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**PHILANTHROPIC PRIORITIES
IN LIGHT OF PEW**

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The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewish Life to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life, as well as to advocate for and support Hebrew and Jewish literacy among the general population.

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PHILANTHROPIC PRIORITIES IN LIGHT OF PEW

The rumblings could be heard far and wide. Ominous chatter, faint at first, then building in frequency until it became an overwhelming and all-consuming cacophony. There was no longer any hope of denying it: We were being treated to another Study.

It happens every few years. A major survey is unveiled to gauge the pulse of a community. The research itself contains valuable information if understood within wider currents and contexts. It's the reaction to the study that causes the din. First, grief: A massive outpouring of despair over an ostensibly dying community. This is followed by rage over programs that are deemed hopeless to stem the losses. Then comes hope, as the same people insist that their programs are the key to salvation. This lasts until the dawn of the next study, and the cycle repeats.

The Pew study was supposed to be different. Using a more reliable sample than that of any other survey of American Jews in history, the Pew study inspired hope that its sober analysis would beget thoughtful and reasoned discussion. But no sooner had the study been released than the spin was set: Jewish leaders across the board erupted in mourning for a dying community facing calamity. Overnight, an onslaught of op-eds, columns and symposia insisted that Pew proved their preconceptions, citing in particular a lack of interest in Jewish institutions as evidence of a lack of interest in Judaism. That people were finding new ways of relating to Jewish experience outside the walls of traditional institutions rarely entered the equation.

Now that the initial hysteria has subsided, it's time to catch our breath and reflect on the insights and nuances of this comprehensive assessment of American Jewish life. Beyond the headlines, the Pew study is replete with data on all aspects of Jewish identity, affiliation and experience. It provides a portrait of a community in transition as individuals chart new ways of connecting to Judaism that are consistent with life in a society that fully accepts and often even celebrates Jewish culture. In particular, as the philanthropic world regroups to consider the most effective areas of resource allotment in light of the study's findings, it behooves the community to approach the study with sobriety. With that in mind, articles in this issue of Contact explore the ramifications of the Pew study from a range of perspectives, from the possibilities of capitalizing on pervasive Jewish pride to the challenges institutions face in appealing to Jews today, from considerations of secular Jewish identity to insights into the myth of Orthodox outreach. Taken together, the essays use the Pew study as a springboard for reflections on how to strengthen and revitalize a community grappling with emerging Jewish identifications that often defy expectations and traditional norms.

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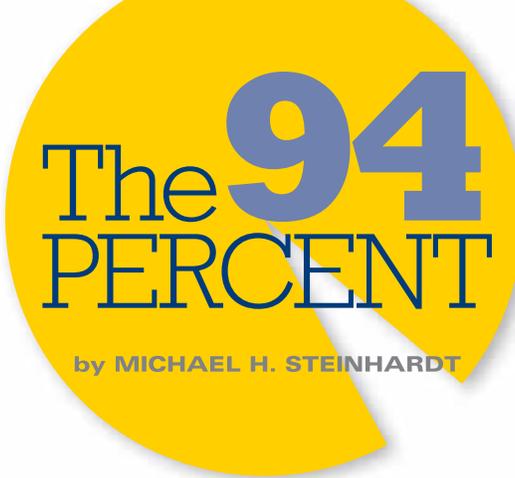
The concept of Jewish pride is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the middle of the last century, one of the defining aspects of Jewish life was the rush to eliminate one's connection to Judaism. People were discomfited by their Jewish roots; they recognized the barriers that overt Jewish identification created for them, and they sought, first and foremost, to scale those barriers in order to succeed. Levis were changed to Lanes, Goldbergs to Greens. We can credit a range of factors, including anti-Semitism and the desire to succeed in American culture, but the result was that Judaism was not something to cherish, but to escape.

Now along comes Pew, which tells us something that would have been mind-boggling just 50 years ago: 94 percent of Jews are "proud to be Jewish." The reason for this enormous change is a subject unto itself — whether it is pride in Israel or a gradual recognition of Jewish achievement that allows Jews to participate in almost every industry and profession. Regardless, one point remains clear: This pride is unprecedented in Diaspora Jewish history, and it contains enormous opportunities for philanthropic engagement.

