do not have law enforcement capacities, above all, the power to punish. There have been times when Jewish courts administered corporal punishment or handed criminals over to gentile rulers for corporal punishment, but this was never a secure right of the Diaspora communities, and today we do not even claim such a right. Third, we do not have the power to tax or to exempt from taxation—except, again, with the support of gentile rulers or, nowadays, of democratic states. Fourth, we are not able to establish or police the boundaries of our community—to decide who is a Jew. And fifth, we do not have the power to establish a system of compulsory education or to require knowledge of the Hebrew language. We have compensated for these absent powers with different forms of communal pressure, from public shaming to complete ostracism. Some of these forms are still employed, very much as they were a thousand years ago.

Communal pressure is sometimes effective, but I want to stress its weakness relative to state power. This weakness manifests itself differently, for obvious reasons, before and after Emancipation. In the centuries before, Jewish communities were tightly organized and often able to mobilize resources, shape a common life, and provide a considerable range of communal services—including schools, at least for boys. Their members faced a stark alternative: They could only leave the Jewish communities by abandoning Judaism. They could not just drift away; there was no secular or neutral space to drift into. So, most often, they stayed where they were, and then were subject to the prevailing forms of social and religious discipline. This made the communities very strong internally. But social and religious discipline had no effect externally, where the communities were frighteningly weak, vulnerable to extortion, violence, mass expulsion, and forced conversion.

After Emancipation, at least in democratic states, these dangers were eliminated or greatly reduced, but the tight organization of the communities was lost. Diaspora Jewry is less cohesive today, Jews as a group no longer have a single common life, fund-raising is a hard business, communal welfare and educational services are much more difficult to sus-

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tain, and conversion under duress has been replaced by a general drift of men and women from the center to the peripheries of Jewish life—sometimes the distant peripheries. Life at the center is dense and lively, but it is harder and harder for core activists and believers to connect with the drifters. We can think of state power in the modern world as the mechanism by which political leaders and engaged citizens reach out to the mass of men and women who are mostly disengaged, busy with their private affairs: to organize them, tax and conscript them, and provide them with some version of education, welfare, and security. Without state power, the reaching out is problematic; the connections between center and periphery are weak.

The Strengths and Drawbacks of Voluntary Association

Jewish life after Emancipation is largely a matter of voluntary association. In Europe, features of an older corporatism survive. But the U.S. is a voluntarist paradise, the country where civil society is most highly developed, and so it is the place where communal success and failure depend most clearly on the free choice of individual Jews. Given free choice, all communities are endlessly fissiparous; they divide and multiply. In the Jewish world, this has meant the rise of denominationalism and congregationalism and an extraordinary proliferation of committees, societies, congresses, and assemblies. Denominations and congregations are often described as Protestant inventions, which we imitate, but in fact the absence of state power forced the Jews, long before the Protestant Reformation, even when we still obeyed a single law, to make our peace with a plurality of organizations—*kehillot* (congregations) and *hevrot* (societies), for example, inside the larger *kahal* (community). Emancipation has greatly increased the fragmentation of our organizational life, but it didn't disrupt an original unity.

And yet, despite the fragments, despite the divisions and multiplications, despite the weakness of Jewish communities in the U.S., American Jewry has a moral center, a core of committed men and women—and, to some extent, the center holds. Money is raised; a Jewish civil service is recruited; services are provided: There are synagogues and temples, Jewish hospitals and nursing homes, day care centers and day schools, self-defense organizations, cultural societies, institutes for adult education, and a multitude of philanthropic societies affiliated with or in addition to the Federations. In the last years before Emancipation, the Jewish *kahal* was denounced as a "state within a state"—a threat to the modern versions of citizenship and sovereignty. Today we constitute a society within the state—and we are certainly no threat to the United States. So, what kind of society is this? Who rules in this society? How democratic are we? How autonomous are we within the larger democratic polity? And what is it that holds us together?

Simon Dubnow was the great theorist of Jewish autonomy in the Diaspora, so I will begin with his challenge to American Jews. In the *Letters on Old and New Judaism*, published in St. Petersburg between 1897 and 1906, he argues for a very strong version of autonomy for the Jews, considered as a national rather than a religious community. He wanted Jewish cultural, educational, and welfare institutions to be funded by the modern state, which would pass on a substantial portion of the taxes collected from its Jewish citizens. At the same time, he knew that it would be very difficult to get governments in Central and Eastern Europe to recognize what he called Jewish "self-administration." So, more modestly, he suggested that we should try "to widen perceptibly the … activities of the communities … on the basis of existing laws guaranteeing freedom of association." And this widening, he wrote, "is especially possible in countries in which the principle prevails that the government does not interfere in the private lives of its citizens, and where … exaggerated concentrations of power do not exist. In such countries, especially in the United States of America, Jews could enjoy even now a large measure of self-administration."

So we could, and, as I've said, to some (limited) extent we do. But Dubnow assumed that there was a single communal "self," which wasn't true in nineteenth-century Europe and certainly isn't true in the U.S. today—in part because of "the laws guaranteeing freedom of association." There are many Jewish "selves" or, better, we are a society of many societies, much as the U.S., as the Jewish pluralist Horace Kallen wrote, is a "nation of nationalities." Most of these societies are clustered near the center, loosely bound together, while a smaller number revolve around it like distant asteroids. Together they constitute a Jewish world, about which we can ask the political questions I have already listed.

The *Kahal* as a Jewish Polis

It shouldn't be surprising that I have posed these questions in the language of state politics. The idea of statelessness is parasitic on the idea of the state. We know what's absent from our stateless condition because of our experience in Jewish and gentile, mostly gentile, states. There are also things that are present in our statelessness, which we similarly understand in state-like ways. This was true in the "old days," and it is true today. Consider the old days first: Even though it never achieved a fully political form, the *kahal* was a kind of Jewish polis—our stateless version of the Greek city-state. And in the *kahal*, the debates about who should rule focused on the political alternatives first discussed in ancient Greece: the one, the few, and the many.

The "one" was the *adam hashuv*, the important person, a local rabbi who had attained the status of a sage, whose legal rulings were authoritative. Wherever such a figure was recognized, he had an effective veto over decisions of the *kahal*. The "few" had a double existence—first as the

learned, then as the wealthy. The rule of the few could be meritocratic or plutocratic; most often in medieval times it was some combination of the two, produced by the intermarriage of rabbinic and merchant families. The "many" might mean the lesser tax payers and property owners or, more inclusively, all adult male Jews; neither of these groups ever actually ruled in the Middle Ages, but they sometimes had a voice in communal decision-making. The Jewish invention of democracy, which I learned about in Sunday school, has no historical foundation. Medieval Jewish writers believed in the rule of the majority, but they distinguished the "majority of substance" from the "majority of numbers," and it was the first of these, the "few" and not the "many," who actually controlled communal life. I want now to consider these same three groups in modern times and ask how they rule (if and when they rule), and what kind of Jewish society, and what degree of autonomy, different rulers produce.

The Important Person

The rule of "one" depends on the community's commitment to *halakha* (Jewish law)—and then on the power of a few learned men, not only to master the foundational halakhic texts, but also to convince other people of their mastery. Since there never was a Jewish pope or anything like a set of bishops, the sages had no ecclesiastical legitimacy; they were sustained by the aura of Torah knowledge that they somehow produced and that others recognized: the charisma of learning. Those of us who are not committed to live "under the commandments"—the great majority of American Jews—don't need authoritative sages. Even when we respect their learning, we are not going to obey their rulings. But in the Orthodox world, there are contemporary examples of the *adam hashuv*—figures like Moshe Feinstein have played exactly that role. The rule of "one" is commonly associated with monarchy, but these Jewish sages are more like chief justices than kings, though sometimes they take on executive as well judicial functions. Mostly, they are very powerful judges—though they depend more on the power of their arguments than on the authority of their courts—and the society they lead is not just a community of faith (in the Protestant sense) but something much more extensive: a rule of law. The subjects of this rule are also subject, of course, to the maxim *dina d'malkhuta dina* (the law of the land is law) and therefore to all the laws of the secular state. Still, Jews living halakhic lives obey a lot of other laws, and by that obedience constitute themselves as members of a semi-autonomous society.

The *adam hashuv* is obviously not a democratic figure, but since his rule is a way of recognizing the central importance of learning in Judaism, his claim to rule, in principle at least, is widely transferable. Remember Moses' outburst, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!" We might well wish that all Jews were scholars and sages. In practice, however, organization and effort are required to produce even a single sage. And

so it was a feature of Jewish life for many centuries that some person in every community was paid to study Torah, and to teach it, and to respond to questions about how Jews ought to act in the world. As I have said, paying for scholars of this sort, who are also halakhic judges, is no longer a communal necessity for most Jews. But there are good reasons to sustain the recognition of learning, including halakhic learning. Some decades ago, Solomon Freehof, a Reform rabbi in Pittsburgh, launched a campaign to revive the literature of halakhic "questions and answers" in the Reform world. He wrote books about the history of this literature, and he wrote many responsa (answers to halakhic questions) of his own. I am sure he realized that plebian Pittsburgh was not the ideal base for an *adam hashuv*. But he did the best he could, and he had some impact on Reform Judaism–in my view, not enough. We still need learned men and women (the addition of women is crucial) who reflect on the legal doctrines of the Jewish people and make arguments about all the difficult issues of contemporary life. I don't mean arguments about new food products and *kashrut* or about using elevators on Shabbat or about what constitutes or doesn't constitute an *eruv* (boundary marker for carrying on Shabbat)—the Orthodox community will provide those decisions for its own members—but rather about the new bio-technologies, the use and abuse of our natural resources, the conduct of war, child labor, gender equality, and so on. The Catholic bishops have set a useful example with their encyclicals on nuclear deterrence and economic justice, and there are a few Jewish writers who have attempted similar statements. Jewish responsa along these lines are obviously not authoritative rulings. They represent something new, a speculative *halakha*, and we need more, and more widely circulated, examples of this sort of thing. Some of the responsa might be written by committees, but they would draw their force from the wisdom, and the reputation for wisdom, of "important persons," individual scholars and rabbis—*hakhamim* (sages) for our time. And they would provide contemporary texts for the rest of us to study and argue about.

The Oligarchs

The rule of the "few" is the most common Jewish government, where the "few" are composed of some combination of lay wealth and religious merit. (I will add another element to the combination in a little while.) The wealthy few play dominant roles in state politics, of course, though in democratic states it is possible to mobilize the power of the "many" against them. In stateless communities, wealth is pretty much unbeatable—and this was even more true in the extremely vulnerable communities of pre-Emancipation Jewry—for wealthy men and women had the resources that the community needed, but couldn't coercively seize, to meet extraordinary levies from gentile rulers, to bribe officials, to ransom captives, and so on. The power they exercised came in exchange for the money they provided. At least, that was the rationale for their hierarchi-

cal position; in the latter days of the *kahal*, they were often accused of using their power to extort money from Jews who had much less of it than they did. There were no procedures, however, like those provided by the democratic state, for organizing the extorted against the extorters—which is why spokesmen for the poorer Jews, like Shimon ben Wolf (Wolfowicz) of Vilna argued, in the revolutionary year 1789, for the transfer of civil powers from the *kahal* to the Polish state.

Once a transfer of that sort has been achieved, the power of the wealthy over the material life of the poor is greatly diminished. But their political importance in the community is not; they still provide a Diaspora version of security. I have always believed that the large role that wealthy Jews play in American political campaigns derives in part from our history of vulnerability: Campaign contributions are the democratic form of protection money. They are something else too, of course, for Jews are ideologically as well as ethnically engaged in American politics: we have ideas as well as interests. Still, it is a matter of real importance in every Diaspora community that there be Jews with access to government officials, and the more it is true that wealth provides access, the more important wealthy Jews will be in the larger Jewish world—where many of us worry that we may one day need them, even though we would rather not.

But the wealthy can't and shouldn't rule alone. They still need the legitimation provided by learned men and women, and major Jewish organizations commonly include such people on their staffs—consider the role that Milton Himmelfarb played for many years in AJC. And rabbis continue to figure among Jewish leaders both locally and nationally, even though they are less likely than in the past to marry their children to the children of the rich—a sign, I suppose, of an overall decline in their communal standing. But they still play leading roles in collective Jewish decision-making (not only among the Orthodox—consider the ongoing debate about homosexuality among Conservative Jews), and they are often the public face of the community, especially in its dealings with other religious groups.

There is another set of men and women that is involved and has always been involved in decision-making, whose role I will illustrate with a story about how communal pressure works at the local level. I grew up in a middle American town, call it Middleton, which had a Jewish community of some 350 families, organized in three congregations and in Hadassah, B'nai B'rith, the ZOA, and several smaller groups. The local UJA brought everyone together. After my bar mitzvah, my parents took me to its annual dinner, where the whole community turned out, there was a fiery and emotional speaker from New York (the year was 1948), and then pledge cards were passed around. The cards were filled out at the table, tucked into an envelope, and passed up to the head table, where Sam Cohen (not his actual name) sat, who owned a furniture store in town and knew everybody's business. He would look at the card, and if he

thought the pledge wasn't large enough, he would tear the card in half, put it back in the envelope, and pass it down the table. That is how money was raised by a community that (ostensibly) didn't have the power to tax. But—my point here—Sam Cohen was not the richest businessman in town; what brought him to the head table was commitment and energy. In fact, all the congregations and all the organizations in Middleton were run by committed and energetic people—many of them well-to-do, but not necessarily the most well-to-do—along with a very few trained professionals, the rabbis chief among them. The community they organized was not subject to a rule of law (there was no *beit din*—Jewish court of law—in Middleton), but it was much more than a community of faith; it was also an ethnic community and a little welfare society, with its own means of meeting the needs of its members. The very rich had a powerful influence on all social and welfare activities in town, but they shared their power with the learned and the committed. I doubt that stateless communities can work in any other way.

The Demos

The "many" don't rule. Particular congregations may be more or less democratic. They have a fixed membership, and their members are invited to vote on budgetary questions and on the choice of a new rabbi—though most often they follow the advice of the finance and search committees, which are run by the usual "few." We can and should aim at higher levels of participation, but it would probably be wise to start with study, welfare provision, and fund-raising rather than with politics. The larger Jewish community, locally and nationally, can't vote on any political issues because it is divided and because it doesn't have clear boundaries. Without state power, there is no way of determining who is a Jew and who is entitled to vote. Anyway, it isn't only the extension of the suffrage that makes for democratic politics, but also conscription, taxation, welfare, and public education—all of which give ordinary men and women a stake in the state and, therefore, a reason to demand the right to vote and to organize themselves for political action. Their organizations, however, are commonly controlled by the "few," in accordance with Robert Michels's "iron law of oligarchy." I am sure there are exceptions to the iron law—according to the historian Yehezkel Kaufmann, "the iron laws of history were not written for the Jewish people"—and it is worth some effort to make the exceptions less exceptional. But the general rule is that only states can be fully democratic. We say that states are legitimated by the consent of their members; by contrast, Jewish communities in the Diaspora are legitimated by their fidelity to a particular conception of Jewishness. And the legitimacy and value of the conception doesn't depend on the number of Jews who are attracted to it.

Center and Periphery

Still, we are definitely interested in our numbers, and it is a problem that, because the spreading periphery has no border and because it overlaps with other peripheries of other centers, we have no reliable way of counting the Jewish "many." What we should probably be counting are not Jews simply but dues-paying Jews: the number of people who contribute not only to the Federations but also to all the congregations and organizations that constitute the Jewish world in the U.S. These people vote with their money, and by doing that they make possible, and also help to shape, the religious, educational, and welfare services that the community provides not only to the dues-payers but also, willingly, to free-riders.

Fund-raising is one of the most important Jewish activities. Though there is much criticism of American Jewry on this point, I don't think there is anything wrong with the importance that Jewish giving has for Jewish identity. The importance is nothing new: countless medieval responsa deal with *tzedaka*, a word that, as we all know, suggests both voluntariness and obligation, charity and justice. The arguments in the responsa literature are about how much to give and for what purposes; about the roles of the *kahal* and the different "holy societies" (for burying the dead, visiting the sick, providing dowries, hiring teachers, and funding poor students); about the relative force of a donor's intentions and the priorities of the community; about the efforts of some rich and powerful Jews to escape their obligations; and about the praiseworthy gifts of some others. The "charity collectors" were important officials of the old *kehillot*, and they are still, rightly, important today.

But the services that our giving makes possible, and the civil servants who administer these services, are even more important: This is how the center holds the periphery. So we might try to count the people receiving those services—the sum total of men, women, and children who at some point in their lives "need" a rabbi (if only for a bat mitzvah, say, or a marriage, or a funeral) or a teacher or an ADL lawyer or a synagogue (if only for high holy day services) or a social center or a Zionist organization or a day school or a nursing home or a Jewish women's group or a veteran's association or a singles' club. These are the passive "many"—we hardly know who they are. How can we strengthen their ties to the center and to the active and ruling "few?"

Life-cycle services and holiday services are the most obvious bonds. The inability of secular Jewishness in, say, its Bundist and Zionist versions, to reproduce itself in successive Diaspora generations has a lot to do with the failure to construct plausible substitutes for these two. Hanukka and Pesach re-invented as celebrations of religious freedom and national liberation are very nice (I was raised on them), but they are not enough. I suspect that the power of the religious tradition cannot be replaced: *Kol Nidre*, to take the obvious example, certainly cannot be replaced—though, given the actual words of that extraordinary prayer, there is no

reason to think that religious belief explains its emotional pull. Similarly, Simhat Torah, the holiday of joy in the Torah, doesn't specify how we should interpret the Torah or even what it includes, but it does assume that we have a Torah—a text or a set of texts to which we are committed. The same commitment, I think, explains why it is not possible to replace such life-cycle markers as becoming a bar mitzvah, standing under the *huppa*, and saying *Kaddish*. It would be foolish to deny the emotional power of these ancient rituals and ceremonies; they are crucial to our collective survival. Insofar as peripheral Jews are connected to the center, this is what connects them.

Participation in Jewish rituals and ceremonies has many motives: a desire to belong, a sense of identity, a yearning for spirituality, and even religious belief (though fundamentalist belief has less of a hold in the Diaspora today than it does in Israel). In the long run, however, the power of holidays and life-cycle ceremonies over our emotions isn't a matter of emotion alone: All the motives have a deeper source. They depend on our understanding of the meaning of the ceremonies and their place in the Jewish tradition; they depend on our Jewish knowledge. Or better, without that knowledge, emotional need, identity, spirituality, and belief will produce only kitsch—does in fact produce only kitsch—and kitsch won't hold us long. We all know this to be true; that's why there is so much anxious talk about education, and the lack of it, among American Jews. I am all in favor of anxious talk; it may lead to resolute action. But the problem isn't merely educational—as if we can solve it by producing better Hebrew schools, or more day schools, or livelier textbooks, or a larger number of trained teachers. All that is certainly worth doing, though it will still leave us far short of a compulsory system. In the absence of compulsion, what we need to drive the educational process is a much greater respect for learning than exists today in the Jewish world. I have already argued that giving up the strictness of halakhic observance should not mean giving up the importance of legal learning. I want to argue now that a wider sense of what needs to be learned and a higher regard for those who are prepared to study—to engage intellectually with the tradition, to learn Hebrew, to argue about texts, practices, and institutions—is necessary to animate and energize the organizational structures of Jewish life and to sustain the peripheral connections. Here in the Diaspora, we can't count on democratic politics with its participatory ethos, its frequent urgency and excitement, and its citizenly pride. We need the learning of the few to inspire the learning of the many.

Visit the annual meetings of the Association for Jewish Studies, and you will see that we are in the midst of a renaissance of Jewish learning. The display of new books is especially remarkable, even if most of them are written by professors for professors. That is the way knowledge is first produced in contemporary life and letters, and we can probably count on wider dissemination as a secondary process. Much of the new knowledge is historical in character: We are getting, a little belatedly, Jewish history

from the bottom up—and so we are learning about the exclusion of women from public life, about the forgotten poor, and about Jews from little-known or remote places. But there is, it seems to me, much too little writing about ideas, doctrines, and arguments. Let me give just a few examples. Even in the Reform movement, the early history of Reform, when rabbis wrote elaborate responsa in defense of their innovations, is hardly known; few of the crucial texts are translated. The controversy among Orthodox German Jews, between Samson Raphael Hirsch and Seligmann Baer Bamberger, over secession from the larger community, is not discussed among Orthodox Jews today, even though they are in many ways the heirs of the secessionists. The major texts of the Russian *Haskala* (Jewish Enlightenment) have never been brought out in English—though there are many of us who think of ourselves as enlightened Jews and might learn from them. Ahad Ha-am's argument with Simon Dubnow, Martin Buber's argument with Hermann Cohen, about the relative value of Zion and the Diaspora—one would think that these would be central texts in an age that has reproduced the old dualism of Babylon and Palestine, but they are not common or easy references in our own discussions. In Israel today, there is a fierce revisionist critique of a central Zionist goal: "the negation of the *gola* (Diaspora)," but here in the *galut* (exile; is that where we are?) we don't talk about such things. Again, in Israel today, for obvious reasons, the talmudic classification of wars, *mitzva* and *reshut*, commanded and optional, is being challenged and revised. Are there still optional wars? What does the tradition have to say about prevention and pre-emption? Shouldn't there be a class of prohibited wars? But how many American rabbis, Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform, could preach a sermon on these questions?

All this should be included when we talk about Torah learning today. This is our Torah, and we need to turn it and turn it to make sure that we haven't left anything out. Who should be the students and teachers of this extended Torah? Once again, we need to think in state-like terms: Modern democratic states produce a fairly large class of men and women whom we call "public intellectuals." The adjective suggests that these intellectuals work in the public sphere and address questions that the public, the people, have to resolve and will resolve, one way or another. In the Jewish communities of the Diaspora, in contrast to the State of Israel, there is no public of this sort; as I have said, the "many" don't rule. And yet, given the anomalies of our existence, we need public intellectuals even in our statelessness, even in the absence of a political public. We need men and women who are critically engaged with the whole of Jewish history, culture, law, and religion—and who write and talk about the issues confronting Diaspora Jewry and invite other people to join them. They will, inevitably, be part of the "few" rather than the "many," but if they honor the maxim from *Pirkei Avot* (*Sayings of our Fathers*) about not separating themselves from the community, they can sustain a connection not only to central but also to peripheral Jews. What does it mean

not to separate yourself? The phrase assumes membership as the natural condition and, certainly, we are born into the Jewish community; separation is an act of the will. But, oddly, despite our birth, here in the Diaspora joining is also an act of the will. So learned Jews and all of us who hope to become learned Jews have to join Jewish organizations, more than one since there are so many, and work and talk within them.

It is a simple truth about life in the Diaspora, where statelessness is still the Jewish condition, that we must be the people of the book if we are to be a people at all. Our only republic is a republic of letters. It is only when we engage with the tradition, however critical the engagement, that we are Jewish citizens—I would say, the more critical, the more Jewish. And the excitement and creativity of even a small number of engaged citizens will spread outward from the centers they build. I have never believed in "filter down" economics, but I do believe in a culture "spread out" from and by a kind of elite, a Jewishly learned religious and secular intelligentsia. The best way to hold the periphery is to make the center bright. We once hoped, and still hope, to be a "light unto the nations," but we first need to be a light unto our own nation—and learning is our light.