Among secular Jews, the dramatic increase in pride has been extraordinary. The question then is: What exactly is this pride that an overwhelming majority of Jews possess? What are its contours, and what does it omit? Here the issue becomes more complicated. In other areas explored by Pew, particularly in the realm of communal and denominational identification, the numbers are seemingly not so sanguine. One-third of Jews in the Millennial generation consider themselves to be "Jews of no religion." If we resist belonging, what exactly are we proud of?

I would maintain that we are proud of secular Jewish achievement and accomplishment, a phenomenon that has only grown in recent years. I remember when I was a child, I knew the name of just about every successful Jewish athlete. For Jews, these sports stars were heralded, their scores memorized, their victories savored. We had the same feeling about exceptional Hollywood actors who were Jewish. Now take that very specific pride in Sandy Koufax or Barbara Streisand, and expand it into more fields than you can imagine, and you can understand part of what constitutes Jewish pride for younger Jews today. Nobel Prize winners, scientists, musicians, great writers and artists, commentators in every conceivable media — it all comes together in a new, all-encompassing mosaic of pride that isn't jingoism but something akin to connection, familiarity and kinship born of shared cultural experience. As

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the Pew report revealed, halachic Jewishness isn't a prerequisite for such feelings. The pride comes not from traditional lineage but from a broader association, a societal association — and that too is different today.

Tallies of Jewish achievement are not meant to be simplistic or chauvinistic. On the contrary, they tap into deep, sometimes ineffable feelings of connection to previous generations of secular Jewish life, and they reflect an appreciation of a Jewish sensibility and perspective that has framed Jewish and Western cultures since the time of European Jewish Emancipation. I like to say that my Jewish history began 300 years ago, because before that, all Jews were religiously observant and halacha was the dominant criteria of Jewish culture. After that, Jews were slowly and inexorably unburdened of limits — and our creativity soared. This creativity and its resulting achievements are the source of Jewish pride for the non-Orthodox majority of Jews today.

This is why I maintain that the roots of secular Jewish pride stretch back 300 years, from the time Jews first began interacting with the outside world. This doesn't mean that Jewish history prior to Emancipation is immaterial, but that because it was often shrouded in religious cues and contexts, and because it was by necessity cloistered, it doesn't speak to most Jews today in the same way as does our secular cultural imprint. One could argue that today, most Jews are ambivalent about ritual, but they are passionate about accomplishment. Our communal organizations need to recognize this. Jewish pride is not about laying tefillin. In fact, it has nothing to do with Jewish spiritual devotion, although there's nothing inherently wrong with religious practice. It's about Jewish sensibility, striving and accomplishment.

Perhaps the greatest secular Jewish achievement of this or any age is the establishment of the State of Israel. What started as the most vivid dream in Jewish history was forged into a nuts-and-bolts reality that has become a laboratory of the Jewish creative spirit. Its triumphs and challenges are born of Jewish wisdom and experience, and both serve as potentially exhilarating educational

tools. Israel expands Jewish pride, adding new dimensions and horizons to our sense of self. Why is it not the source of more secular Jewish education in the Diaspora?

Our philanthropy must contend with Jewish pride and orient itself to a newly understood landscape. Given what we now know about this pervasive sense among secular Jews, it is time to invest more seriously in educational endeavors that reinforce it and build upon it. Simply put, for a Jew to be Jewishly educated today, he or she must know the history of the past 300 years. We must learn and understand our achievements, and explore the background and basis of our success. Was it DNA? Social cues? Pressure from persecution? Education? We need to educate more thoroughly in this area than we have in the past.

After all, as we know from the Pew report and other places, there are discernable areas of decline in terms of Jewish affiliation, particularly in terms of institutional connection. We have pride, but not much desire to affiliate. How can this be? Our institutions are not meeting the needs of an integrated, intellectually curious people that arguably obtains more of its Jewish education from television than from Hebrew school. Frankly, pride is largely absent from Jewish education as we know it. Yes, many Jews may know that Marx, Freud and Einstein were Jews of great achievement. But there is very little effort made to educate how their ideas were Jewish in iconoclastic ways that might not fit with traditional definitions of Judaism, and how they — and countless other men and women, from societies near and distant — were part of a Jewish intellectual and cultural revolution that reinvented our ways of seeing the world.