At a Century's End, At a Century's Beginning: Thoughts on the Future Shape of Judaism and Jewish Identification

Steven Bayme

By the end of the twentieth century, several currents were in place signaling the transformations of Jewish life in the post-Holocaust world. Each of these trends contained significant implications for the future shape of Jewish identity and peoplehood.

The Flowering of Academic Jewish Scholarship

First, one of the brightest signs of contemporary Jewish life is the efflorescence of Judaic scholarship in American universities. A mere forty years ago serious Jewish scholarship existed primarily at Harvard, Brandeis, Columbia, UCLA, and perhaps several points in between. By the turn of the century, there was hardly a university of note that failed to contain an impressive array of academic Jewish scholarship. This represents a first in American Jewish history. Its implications for the future health and vitality of the Jewish community are considerable. The question remains open whether this resource of Judaic scholarship will help transform the nature of Jewish communal life or will be relegated to a casual corner within the Jewish community. At present, however, one can already underscore two significant outcomes. First, the presence of academic Jewish studies on campus legitimates the place of Judaic civilization within elite American culture. Secondly, it provides enormous opportunities for Jewish students to pursue seriously the treasures of their Judaic heritage.

The Impact of Israel on the Meaning of Jewish Peoplehood

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Secondly, and perhaps on a more global level, the meaning and map of Jewish peoplehood have been changed irrevocably by the events of May 1948. Not only was the map of the Middle East changed, but demographically, politically and religiously, Israel has become the focal point of Jewish consciousness and concerns. On a more subtle level, the existence of Israel changes the very meaning of what it is to be a Jew. The return of the Jews to sovereignty and statehood after two thousand years of Jewish history constitutes the Jewish success narrative in the modern Jewish experience.

To be sure, that master narrative may very well be receding in the minds and hearts of younger Jews. For many, that narrative no longer suffices as a basis on which to ground Jewish identification. That may very well be a positive development, for it compels us to look at the meaning of what Jewish heritage and tradition contains for us. However, by the

same token, the receding of this master narrative connotes that the greatest Jewish success story of modern times fails to speak to twenty-first-century Jews. In receding, it abets the tendency to draw the master narrative of Jewish history as one of terrible events befalling Jews. Perhaps on a more subtle basis, Israel as master narrative connotes an appropriate corrective to the personalism and individualism that are so prevalent within American Jewish life. The story of Israel brings us into contact with the collective narrative of Jewish people. It provides the foundation stone for the challenge of the twenty-first century regarding how we strengthen the bonds and ties between Israel and the Jewish people generally. In that context, the receding of Israel as master narrative is hardly cause for joy.

It is in this context that one can appreciate the importance of the birthright Israel project. In fairness, permit me to confess that initially I had been quite skeptical about this project. I maintained that too many hopes were being invested in it out of a desire for a quick fix to secure the road to Jewish continuity. Philosophically, however, birthright made the appropriate statement that being a Jew in the twenty-first century connotes being part of the Jewish people and guarantees by right of birth a visit to the Jewish homeland and the Jewish state. Moreover, by making such a statement, Jewish philanthropists were making a critical assertion about the priorities of the Jewish world as involving a relationship with Israel. Lastly, birthright represented the first time in the modern history of Israel that the government of Israel was taking responsibility for preserving the continuity and quality of Jewish life in North America. On this philosophical level, birthright changed the paradigm by which we consider Jewish life. Add to that its unforeseen qualitative and quantitative successes—the numbers of young people who have gone on these trips and how they have been affected—and the birthright project in all likelihood will go down as one of the seminal ideas to revitalize Jewish life in the twenty-first century.

The Role of Holocaust Memory in Jewish Identity

Thirdly, one must look at the other grand narrative of the late twentieth century, the Holocaust and Holocaust memory. At a social gathering some weeks back, I asked a group of friends if they had the opportunity to make one chapter of Jewish history mandatory knowledge for all Jews, which would they choose. Some chose the Exodus as foundational narrative of the Jewish people. Others chose the return of the Jews to sovereignty and statehood in modern Israel. Still others chose the emergence of prophetic Judaism as a protest culture challenging the status quo.

Upon hearing these responses, I proceeded to note that no one had selected the narrative of the Holocaust. Yet it is the Holocaust that is precisely what American Jewry has chosen as the one chapter of Jewish history mandatory for all. Holocaust education permeates the Jewish school curriculum. Holocaust museums have become the dominant expression

of Judaic culture in American public space. In turn, the very same Jews for whom rabbinic Judaism and Jewish philosophy remain closed books turn to the destruction of European Jewry as their dominant historical memory.

The data concerning the role of Holocaust memory in contemporary Jewish identity are indeed staggering. One study reports remembering the Holocaust as the most highly rated item on a list of fifteen possible components of Jewish identification. In another study 79 percent of Conservative Movement Jewish college students rated the Holocaust as reflecting the meaning of being an involved Jew. Yet another study of teenagers revealed that the largest proportion (53 percent) cited the Holocaust as connoting what "being Jewish was about."

The implications of these data are both profound and disturbing. For one thing, they suggest that we are creating a distorted image of the Jewish past. Jewish history concerns far more than Jewish suffering. It contains a story of Jewish creativity, community, peoplehood, and, yes, positive relations between Jews and others. Anti-Semitism, to be sure, is a real phenomenon that should never be trivialized. But the Holocaust as the dominant memory creates a distorted image of Jewish history as coterminous with Jewish suffering. Rabbinic Judaism, by contrast, flourished not because of Roman oppression, but because the rabbis of the Talmud had made their peace with Rome, and some even enjoyed friendly relations with Roman rulers.

Not only is the past thereby distorted, but so is the Jewish present. No society in Diaspora Jewish history has been so welcoming of Jewish participation as has the United States. Yet the same above-cited Brandeis University study of Jewish teens found that remembering the Holocaust and worrying about anti-Semitism constitute the two most critical Jewish priorities in the minds of today's Jewish adolescents. Clearly the emphasis upon the Holocaust has diverted us from our more critical questions of securing future Jewish continuity and nurturing stronger ties of peoplehood, ties that need to be based upon common Jewish aspirations and hopes rather than fears.

In this context, it is noteworthy how the Holocaust has penetrated the Jewish curriculum. Virtually every Jewish high school features the Holocaust as central to historical memory. By contrast, the other seminal event in modern Jewish history—the birth of Israel—rarely merits adequate attention. So fixated have we become on how Jews died that we have neglected their most critical achievements of twentieth century history—building a strong and secure Jewish state.

There are other distortions resulting from the current emphasis upon the Holocaust in communal programming. We have, unfortunately, become embroiled in an unseemly competition for "victim status," a status in which traditional Judaism saw no merit and took no pride. We have become quite shrill in our denunciations of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's failure to rescue, while ignoring his real achievements which

were to lead America out of her isolationist mindset and, like Winston Churchill, to recognize that Western democracy could never coexist with Adolf Hitler's Germany. Lastly, we have held our heads in shame over the Jewish community's own failure to rescue, ignoring how little actual influence and leverage American Jewry in the 1930s in fact exerted over American public policy.

To be sure, some of this focus upon the Holocaust remains both necessary and desirable. The Holocaust does represent the most horrendous chapter of Jewish history, if not of all human history. Far too many nefarious individuals have sought either to deny its proportions or to relativize them as one tragedy among others. Tragically, Europe in recent years has witnessed a spate of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist attacks even in the most liberal and democratic of countries. We need not only to answer these voices, but to tell the story to the next generation lest we, as the late theologian Emil Fackenheim constantly warned, "grant Hitler any posthumous victories."

For these reasons, Holocaust history is significant. But it needs to be contained within a larger narrative of the modern Jewish experience. Building strong Jewish identities depends upon a framework of Jewish teaching and values—rather than an image of terrible things happening to Jews. Nations, like individuals, need to pride themselves upon their achievements and successes rather than their defeats.

Denominational Differences—a Strength, not a Weakness

Fourthly, we need to examine the current status of the religious denominations within Judaism. For many years I have maintained that we have too great a fear of denominational battles. This intra-Jewish squabbling captures the media and broadcasts an image of polarization between Jews. What is missing in this portrait, however, is that denominational battles are also a measure of how deeply we care about the meaning of Jewish identity. Denominational quarrels are a statement of how committed, how passionate we are in our dedication to the respective ideologies that these movements represent. Although a call for the end of denominationalism is popular in many circles, let us recognize that the more we disagree and struggle over these issues, the more likely we are to be stronger and committed in our passions concerning them. We certainly need to learn how to manage denominational differences and create a culture of civility within the Jewish community. However, these differences are not necessarily bad. On the contrary, we are more likely to secure Jewish continuity if we care and differ about the respective meaning of what it is to be a dedicated, passionate, and, yes, ideological Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist Jew.

In this context, the role of Orthodoxy in general and Haredi Orthodoxy in particular needs to be stressed. According to the 2000-01 Nation-

al Jewish Population Study, within affiliated Conservative Jewish homes there are 155,000 children under age eighteen. In Reform homes, the number is 175,000; in Orthodox homes, it is 225,000. In other words, the smallest of the movements contains approximately 38 percent of the children in affiliated homes. But that suggests that, when looking at the Jewish community of the future, in particular at the population of those who are interested in discussions of Jewish public policy, of what Jewish life is all about, of what is necessary to create a positive Jewish future, the largest percentage of Jews in the future interested in such questions will come from the ranks of American Orthodoxy.

That demographic reality, however, creates a real paradox for the Jewish community of the future. The more efforts that are made to meet the needs and interests of Orthodox Jews and to reach out to that constituency, the greater the degree of distancing non-Orthodox Jews will feel from the organized Jewish community. In other words, a real contradiction exists between our desire to be inclusive of all Jews and the existence of communal policy perspectives which are often widely at odds with the culture and value system within contemporary Orthodoxy. We certainly wish to create an inclusive Jewish community through which those who are most interested and committed to leading a Jewish life will have a place at the table. By the same token, however, we do not wish to alienate those who find this form of Jewish identification too particularistic. The demographic record is clear, and the future numbers of Jews point to an Orthodox renaissance, if not ascendance. That confounds the wisdom of the 1950s sociologists who maintained that Orthodoxy was a dying movement that connoted merely nostalgia for a Jewish world that no longer existed. How we manage a Jewish world in which Orthodoxy represents some of its most vibrant and passionate components constitutes a challenge for the twenty-first century.

The Need for Serious Jewish Learning

Lastly, in any discussion of the Jewish future and future Jewish identity, one needs to underscore that there is no substitute for serious Jewish learning. Jewish education must be at the center of the communal Jewish agenda. Unquestionably, major strides have been made in that direction. However, this is hardly a simple matter. It is not only about whether Jewish education should become more broadly accessible. The question of accessibility permits us to suggest that it is primarily about cost and affordability. But the real problem and challenge that Jewish education presents is that it requires a great deal of work and dedication. Jewish continuity will be attained by those groups who are prepared to pay the price for it, and that price is hardly financial. Rather it is measured by the claim that Jewish learning will exert upon the current and the next generation of Jews.

Clearly, a more knowledgeable Jewish community is likely to be a more committed Jewish community. But Judaic literacy will be attained only through hard work, only to the extent that we are prepared to set aside time to study Judaic texts and heritage. In effect, we need a new definition of what is a Jew—perhaps someone who sets aside regular time for the serious study of Judaism. To date that standard has been attained primarily by American Orthodoxy. The challenge for the future is whether a standard of Judaic literacy can be established as a universal norm among Jews. Historically we have defined ourselves as People of the Book. Our challenge for the future is to give that definition real meaning and to recall that it references the fact that for Jews the power of Jewish learning and ideas have underscored Judaic uniqueness and Jewish meaning.

AJC Centennial Reflections: A View of the Past and a Program for the Future

Alfred H. Moses

At a Century's End, At a Century's Beginning, the Prospects for Judaism and the Jews, the theme of the American Jewish Committee's Centennial Symposium, examined the Jewish world as it exists today and looked into the future, focusing on Jewish communal and religious life. This short paper goes beyond the valuable work of the symposium, exploring some of the challenges AJC faces more broadly and suggesting programmatic responses to those challenges. In doing so, I am mindful that AJC has accomplished much in the last decade, led by an extremely able and dedicated staff and lay leadership.

The Difficulty in Making Predictions

In 1906, the year AJC was founded, few could have predicted the tumultuous events that changed the Jewish world forever. Making predictions is difficult, as borne out by a recent news story. Of the more than three million basketball fans who were asked at the end of the 2004 NCAA college basketball tournament to name next year's "final four," only four guessed right. If the founders of AJC had been asked in 1906 to predict the seminal events that would affect Jews over the next 100 years, how many would have predicted the Holocaust or the creation of the State of Israel, not to mention the Communist Revolution or the collapse of the Soviet Union, events that largely shaped Jewish experience in AJC's first century?

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Certainly, the Jewish world of today is far different from that of 1906. For one thing, it is largely bipolar; over 80 percent of world Jewry now lives in the United States and Israel. The large Jewish communities that existed in North Africa and in other Arab lands 100 years ago have emigrated en masse to Israel and elsewhere. Three million Jews lived in pre-World War II Poland, more than three million in the former Soviet Union, eight hundred thousand in Romania, and six hundred thousand in pre-Nazi Germany. A smaller but still impressive number lived in Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Greece. Sadly, a vast number of Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe that once were are no more. Only embers remain of these once important centers of European Jewish culture and learning. Their few surviving Jews, shattered by history, lack the means and the will to regenerate a distinctive Jewish life, notwithstanding large financial contributions from American Jewish organizations, individual philanthropists, and others.

Whatever the tragedies of the past have wrought for Jews, and for other large swathes of the world's population, the proper response does not lie in focusing on the Holocaust and other tragedies in our long history. If we do so, we run the risk of becoming mired in the past, of

becoming ossified, like Lot's wife who looked back on the destruction of Sodom and turned into a pillar of salt.

Much to Celebrate

The fact is that AJC has much to celebrate at the end of its first century. Jews in America are arguably more secure than Jews have been at any time in Jewish history. Today we are part of the fabric of American life, without being asked to give up our Jewish identity or religious practices. This reality was brought home to me recently when I visited a large, prominent New York law firm that forty years ago was *Judenrein*. Today there are not only Jewish partners and a host of Jewish lawyers, but the firm houses a daily Orthodox minyan. Public "displays" of Jewishness are acceptable in most spheres of American political, academic, business, and social life, Borat's depiction to the contrary notwithstanding.

Interreligious affairs have moved from a begrudging tolerance of differences a century ago toward mutual interdependence among people of faith. The token Jew on the White House staff or in academic departments of leading American universities is a thing of the past. The numbers today are so great that we have stopped counting. So, too, are the days when we all knew the name of the sole Jew who had made it to the top of America's corporate ladder, or the lone Jewish senator in the U.S. Congress. Any way you look at it, Jews in America have made it, as have other minorities, thanks to the civil rights movement and competitive economic forces, such as globalization, that emphasize the present, not the past, and that tend to blur racial, religious, and other distinctions.

There are other reassuring changes, among them, the more than 200,000 Jewish students attending Jewish day schools in the United States; the almost 400 American colleges and universities that offer courses in Jewish history, religion, culture, Hebrew and even Yiddish; a slight increase in synagogue attendance and other forms of Jewish organizational identification; and, perhaps most important, the recognition on the part of those who worry about the Jewish future that Jewish education for all ages is the key to Jewish survival in an increasingly mobile America, where fewer adult Americans live in the same community more than twenty years.

Issues of the Future

What does this snapshot view of the past and present tell us about the issues AJC will face in the future? Because the fate of American Jewry is so intimately tied up with the larger society in which we live, I believe that AJC must continue to reject those who might be characterized as Jewish isolationists, meaning those who fail to see the interconnectedness between the health and well-being of American Jewry and that of the society as a whole. Truth be told, Jewish life has always been shaped by

the larger societies in which we lived. The First Temple was Phoenician in design; the Temple Herod built was Roman. The Babylonian exile permanently shaped Jewish thought, as did non-Jewish thinkers from Aristotle to Immanuel Kant. Would Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel have had the same impact on the Jewish world had they not been influenced by what they learned at the great secular universities they attended in Vienna and Berlin? The culture of most American Jews is more American than Jewish. The same is true of American Jewish writers, intellectuals and opinion-makers. What happens in mainstream America impacts how we, America's Jews, think and act. Thus, it is interesting to ponder whether the recent growth in Jewish fundamentalism does not reflect the same societal forces that have spurred Christian fundamentalism—namely a rejection of the larger society, a turning inward, examples of which are homeschooling among Christians and its functional equivalent in many aspects of Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) life in America.

I believe AJC needs to continue to be a force influencing American society in positive directions that are supportive of Jewish interests as we see them. Interreligious and interethnic relationships will continue to be important and should be expanded, not just in Israel, where AJC has long been active, but globally as opportunities arise. One obvious target is the Muslim world. The difficulties here are obvious, but the numbers are too large and too important to be ignored.

Anti-Semitism continues to exist and is now embedded in parts of the world with virtually no Jewish population—Japan, for example—and in Muslim countries such as Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, and throughout the Arab world. True, this hatred has been spurred by anti-Israel rhetoric on the part of the likes of Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who denies the existence of the Holocaust in order to undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Anti-Semitism on the left is a fairly new but growing phenomenon, tied to anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian sentiment that, regrettably, finds occasional support among some prominent Jews as well. AJC need not defend everything Israel does or its leaders say, but it should not leave unanswered anti-Semitism in whatever form it exists, whether it be physical attacks on Jewish individuals, damage to Jewish property, or one-sided condemnations of Israel. This struggle includes opposition across the board to calls by church groups and others to divest from Israel and from companies doing business in Israel. Thirty years ago, I chaired, on behalf of AJC, the Jewish coalitional effort to oppose the Arab League's boycott of American companies doing business in Israel; that campaign led to the enactment by the Congress of anti-Arab boycott legislation. Now the fight has moved from the Congress to university board rooms and church conferences. AJC should regain its leadership role.

One of AJC's stellar achievements of the past decade has been its outreach to Jewish communities around the world. At present AJC has twenty-three working partnerships with other Jewish communities and international Jewish groups. These ties have enriched AJC, have increased

enormously AJC's outreach abroad, and have, in turn, strengthened institutional ties between AJC and those communities that heretofore thought of themselves as forgotten by American Jewry and by an Israel interested only in aliya. It remains to be seen whether AJC can use these relationships to strengthen and protect these Jewish communities, and whether these relationships will enable AJC to persuade foreign governments to combat domestic anti-Semitism or change their anti-Israel rhetoric, particularly in the UN and other international bodies, where country positions are on the record. The results to date have been mixed. Access to high-level government officials has not translated into greater friendship for Israel. Absent important economic or financial enticements or the perceived ability to have a major impact on decision-making in Washington, AJC has little to offer in exchange for a shift in the thinking of foreign leaders on matters affecting Israel. With the recent decrease in U.S. influence abroad, the Washington card counts for less.

There has been more success in the fight against anti-Semitism. AJC had a hand in getting French President Jacques Chirac to speak out forcefully against anti-Semitism in France. The struggle against anti-Semitism masquerading under the guise of Israel-bashing will continue and is likely to intensify across Europe and elsewhere, as Israel is increasingly portrayed as an occupying power. AJC has a strong presence across Europe, with offices in five countries. We need to ask ourselves whether more can be done by working closely with European Jewry to sharpen their focus and build a better set of tools to fight anti-Semitism.

AJC's Relationship with Israel

Looking ahead, AJC's relationship to Israel will remain a principal focus. AJC has a large office in Jerusalem and is heavily invested programmatically in Israel and in building support for Israel in the United States and abroad. AJC's Israel-related activities are routinely acknowledged by a grateful Israeli political leadership, frequently reported in the Israeli press, and recognized by some in the Israeli elite, but awareness of them does not reach beyond to Israel's rapidly growing cadre of business leaders nor to the Israeli public at large. AJC is a pioneer in organizing exchange programs of all stripes. These will and should continue, and even be expanded. AJC's offices in New York and across the country should become routine stopping places for visiting Israelis whose missions touch on the many aspects of Jewish connectedness.

The symbiotic ties between American Jewry and Israel are obvious. The health and welfare of each affects the other. At the opening session of AJC's Centennial Symposium, A.B. Yehoshua repeated his oft-stated view that only in Israel can Jews live a fully Jewish life. Factually, this assertion lies somewhere between highly dubious and outright false. Triumphalism on the part of either Israeli or American Jews is not the answer. But, more to the point, Yehoshua's thesis is irrelevant for Jews who live outside

Israel and have no intention of making aliya. Israel's political leadership knows the importance to Israel of American Jewry. For the foreseeable future, Israel's security is dependent upon American military support and our nation's commitment to Israel's security. Strong American Jewish political activism, which requires numbers and relationships, is the best way to ensure that Israel's interests are heard in Washington and elsewhere in America.

But the question remains: Does Jewish consciousness or group identity in the long term require a physical nationality rooted in a Jewish land—i.e., Israel? The quick answer is that the Jewish people survived for 2,000 years without a homeland. But there is a difference between those two millennia and today. For most of that time, Jews lived in isolation, bound together by Jewish communal life and Jewish authority. This has disappeared in America, leaving the Jewish religion, however observed, as our collective Jewish consciousness. The challenge of living Jewishly in an America without walls is immense, and there is no easy fix. Precisely because AJC is not a religious organization, it should reach out to all who care about the future of Jewish life in America—in a word, become a full participant in the exciting work of building a collective Jewish consciousness in a free society.

Geopolitical Challenges

On the broader geopolitical front, the hard reality is that the struggle in the Middle East is no longer seen by most of the world as an Israeli-Arab conflict, but as a fight between "competing nationalisms," one Jewish, the other Palestinian. Increasingly, Israel is portrayed as the oppressor, the Palestinians as victims. This was not always the case. In 1948, Israel had to battle five hostile Arab armies and overcome a U.S. arms embargo to survive. Now, Palestinians and their supporters have succeeded in turning history on its head, making Israel the modern-day Goliath with the most potent military in the region; the Palestinians have become a biblical David with limited weaponry, often made in home factories. The United States, as Israel's principal weapons supplier and supporter, is similarly demonized.

Today only a potentially nuclear-armed Iran poses a military threat to Israel's existence. Syria is no match for Israel militarily—far less so Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and Hamas. Separately and collectively, they are more of a deadly nuisance than a military threat.

Looking back forty years, one could say that the defeat of Jordan and Egypt in the Six-Day War left the territories of Judaea and Samaria and Gaza to the Palestinians. The consequence is that present-day Israel is more secure militarily, but more exposed politically by the rise of the Palestinian national cause that it helped to create as an unintended consequence of its military success. In my view, Israel and its supporters,

including AJC, have been slow to grasp the new reality. The Palestinians' side is gaining adherents, largely by default. Where are the voices proclaiming that the Palestinian political leadership continues to laud the struggle, not advance the solution? Or that however much Israel and the United States try to prop up Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, the situation on the ground is driven by Hamas and other rejectionist forces that find ways to incite violence and hatred?

Where are the voices in the international community speaking out for human rights when trigger-happy Hamas fighters kill Palestinian families allied with Fatah? The hypocrisy of the UN Human Rights Council on this very subject was exposed by an AJC affiliate, UN Watch, when its director, speaking at the March 2007 Human Rights Council session in Geneva, called attention to the council's failure to deal with the most flagrant human rights abuses, such as in Darfur and Zimbabwe. He pointed out that since its first session eight months earlier, the council had succeeded in condemning Israel nine times, while ignoring human rights abusers throughout the world. This act of "speaking truth to power" was applauded in an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* and in other leading newspapers and journals. The ADL and B'nai B'rith sent strong letters of support.

Now is the time for AJC to speak out and be heard—in a word, to be bold. Power not exercised is not power; power not seen may not be power at all, but self-delusion. We should say what we believe loud enough for others to hear. The cost to AJC will be occasional confrontations; the reward for AJC will be the betterment of the Jewish world.

The Price of Acceptance

This brings me to my final point. It is also the theme of AJC's Centennial Symposium, *The Prospects for Judaism and the Jews*. Our lives as American Jews have changed dramatically over the past one hundred years. We are now full participants in the mainstream of American life. As a result, the level and depth of acceptance of Jews in the broader society is no longer an issue. Our concern today is not *exclusion*, but, ironically, the price we pay for *acceptance*. What is the future for an American Jewry that has all doors open to it? Gone are geographical separations (Jewish neighborhoods), occupational concentration, cultural differences, and, yes, physical appearance. Jews have become increasingly homogenized, more alike than different from our fellow Americans. We are geographically dispersed throughout the country, more connected by the internet than by physical contact. Cyberspace has no walls. The internet and cell phones have produced new forms of literacy, or lack thereof, that do not depend upon the traditional Jewish wellsprings of learning and written communication. For two thousand years, our Jewish consciousness, insofar as it was concerned with human events, was tied to interpretive historical theology based on the Bible. Everything else was derivative. Will this contin-

ue for non-Orthodox Jewry and, if so, in what form? What will there be that is distinctively Jewish for future generations to cling to?

For AJC, and most American Jews, separation and exclusion, e.g., the Haredi lifestyle, is not the answer, nor should it be. We are not going to opt out of American life. We will continue to jump in with both feet. Yet most of us have a clear desire to hold onto whatever it is about being Jewish that is meaningful for us. Individual choice will continue to dominate Jewish life, but AJC can help make Jewish choices available by reinforcing the importance of being Jewishly literate (in a word, having a Jewish education), and by promoting in-marriage while at the same time not rejecting the intermarried. It is no longer open to debate that in-married couples are more likely to raise their children Jewishly than intermarried couples. It is also beyond doubt that in an open society, large numbers of Jewish men and women will marry non-Jews. To reject a non-Jewish spouse is no longer an option for the well-being of Jewish families and institutions. To do so would cut off a potentially valuable human resource.

In America, Judaism is the life force of the Jewish people. There can be no intergenerational continuity without it. All the other "isms" are gone. Some immigrant Jews in 1906 had strong loyalties to Zionism. Others from the Pale of Settlement had their socialist, anti-religious causes. These no longer exist in present-day American Jewish life. Zionism's historical message calls for living in Israel, not in New York. The grandchildren of yesteryear's Bundists are now working on Wall Street or in other capitalist havens. Only the Jewish religion remains to impart Jewish self-identify and life force.

AJC's surveys tell us that the most vital source of Jewish renewal in America today is to be found in the Orthodox community. Their numbers are growing. Some 38 percent of school-aged children of affiliated Jews are Orthodox. AJC needs to continue to find ways to reach out to the Modern Orthodox, still the largest segment among the Orthodox, who as a group are better educated Jewishly, better connected through family and other ties to Israel, and seriously committed to the future of American Jewry.

This does not mean lessening AJC's connectedness to the other Jewish religious streams that continue to feed and be fed, in turn, by it. AJC should remain open to all that is positive in Jewish life, building where it can contribute ideas, reinforcing the centrality of the Jewish religion (however interpreted) to our survival as American Jews.

There is much more that could be said on the future of Judaism and Jews in America, but it may be enough to end with the thought that everything that AJC does and will do depends upon the vitality, self-awareness, and self-directedness of American Jewry.

A Synopsis of the AJC Centennial Symposium

Roselyn Bell

The AJC Centennial Annual Meeting opened with a four-part symposium in which prominent public Jewish intellectuals addressed the challenges of the Jewish future as well as the meanings of Jewish spirituality, community, and continuity. AJC Honorary President Alfred Moses, the chair of the Centennial Committee, who initiated and led the symposium project, noted in his introductory remarks that "this was not a moment for triumphalism but rather for a serious contemplation of where we have been and where we are headed."

What Will Become of the Jewish People?

The first panel of the symposium, which generated the lion's share of the publicity, was moderated by Ted Koppel, with discussants Cynthia Ozick, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Leon Wieseltier, and A.B.Yehoshua, addressing the question of "What Will Become of the Jewish People?" Koppel framed an opening question to Rabbi Steinsaltz as to what it was about our past that makes Jews alike—and whether the suggestion that there was something universally identifiable among Jews was not exactly what the anti-Semites say about us. The rabbi, perhaps echoing the description in Exodus 32, perhaps playing at mischievous impudence, said it was that "we are obnoxious" because we always want to be like everyone else. Ozick suggested that it was not obnoxiousness but that Jews were anxious to please, out of shyness in the face of others, as history is a barrier between us.

Yehoshua, showing no shyness, responded, "I am what I am. I have a country; I have a language; I have a people. I have a reality … like a Norwegian or a Dane." He said that the possibility of being an "other" never occurred to him and this problem was only for Diaspora Jews. He launched into an indictment of the "great failure of the Jewish people" during the last century in not creating a state in time to save one third of the Jews from the Holocaust. Had more than a tiny percentage of world Jewry come to Palestine when the possibility of homeland was presented in 1917, the Holocaust could have been prevented. Rabbi Steinsaltz disagreed, noting that the Jews of Mandate Palestine were no more able to defend themselves militarily than were the Jews of France or North Africa, but they were only fortunate that Rommel did not reach them.

Wieseltier distanced himself from Yehoshua's "completely Zionist analysis," saying that modern Jewish history had two revolutions which were both breaks from the past—one in Israel and one in America. Democratic pluralism in America, he suggested, did not require immigrants to erase parts of themselves, and this was a great innovation for Jews. What was unique about the American experience was that American Jews don't face the deadly pressures our ancestors did—he would take Mearsheimer and Walt over the Kishinev pogrom any day. He warned

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that we should beware of making the enmity of our enemies the central feature of our Jewish identity.

Yehoshua, sounding like Zionist theoreticians of an earlier era, took a classic *shlilat hagola* (denigration of the Diaspora) stance: "If in a hundred years Israel will exist and I come to the Diaspora and there are no more Jews, I will not cry. I don't say I want it.... But if Israel were to disintegrate, for me personally there is no alternative to be a post-Zionist Jew.... Being Israeli is my skin, not my jacket. You can change your jacket but not your skin."

Asked about the Jewishness of secular Israelis, Steinsaltz noted that there were very few totally secular Israelis, and that the typical secular Israeli has more connections with his Jewishness than many Conservative and Reform Jews, in that Israelis can read the Bible in the original and live to the rhythms of the Jewish calendar. American Jews are Jewish by ethnic definition and are unsure of what that means to them. On the other hand, he added that while it was clear whom American Jews or French Jews imitate, it was less obvious that Israeli Jews also imitate—they imitate the non-Jew as an abstract notion.

Wieseltier asked what made Jews Jewish, and answered that it was not territory that kept Jewishness alive but the civilization of the Jews that was formed in the period after the Second Temple was destroyed, the period that Yehoshua would "put a parentheses around." He credited the rabbi (Yohanan ben Zakkai) who made Judaism portable, and he praised "Judaism's historic flexibility and its ability to live among strangers and insist on its apartness yet accept fertilizing influences." He claimed, "To live doubly is the only way to live. What I am as a Jew is not the same as what I am as a totality."

Steinsaltz asked what having a state was for, and noted that the Jews had lost sovereignty before and could do so again. On the other hand, there was the threat posed by the negative demographic growth rate: Would American Jewry in the future be only Satmar Hasidim and children of Reform rabbis? While American Jews had done better than any other minority in America in terms of individual achievement, what contribution had Jewish America as an entity made to American culture? His answer: only Hollywood.

Wieseltier responded that the better question was what contribution had Jewish America made to Judaism. He criticized the self-congratulatory tone of other speakers and their assumption that there was a zero-sum game: If Israeli Jewish identity were strong, then American Jewish identity would be weak, or vice versa. This was a mistaken view, in his opinion, as there is one people called Jews with a set of texts to which we all refer. The primary challenge to us all was what to do with this tradition that has fallen into our laps. It was not enough just to survive, but we must represent an idea and a tradition—and not just a political idea.

Cynthia Ozick suggested what was "original" with the Jews was that Jews brought an idea so original even they didn't want to recognize it—

monotheism. This monotheism goes against the desire for the concrete and asks its followers to imagine through texts.

A.B.Yehoshua objected to this abstraction. "What we have done is try to put territory and country and frameworks into the abstract, but we don't live on the abstract level but in reality." Identity, in his view, was what we do in reality—for example, whether we torture terrorists to get intelligence or sell arms to dictatorships. Religious Jews in the Diaspora don't make these kinds of decisions, but rather their practical decisions are made within an American framework. He accused Diaspora Jews of "playing with Jewishness" because their real decisions were made in American terms. He characterized this phenomenon as "plug and play" Judaism.

Wieseltier retorted that people are not "stupid servants of their states," but rather "people lead complicated lives." Not everything a Jew does is a Jewish thought or deed—not in Israel nor in America nor in Plotsk. What matters is whether one is actively engaged in the development of one's Jewishness. When asked by Yehoshua to define this Jewishness, Wieseltier responded that it lay in educating oneself and one's children, teaching them the history of their people.

During the question period, Ozick admitted, "I have a dual loyalty—total loyalty to the country where I live and the same feeling toward Israel. If something happened to Israel, *has veshalom* [God forbid], that would be the end of the Diaspora." In response Yehoshua said that he welcomed her dual loyalty but would rather she had only one loyalty and came and participated in Israeli life. But since she did not, he characterized her feeling toward Israel as "living in myth."

Yehoshua criticized the Jewish obsession with survival. If at the end of time there remained one last Jew living on the moon, some would say that we fulfilled our mission to survive. But Yehoshua suggested, "I want to change the concept of survival." Steinsaltz countered that you cannot speak about survival without content.

Wieseltier said that he did not think Jews would disappear demographically, but he worried about the quality of Jewish life and the possibility of turning into just another ethnic group in the U.S. Though he characterized American Jewry as the "spoiled brat of Jewish history," he said he was pessimistic in the short term, but was optimistic about Jewry's long-term survival.

The Forms and Fortunes of Jewish Spirituality

The second and third sessions of the symposium, held at the historic Sixth and I Synagogue, proceeded using the format of a formal paper presented by a scholar followed by responses from thinkers of similar stature, creating a dialogue of the learned. The session on "The Forms and Fortunes of Jewish Spirituality" was chaired by Dr. David Gordis, the president of Hebrew College of Boston, with Prof. Moshe Halbertal presenting the

paper, and Rabbi Dr. Arthur Green, Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson, and Dr. Steven Bayme responding to it. Dr. Gordis framed the discussion by observing that "religious civilization" was at the core of what it meant to be Jewish, but why Jewish survival mattered to the world was a more profound question than merely how to survive.

Prof. Halbertal, who teaches Jewish thought and philosophy at the Hebrew University, began by stating that since the rise of modernity in the nineteenth century, there had never been a time as good as the present for ultra-religious groups in society. Ultra-Orthodoxy was thriving in Israel, partly, he observed, through the "*mehutanization*" of the state (i.e., the state, instead of the father-in-law, supporting yeshiva students who remain economically unproductive). Prof. Halbertal cited three large processes that have transformed the role of religion in Jewish life in the last century:

Radical changes in the forms of Jewish secularism: At the beginning of the twentieth century the rabbinic elite were under attack from three powerful movements of secularism: Jewish nationalism in the form of Zionism; Enlightenment/*Haskala*; and socialism. These movements defined the life of the individual in a powerful scheme of meaning beyond himself, and so posed a formidable challenge to religion. In the contemporary time frame, with the movement toward postmodernism, secularism does not wield as much clout. It offers individualism and freedom, but it does not adequately grab at the soul of a people. The one movement in the contemporary secular world that is capable of enriching religious life yet is threatening to the establishment is feminism, which presents a strong moral and historical challenge.

The decline of reason as a counterforce to religion has meant that religion has had an easy time of it in the last decade, with no critic sitting on its shoulder. But this change has harmed religion by making it into "a mere spiritual thing, an elevating experience." Thus religion has lost its power to make demands. This shift has had an impact on denominationalism, in that the Reform Movement drew its power from its alignment with the Enlightenment, with its rejection of ritual and of particularism. Since the Enlightenment is no longer a gripping force, the denominational distinctions are less important. In his view, the denominations should converge, but like the Israeli parties, they remain because of institutional momentum, though they no longer know what they're fighting about. He noted that an institution like the nondenominational rabbinical school just launched by Boston's Hebrew College would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

The shift in the role of large historical events—the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel—in defining Jewish identity: The State of Israel was no longer the singular identity of the Jews, and identification with Israel was not enough to maintain us—and this was true of Israeli Jews as well as Diaspora Jews. The large historical dramas of the Holocaust and the birth of Israel no longer capture the hearts of the younger gener-

ation, who are seeking something deeper about what it is to be a Jew. He stated that he was optimistic about this development, but there was no serious substitute in Jewish life for Jewish literacy and close proximity to the tradition. Without a deep Jewish literacy, he doubted that there could be a deep connection between the Israeli and the Diaspora Jew.

The transformation of the Israeli-Arab conflict from a political conflict into a religious war over the past decade or two: The Arab world has used its religious extremes as a weapon against us—Yasir Arafat using Hamas, the Lebanese using Hezbollah—but now they are enslaved to their own means, as Hamas has come to power. Similarly, we have used our religious right wing as a whip, and now it is not clear that we are not their prisoners. This means that now Israel is not only engaged in a battle with the Palestinians, but the conflict has been redefined as a Jewish-Muslim fight. He feared this because of religion's tendency to absolutize relative claims, a trend that endows political interests with the aura of the sacred. The sacred is indivisible, and unlike land or water rights, cannot be split. This transformation then globalizes and absolutizes all the issues. He found this to be "the ultimate form of idolatry and perversity as to what religion was about," and felt that as a Jew, he must condemn it. "God is not dead in the Nietzschean sense but is becoming an idol—which is worse," he warned, because "in His name, bloodshed is committed."

In response to Prof. Halbertal's presentation, Rabbi Dr. Arthur Green, dean of the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College, chose to emphasize the American dimension. He observed that the past fifty years in this country have been a time of personal seeking and personal quest, but the Jewish community has mostly stood back and left the seekers to Chabad. Why was there more personal search in America than in Western Europe? He suggested that this was due to the collapse of the religion of progress after Auschwitz and Hiroshima; also interest in ecological matters had led American seekers to learn from the Hopi or from Zen masters. In Green's view it was fortunate that so many Jews had ended up in a country with so much interest in questions of religion.

Rabbi Green rejected A.B. Yehoshua's assertion the night before that American Jewry was "playing with the tradition." Rather, in his view, Jews are a diasporan community that finds meaningful life outside of territory. He said that he felt some "guilt" for having made the term "spirituality" respectable. He defined spirituality as religion that focuses on the personal quest. This is religion that is focused on *kavana*, or inwardness, rather than *keva*, or outward forms. How do the ultra-Orthodox fit in? He felt that the memory of the Holocaust and recent immigration were still too close for them, so it was too soon to tell whether they would be able to come to see the legitimacy of others' quests.

Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson, president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, recalled how the recently departed Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg had framed these issues and noted that he went back one hun-

dred years earlier than the point of departure that Prof. Halbertal had chosen. Hertzberg looked at how Jewish life had been transformed by the Emancipation and Enlightenment: The Enlightenment challenged the idea that all our texts were given by God, and thus it challenged the authority of religious tradition. The Emancipation made Jews into individual citizens of their countries, and not necessarily members of the Jewish community. It also made Jews the equals of non-Jews, with the result being rising rates of intermarriage. Thus there are a common set of challenges that confront Jews across the religious spectrum. Why then the growth of ultra-Orthodoxy? Ironically, he noted, that Emancipation, Enlightenment, and secularization allowed greater compartmentalization of religion. When premodern Jews were all part of the *kehilla*, there was a moderating influence that compelled all Jews to belong to one community; today each group can define its own way and this allows extremism to blossom. Each group tends to move from the center toward the extremes.

Dr. Ellenson identified two opposite trends in Jewish life: More and more Jews were unaffiliated, because the Jewish narrative did not resonate for them. Yet there has been a renewal of Jewish learning as more Jews embrace serious Judaic study. How do we make the Jewish narrative provide a sense of meaning for individuals as they navigate through the shoals of life? Referring to Robert Cover's essay "Nomos and Narrative," he suggested that law is always contained in a narrative. Law operates in two ways: as a set of rules, or as an overarching vision that allows individuals to reconstruct their tradition and to move forward. In order for Jewish heritage to provide such a bridge to the future, we need to be imbedded in the texts and teachings of our tradition. For example, Leon Wieseltier's *Kaddish* and Joseph Soloveitchik's writings are both embedded in the tradition but lead to different praxis. The tradition can provide a landscape in which many Jews walk but along different paths.

Dr. Steven Bayme, director of AJC's Contemporary Jewish Life Department, began by noting the impressive growth of academic Jewish scholarship over the last forty years, and suggested that this development could be harnessed to enhance the vitality of the Jewish community through events such as this symposium. He made four comments on Prof. Halbertal's presentation:

For himself, Dr. Bayme noted, 1948 changes irrevocably the meaning and map of Jewish peoplehood, but the narrative of Israel's birth seems to be receding in importance in the minds of young Jews. In his view this was a negative development, as it means that the most transformational event in 2,000 years of Jewish history is receding. While in America religion speaks largely in terms of personal meaning, Israel is the corrective by putting religion into a larger societal framework. Observing that the Holocaust resonates more strongly with younger Jews than does Israel, he felt that reading Jewish history through the lens of the Holocaust promotes an image of Jews as a beleaguered people, while the narrative of Israel presents a more positive image.

He suggested that there is too great a fear of denominational battles, when in truth these fights are a measure of how much we care. The battles are not themselves the problem as long as they are conducted with civility.

Several speakers had addressed the need for serious Jewish learning. While major strides have been made, there is a lot of work to be done in this area. Continuity, in his view, will come to those who pay the price for it. A knowledgeable Jewish community must set aside time on a regular basis for serious study.

As to the rising role of the Orthodox in the Jewish community, he noted that the most recent NJPS study found that, among households of affiliated Jews, 38 percent of the children were being raised Orthodox. This means that the affiliated Jewish community of the future will have a larger percentage of Orthodox members than the current community has. This will require the community to change to meet the needs of Orthodox Jews, to bring them in, but in doing so, there is a danger that the rest of the community may be turned off.

In the question and answer period, when asked what he meant about feminism being a revolution within Judaism, Dr. Halbertal explained that the exposure of Jewish texts to a new group of students—i.e., women—would bring new views of Torah. This was as much a revolution as when Torah stopped being the monopoly of the priests when rabbinic Judaism took hold. What would be the effect of the entry of this new voice into the shaping of Jewish culture? Many of the sources, he stated, were deeply patriarchal, and the need to reinterpret the past presented both a challenge and an opportunity.

Rabbi Green, expanding on his views about Israel, stated that "Israel is here" and the name Israel belongs to all of us. The decline of Israel as a moral marker has come about because of the moral disquiet that young Jews feel with Israel because of the occupation. He also suggested that Jews are a tribe, but the young people he is educating don't think of themselves as members of a tribe. Therefore they are more ready to welcome into the tribe Jews by Choice, who are often the most serious questioners about Judaism. With the rise in adoption, conversion, and long-lost Jews finding their roots, there is greater racial diversity among Jews.

Rabbi Ellenson noted that Simon Rawidowicz had created the metaphor of the centrality of Israel in the life of Diaspora Jewry. But in Ellenson's view a better image might be an ellipse, a structure of which we are all a part, to suggest the mutuality of responsibility between Israel and the Diaspora.

The Jewish Community: Old Models, New Models

The third session of the symposium, moderated by Jeffrey Goldberg of the *New Yorker*, examined the social and political bases of Jewish community. Prof. Michael Walzer, a political theorist with the Institute for

Advanced Study in Princeton, presented a paper in which he examined who rules in the Jewish community and what holds it together.

In the medieval Jewish *kahal* (community), Walzer noted, the answer to who rules was threefold: 1) the one, the *adam hashuv*, the important person, i.e., the *hacham*, the sage; 2) the few, that is, the learned and the wealthy, the meritocracy and the plutocracy; and 3) the many, the lesser tax payers and property owners or all adult male Jews. The latter groups never ruled but had some say in communal decisions. The notion that the Jewish community invented democracy has no foundation in reality. Medieval Jewish writers believed in the rule of the majority, but they meant a majority of the people of substance.

In modern times, the same three tiers exist: The rule of the one depends upon a community's commitment to *halakha*, and the power and leadership of the sage. These scholars must not only master the texts but must convince others of their mastery, as their power depends upon the charisma of learning. The rule of one is usually associated with monarchy, but these sages are more like judges, and the society they lead is not merely the community of faith but a more extensive body within a semi-autonomous rule of law. Their subjects are also subject to the law of the secular state, *dina d'malkhuta dina*. The *adam hashuv* is not a democratic figure, but his claim to rule is widely transferable.

It has long been a feature of Jewish life that someone was paid to learn. In modern life it is no longer a communal necessity, but there are reasons to sustain the notion of paying scholars and public thinkers to reflect on Jewish texts and to give responsa on contemporary issues such as biotechnology, the use and abuse of the environment, child labor, gender equality, and the ethics of war (like the Catholic bishops with their encyclicals on nuclear armament and economic justice). These Jewish responsa would not be halakhic rulings, but a speculative *halakha* for the rest of us to argue about.

The rule of the few is the most common Jewish government. The wealthy few play dominant roles, especially in stateless, vulnerable communities such as medieval Jewry, where they were needed to meet levies demanded by gentile rulers, to bribe officials, and to pay ransoms. The power they exercised came in exchange for the money they offered. In the latter days of the *kahal*, they were accused of extorting money from Jews who had less than they did. Once political power shifted from the *kahal* to the civic state, the power of the wealthy over the poor was diminished, but their political power was not entirely gone because they still provide a Diaspora version of security. Today campaign contributions are a democratic form of protection money. It is a matter of real importance to every Diaspora community that there be Jews with access to government, and insofar as wealth provides this access, wealthy Jews will be powerful in the Jewish world. But the wealthy need the legitimation provided by knowledgeable Jews, and Jewish organizations include such people as staff. These knowledgeable leaders are often the public

face of the Jewish community, especially in dealings with other religious groups.

Another kind of leadership offered by the few to the many is seen in the pledge card system in place in our community—the way money is raised when there is no power to tax. The person calling the cards may not be the richest person in town, but is marked by his/her commitment to the cause, his energy, and his knowledge of what the others can or should give. The community thus organized is more than a body of faith—it is a mini-welfare society with its own methods of raising funds and meeting needs. In this system, the rich have influence, but share power with the learned and the committed.

The many do not rule. Within a congregation, there can be democracy because there is a fixed membership and members vote, although most follow the advice of the few who sit on committees. The larger Jewish community, locally and nationally, cannot vote on issues because it does not have boundaries. Without state power, there is no way to determine who is a Jew and who can vote. Organizations are controlled by the few, according to Robert Michels's law of oligarchy. Only states can be fully democratic; by contrast Jewish communities are legitimated by fidelity to their concept of Jewishness, and the legitimacy of the conception doesn't depend on the number of Jews attracted to it.

Still, numbers do matter, but are problematic. A spreading periphery of Diaspora Jewry has no boundaries and so no reliable way of counting. What we should probably be counting is not Jews but dues-paying members—not only to Federations but to congregations and the organizations. These people vote with their money. There is nothing wrong, in his view, with the importance that Jewish giving has to Jewish identity. Since medieval times, the charity collectors were important persons to the *kehilla*, but even more important are the services the *kehilla* offers. So we might count as Jews all who use these services—those who at some point in their lives need a rabbi or a teacher or a Jewish communal lawyer.

How can we strengthen the ties of the passive periphery to the center? He felt that life-cycle ceremonies and holiday celebrations are the most obvious bonds, but the inability of secular Jewish organizations to find substitutes has been responsible for their difficulty in transmitting their message from generation to generation. The emotional power of religious rituals and ceremonies—like standing under a *huppa* or saying Kaddish—has many sources: the desire to belong, a sense of identity, a yearning for spirituality, even religious belief. All the sources have a deeper root and depend on our understanding and our Jewish knowledge. Without knowledge, we produce only kitsch.

In the absence of a compulsory educational system, what we need to drive the educational process is a greater respect for Jewish learning than exists today, a wider sense of what needs to be learned, and a higher regard for those who engage in Jewish learning. We need the learning of the few to inspire the learning of the many. At the annual meetings of

the Association for Jewish Studies one can see that we are in the middle of a renaissance. But in his opinion there is much writing about history, and too little writing about ideas, doctrines, and arguments. For example, early Reform responsa or the arguments of the German Orthodox community about secession from the larger community or major texts of the Russian *Haskala* are not known today. In Israel the subject of the ethics of war is very relevant—what the tradition says about preemption and prevention of war—but few Diaspora rabbis discuss it. All this is our Torah.

Modern democratic states produce a large class of public intellectuals who address questions that the public needs resolved. In the Diaspora, there is no public of this sort, but we need public Jewish intellectuals even in our statelessness. We need thinkers who are engaged with the whole of our history, law, and tradition and who write and talk about the issues confronting Diaspora Jewry. They will be the few, but they should honor the maxim from *Pirkei Avot*: "Do not separate yourself from the community." This saying assumes membership in the community to be a natural condition and to separate oneself an act of will. In the Diaspora, we must choose to engage, but in our statelessness we must be the "People of the Book" if we are to be a people at all. Our only republic is a republic of the mind. To be a light unto the nations we must first be a light unto ourselves, and learning is our light.

Jeffrey Goldberg, the moderator, posed the question of whether, in an atmosphere of almost complete freedom, learning is enough to keep Judaism flourishing in America.

Prof. Jonathan Sarna, professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University, responded by saying that knowledge in Judaism is a source of power, and thus the welcoming of women into the centers of Jewish learning, whether in academia or the rabbinate, was a revolution in our times. So often in Jewish history, he commented, continuity has been strengthened by discontinuity; this was true in the past of Hasidism and is true today of feminism. He was optimistic about Jewish learning today: We are also the most Jewishly educated generation of native-born American Jews in history.

What unites us as Jews, Prof. Sarna suggested, was a negative: We are not Christians, not Muslims, and we glory in that difference. We are also united by a sense of identification with *klal Yisrael*. This notion has been central to AJC since its founding and has impelled AJC to try to prevent any infraction of the civil or religious rights of Jews anywhere in the world. He was deeply worried that this value of *klal Yisrael* was becoming endangered today. Only half of Jews in a recent survey agreed with the statement, "I have a special responsibility to take care of the needs of Jews around the world." Unless we strengthen this bedrock Jewish principle, we will spread apart. We are a people held together by kinship, by study of texts, and by our minority status.

Prof. Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary,

expressed some skepticism about Prof. Walzer's view of the salience of Jewish learning. He noted that Prof. Salo Baron, the dean of Jewish historians, had said that if the American Jewish community produced 100 great scholars, its future would be assured. This view was challenged by Wertheimer, who offered historical examples to the contrary: There had been no great rabbi or scholar in France in the nineteenth century, yet France had a vibrant Jewish community during this time. Scholarship alone does not produce a vital Jewish community, if the professors aren't engaged in Jewish life and don't provide a Jewish model to their students. While he celebrated the importance of Jewish learning, he also valued Jewish association and the ability to rally for Jewish causes. "We have to find what inspires us as Jews." He expressed concern that while we are fixated on the theme of Jewish education, we must pay more attention to the content of Jewish education.

He then asked what percent of the day's audience were under 55—and suggested that it was between 10 percent and 15 percent. While AJC is one of the Jewish organizations working hardest at involving young Jews, for the most part younger Jews are not joining Jewish organizations. The 2000-01 NJPS found a 20 percent decline in membership in national Jewish organizations over the past decade and a decline of one-third in the number of donors to Jewish Federations for the same period. He cited the recent AJC Ukeles study of younger Jews which showed evidence of a lack of engagement of younger Jews with the Jewish community. Why was this happening? He suggested it was because younger Jews are not marrying other Jews and not having kids—because those who do have children are those affiliated with the Jewish community.

What binds Jews together, in his view, was peoplehood. There has been a declining commitment to Jewish peoplehood, which lessens with each ten-year cohort. From a sociological perspective, he understood Prof. Walzer's comments about fluid boundaries, but felt that if we don't create boundaries, to define who is in and who is out, it is difficult to create community. It is not enough to be anti-something. There have to be elements of positive content to Jewishness.

Martin Peretz, the editor-in-chief of *The New Republic*, recalled the Yiddish cultural environment in which he had grown up, which was isolated from other Jews but not alienated from them, and which was characterized by a passionate love of other Jews. He noted that Franz Rosenzweig had founded his *Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus* in 1920 because he observed that the German Jews around him were competent in everything but incompetent as Jews. Similarly today's secularly achieving Jews (like himself, he admitted) had a smattering of knowledge about Judaism but were not really learned. The synagogue was gratifying to some, but not to many. The Holocaust was a "morbid factor" in our lives, a way to fixate on the Jewish end. The solution, in his view, was to concentrate on adult education, particularly young adult education, and use it to bring together different elements of the Jewish community to learn together.

This experience could generate a sense of *klal Yisrael*, and help them to become "real Jews."

Jeff Goldberg asked whether the rich Jews have too much power in the Jewish community. Prof. Walzer replied that the only alternative was the power of the Jewish civil service—i.e., the staffs of Jewish organizations—and he would prefer to see a strengthening of their role. Walzer responded to Wertheimer's remarks about boundaries, noting that in an emancipated Diaspora, we are a voluntary association, whose necessary characteristic is a strong center and a spreading periphery. All voluntary associations work that way, and so we have no choice but to make life at the center so passionate and interesting that those who wander off will want to come back.

Prof. Sarna, in response to the question about wealth, observed that while the wealthy were once a very small minority, as in the days of Jacob Schiff and Louis Marshall, today there is a democratization process in the Jewish community. We have moved from a top-down business model to a start-up model. Today one doesn't have to persuade Federation of a new project in the Jewish community; one could go to an independent Jewish funder. Some of the start-ups will fizzle, but he had faith in the power of the Jewish marketplace.

Prof. Wertheimer noted, conversely, that there were Jewish organizations that should have disappeared but remained alive because of the support of a few givers who underwrite them. He is engaged in a research project on American Jewish organizational structures, and had found that most give a great deal of discretion to their professionals, but that professionals devote more and more of their time to fundraising. On the issue of boundaries he added that the debate in the Jewish community was over whether it was better to have a broad tent or to set boundaries, but most agree that some groups such as the Jews for Jesus are outside the boundaries (yet other groups like the Bhu-Jews are not).

Prof. Sarna said historically big tents have succeeded more than boundary-setters. For instance, the Conservative Movement has narrowed its tent and lost members, while Reform and Orthodox have done the opposite. He observed that not since the sixties have we seen such ferment among young people, but the young don't get involved in Federation and large organizations because of the emphasis on big donors. He also emphasized the importance of the Internet to connect with young people, and wondered whether JDate would have an impact on intermarriage. Prof. Walzer noted the statistic that there is now a twenty-year gap (at least) between bar mitzvah and marriage, and perhaps there needed to be some new life-cycle rituals to fill in this time period—for instance, a way to celebrate their first romantic liaison.

What Should We Worry About Next?

The final session of the symposium was moderated by AJC's executive director, David A. Harris, who introduced the subject of Jewish worry with a quotation from I. B. Singer, who described the Jews as "a people who cannot sleep themselves and let no one else sleep either." Jews are not alone in worrying, of course. Harris introduced Leon Wieseltier—an editor, essayist, author, and public intellectual, who worked with Al Moses in organizing the symposium. He paid tribute to Ambassador Moses, who had conceived the idea of the symposium and assured its success by thinking big, getting the best minds, choosing the appropriate venues, and ensuring a long shelf life for the occasion by providing for appropriate media and publications to follow it.

Leon Wieseltier began by noting that Jewish law, *halakha*, includes a codification of worry, concrete instances when worrying becomes an obligation and a general principle. Jacob ben Asher (the Baal ha-Turim, a thirteenth-century Spanish codifier), in his code of law, the Arbaah Turim, includes a list of things that are forbidden because of danger: injunctions against eating foods that are disgusting or leaving potable liquids standing or eating meat and fish together or putting coins in one's mouth or putting a knife into an *etrog* lest someone fall on it and die. "All this is very advanced worrying," he commented wryly. These statutes embody the "imagination of catastrophe in the realm of the commonplace"—or put otherwise, the legitimation of worry by law. This is the precautionary principle of the rabbis, that danger must be imagined and guarded against. Moses Isserles, the sixteenth-century Polish rabbi, put it: "Danger is graver than sin."

The sensitivity to danger was partly a requirement of prudence—Jews needed to have their wits about them. But the centrality of worry to the Jewish life reflects not only the concrete situation of Diaspora Jewish communities but certain spiritual inclinations. One might defend Jewish worry as an expression of Jewish philosophy. For instance, worry is the appropriate emotion to accompany a linear view of history—the pioneering Jewish view. A cyclical view of history is more fatalistic and therefore less anxious.

Worry is hope's twin. The salience of hope in Jewish culture is well-known, and so worry accompanies it. He recalled his own mother's response to his asking why she worried about him so much: "It shows an interest." He insisted that there is a philosophical principle behind this maternal morbidity: Worry is the regular expression of the Jewish belief in attachment—to the family, the people, and the world. Attachment makes one both stronger and weaker, more fearless and more fearful, in contrast to Eastern religions that eschew attachment. Judaism demands a belief in the reality of the world and a commitment to its preservation and an interminable engagement with it. The more you care about something, the more regularly you contemplate the possibility of its loss.

What have Jews worried about? We have worried about both external dangers and internal dangers, and our sense of our prospects has always consisted of an assessment of the balance between these two. The external dangers were discrimination, persecution, and extermination. The magnitude of each of these threats varied in different times and places of Jewish history. Even if one rejects what Salo Baron called the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history," the Jews were never entirely free of these fears, and their lachrymosity had a basis in reality. Even when Jewish life in exile was not miserable, it was precarious. The internal dangers were sectarianism, heresy, apostasy, and ignorance. Crises of conviction and crises of competence—the former have been studied by Jewish historians more than the latter, but perhaps a great book remains to be written about the history of Jewish literacy. There were times when Jews regarded the threat to truth as greater than the threat to life, and so we had our own martyrs. The remarkable thing about Jewish life in exile was our ability to struggle against both of these threats simultaneously, without the struggle against one hobbling the struggle against the other.

From the virulence with which the internal battles of belief were waged, you would think that the combatants were living in perfect security and needed only to attend to the refinements of their faith. A feeling of sovereignty and security suffuses the legal and metaphysical texts of traditional Jewry—yet they were neither sovereign nor free. The spiritual autonomy of the Jews was steadily asserted despite the absence of political and physical hegemony. The pressures and perils from the outside did not interfere with the development of the individual and collective spirit on the inside. The texts never use their circumstances as an alibi for moral slacking. The Jewish will to survive notwithstanding, we were never merely survivors, because we regarded our survival as the survival of an idea that necessitated our physical continuity. To paraphrase David Ben-Gurion, "We fought our inner enemies as if we had no outer enemies and our outer enemies as if we had no internal enemies." This is still good advice, especially in the face of the rampant politicization of Jewish identity.

As a consequence of the ferocious dramas of the twentieth century, the destruction of European Jewry and the birth of Israel, as well as of the historicism that has overwhelmed the self-interpretation of all moderns, the meaning of Jewish life has been formulated in recent times in collective terms or in eschatological terms. Judaism has become increasingly experienced as membership in a movement, a party, a cause or a lobby. The still small voice has nearly been extinguished. We have thus lost our ancestors' equilibrium, their skill at balancing the needs of the people and the needs of the soul.

What has changed for Jews, and for the better, has been two things: Israel and America—the restoration of sovereignty in a national state and the revolution of pluralism in a democratic state. In places like Iran, Argentina, France, or Russia, our fellow Jews may regard their situation as continuous from the past, but we in the United States cannot. The tradi-

tional picture of the place of Jews in the world—tense, exposed, fragile and anomalous—does not describe our situation here. Our brethren in Israel do live by their nerves, but in part this is because they have chosen not to use all the force at their disposal and because they prefer a political solution to the problems that confront them. Even in Israel in the age of jihad a normal life for Jews has been achieved.

Thus the question of what to worry about next cannot be given the old answers. Without denying the external threats, he believes in the optimistic view that the Jews of the U.S. and of Israel have escaped what used to be called the "Jewish fate." There are real dangers, such as the strategic threat of Iran, but Palestinians won't destroy Israel; the results of the recent election show that Israelis have rejected the politics of pessimism. For the Jews of the U.S., there is still anti-Semitism, but it is without force or legitimacy. The virulent anti-Zionism on the college campus cannot be mistaken for the attitude of the society at large. While there will always be work for defense organizations, this kind of Jewishness is looking increasingly anachronistic. It is not enough to be an anti-anti-Semite; the barbarians, or at least most of them, are not at the gates.

The greatest threat to Judaism today lies, he believes, within the gates—i.e., from American Jewry and what it has done to the Jewish civilization that it inherited. "We are the barbarians within the gates." The amount of Judaism and Jewish tradition that is slipping through our fingers under the conditions of security is greater by many orders of magnitude than what was lost by our ancestors under conditions of peril. While in every generation much is lost, American Jews have been time's allies in the erosion of tradition.

American Jewry's achievements have been primarily communal, political, organizational, financial and institutional, but they have not been primarily spiritual, philosophical, literary or artistic. To be sure, American Jews' contribution to the art and culture of the United States has been extraordinary, but the standard by which we must judge ourselves is not an American standard, though we are Americans, but by the standard of our Jewish tradition. The questions we must ask ourselves are: How does what we have created compare to what we have inherited? Did we add to our tradition or did we subtract from it? Did we transmit it or did we let it fall away? What is our distinction?

Our distinction, he felt, was that we are the first Jewry in history all of whose wounds are self-inflicted. There are some encouraging cultural and religious developments, such as a slight increase in day school enrollments, a high level of Jewish studies on campus, energetic Jewish journalism, and a new Judaic hipness downtown. But will we acquit ourselves with these things to our tradition—not only to its survival but to its substance? The quality of Jewish identity in America matters as well as the quantity.

The bleakest of our failings is, to his mind, the illiteracy of the American Jewish community. The American Jewish community is the

first great Jewish community in exile to believe that it can receive, develop, and transmit Jewish tradition not in a Jewish language. The overwhelming majority of American Jews cannot read or write a Jewish language—neither Hebrew nor Yiddish. The assumption that we can do without a Jewish language is an arrogance without precedence. The Jewish tradition will not disappear entirely without a Jewish language, as Aramaic's status came about through an ignorance of Hebrew. Neither would he entirely deny the validity of translations. Yet it is impossible to deny that a huge loss is taking place. For example, when Moses Mendelssohn wrote the revolutionary *Biur*, translating the Torah into German, he wrote it in German written in Hebrew characters. It was premised on a degree of literacy that we the Jews in the U.S. no longer possess. Were such a translation into English done today, it would be useless to the vast majority of American Jews.

Various Jewish exilic cultures have taken on characteristics of the host culture, and this is not always a bad thing. Gerson Cohen used to speak of "the blessings of assimilation." In America, the surrounding culture has made us more relaxed. Consider the ethnicization of Jewishness in America. It has conferred upon us a post-melting pot, multicultural parity with our non-Jewish neighbors, but it has also made us smaller and more tribal and more biological (witness the non-medical interest in Jewish genes). It has also led to an internal relativism in our understanding of Jewish tradition. In an anthropological definition of Jewish identity, all expressions of Jewishness are equally important if they are equally authentic—I love Maimonides and you love Matisyahu. But there are more important and less important elements of Jewish culture, and the quality of our Jewish identity depends upon recognizing these distinctions and maintaining the hierarchy of values.

Another way in which we have over-Americanized our Judaism is in behaving toward our tradition like consumers—adding what confirms our sense of things and subtracting what contradicts it. We live in a famously voluntaristic society, but consumerism is a corruption of voluntarism because it replaces reason with tastes. We call the trend "customization," which means the removal of all dissonance from one's experience. When we inherit languages and customs that do not conform to our contemporary taste, we abandon them. We owe an explanation of what we have preserved or discarded of the Jewish tradition, not only to our descendants but also to our ancestors. We have the right and the duty to redact our tradition, but not capriciously or ignorantly or narcissistically.

There are two ways we can educate our children, two instruments of identity with which to equip them–one is conviction and the other is competence. He believes that the future of Jewish life in America will be determined more by Jewish competence than by Jewish conviction. We can try to teach children what to believe, but they will believe what they wish to believe and we cannot control their beliefs. But we can at least arrange matters so that our children will not be shut out of their own

books and their own quarrels. We cannot make sure that we are followed by devout Jews, but we can make sure we are followed by skilled Jews. Competence protects a Jew against unreflective conformism, and produces a Jew favorably disposed to conviction. A competent Jew is not destroyed by his questions, because he can look for the answers himself. Knowledge is a form of sovereignty, and from this kind of self-rule we can only be exiled only by ourselves.

About the internal dangers—the ignorance, the illiteracy, the happy accommodation—about all these aspects of Jewish life, American Jewry has stopped worrying. Thus in his view what we should worry about next is: We should worry about the end of worry. When we stop worrying, we should start worrying.

The panelists responding to Wieseltier were Anita Shapira, a professor of Jewish history at Tel Aviv University and president of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture; Hillel Halkin, an author, essayist, and translator from Israel; and Jonathan Rosen, author of two American Jewish novels and a work of nonfiction.

Prof. Shapiro noted that worrying was a well-respected Jewish pastime, but she did not share the speaker's basic optimism. It is true that we have never had it so good, but Jewish history teaches us that we never know what disaster is awaiting us. Jews are generally divided between the optimists and the pessimists, and so in Zionist history, the generation of founding fathers, such as David Ben-Gurion, was pessimistic; their sons thought that they could achieve anything. In each case they created a self-fulfilling prophecy.

She identified one of the dangers facing Jewry to be the relationship of American Jewry to Israeli Jewry. She saw "two continents drifting apart," not on purpose but spontaneously, as a consequence of not speaking the same language. The question of Hebrew is a touchy subject in this country; she thinks that it is of major importance that American Jews learn Hebrew. At the turn of the century there were very few Hebrew speakers, but many Jews knew how to read and write Hebrew. She felt that learning Hebrew was a test of American Jewry's determination to keep Judaism intact.

Hillel Halkin, picking up on a distinction made by Wieseltier, looked at the contrast between threats to life and threats to truth. Leon had emphasized threats to truth, while Israeli Jews tend to emphasize threats to life. He noted that on the various panels there had been a noticeable division between American Jews and Israelis in ways of relating to problems. Israelis have to worry about threats to life—such as the Iranian bomb—while American Jews have to worry about cultural assimilation gradually destroying a community. But in our time there is an alliance between the two threats—because of the alliance between Islamic fascism and a constituency of the so-called "progressive" post-modernists in Europe who support them. Jews, though they did not choose the role, are the targets of both these groups. As a Zionist who believes in

the idea that Israel would bring "normalization" of the Jewish role, he would welcome the chance to lay down the burdens of Jewish history. But another burden has been thrust upon us—the burden of being the "point people" for a moral and intellectual struggle against these forces.

As the only American respondent on this panel, Jonathan Rosen noted that he was exactly the kind of "monolingual disgrace" that Wieseltier had talked about, yet America had "not only failed me but found me." Through Jewish studies at Yale and marriage to a rabbi, he had come to embrace and appreciate his Jewishness. He challenged the dichotomization that Halkin had suggested between Israeli and American concerns. Using the analogy of a birdwatcher who cannot be concerned only about the environment for birds in his immediate neighborhood but must also think about the rain forest where they go in winter, he suggested that "inevitable globalization" was blurring the worries of American and Israeli Jews. Recounting an anecdote about a Russian cab driver who complained about Americans not liking tragedy but only stories with happy endings, Rosen speculated that Americans' ability to imagine happy endings was what had produced them. He feared that we Jews might lose our imagination both for happy endings and for catastrophe, and stressed the necessity of imagining both. But since technology magnifies our ability to do evil, he imagined "what if we live in a prelude to calamity."

Leon Wieseltier responded by saying that he was speaking from neither the continent of Israel nor the continent of America, but from the continent of Jewish tradition. From that perspective, he recognized a threat to truth in Israel too, but in America the threat was greater because Jewish tradition has been criminally neglected. To meet that threat, we have to multitask, and we have to follow the example of our forefather Jacob, who created two camps for his family in order to survive.

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