Unfortunately, at this point in our history and culture, we have pride but not enough knowledge to back it up. It's inchoate; it needs to be equipped with articulation. We must start focusing on educational models that bring the knowledge and content of secular achievement to young Jews, and that help explain what historic Jewish values and ideas contribute to that achievement. We must find and train educators with a knowledge base to help Jews understand what elements of Jewish history and wisdom have informed the actions of Jews in the secular world. After all, it will be much easier to strengthen a sense of Peoplehood if we teach our children the secular history of our people. This will create a substrata of emotional connectivity upon which a more durable Jewish identity can be built. In the end, our goal must be that in the next generation, "94 percent" will be bandied about not just to describe Jewish pride, but education, connection and commitment — the recipe for a vibrant Jewish future. ■

THE FEDERATION MOVEMENT AND THE CHALLENGE OF JEWISH IDENTITY: INTERPRETING PEW

by BARRY SHRAGE

In 1965, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel spoke to the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds at the General Assembly (GA) in Montreal:

There are two words I should like to strike from our vocabulary: “surveys” and “survival.”

Our community is in spiritual distress, and some of our organizations are often too concerned with digits. Our disease is loss of character and commitment, and the cure of our plight cannot be derived from charts and diagrams... undertaking surveys is an evasion of creative action, a splendid illusion.

Survival, mere continuation of being, is a condition man has in common with animals. What is important is attaining certainty of being worthy of survival.

Our young people are disturbed at parents who are spiritually insolvent. They seek direction, affirmation; they reject complacency and empty generosity.

To maintain devotion to Judaism, to succeed in the effort to convey my appreciation to my child, I need a community, as we all do. In this emergency we call upon the Federation: Help us! Let us create an atmosphere of learning, a climate of reverence.

We need a revolution in Jewish life.

(Adapted from Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays by Abraham Joshua Heschel, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997)

It's rare (and wonderful!) to face a crisis in our time and to know with some certainty what one of the great sages of the last century would counsel. Heschel understood the Federation movement and its historic opportunity with prophetic power nearly 50 years ago, and had the courage to speak truth to power in 1965. It's tragic that so little has changed and that his words are still relevant today. Sadly, he could have given virtually the same speech in response to the Pew survey at the 2013 GA in Jerusalem. It will be a crime against the Jewish future if in 2054 it can be said that the Federation leadership of our time missed another opportunity.

There has been plenty of debate about the Pew results, but perhaps, as Heschel warned, we're studying the numbers when we should be looking at something far more significant. The important question is not how many Jews there are or will be, but rather what is a "Jewish life" worth living, and how do we build it? It is impossible to build a strategy to respond to the survey until we answer that question.

Our aspirations need to be clearly stated. We want our children to experience the beauty and

glory of a connection to a 3,500 year old culture and civilization. We want them to experience the intensity of Jewish spirituality, whether they choose to call it religion or something else. We want them to experience the power of being connected to millions of other Jews and, through that connection, desire to improve the world and share in the joy of Jewish life.

Even at the beginning of the 21st Century, at a time when "umbrella charities" seem to be losing influence, local Federations and our national Federation system still embody the hopes and dreams of many Jews. Our full engagement in the challenge of building a broadly based Jewish renaissance is at the heart of those aspirations. To the extent that we fulfill these dreams, we will attract the best and brightest leadership, raise necessary resources and receive the blessing of future generations. If we don't, Federations will disappear from history and future generations will curse our failure.

In fact, after a hundred years of assimilation in the world's most powerful and attractive culture, the alienation of young American Jews from Jewish institutions is not a mystery. When the Federation movement was created during the massive immigration of Eastern European Jews to America at the beginning of the 20th Century, Federations (like most other American Jewish institutions) supported the aspirations of their communities, encouraging assimilation and providing the services needed by a generation moving from immigrant poverty to the middle class and beyond. Jewish education was hardly on the Federation agenda.

After the Six Day War, Israel became the "civil religion" of American Jewry. It was the golden age of the Federation movement. Campaigns flourished and Federations accomplished great goals, from the support for Israel in a time of war to the redemption of Soviet Jewry. But Jewish education remained nearly invisible as a priority for the movement and for all but a few exceptional Federations.

While one can't fault the Federations for failing to see beyond the cultural imperatives of those times, it is fair to critique the movement for its failure to use the development of an electrifying new ethnic Jewish identity in 1967 to build something deeper and even more powerful. In 1990 the National Jewish Population Survey revealed that levels of assimilation were far worse than any of us could have imagined. It wasn't an overemphasis on Israel that was driving away a generation of young Jews. It was a lack of decent Jewish education, the absence of authentic spirituality, the lack of a serious encounter with Peoplehood (something more than ethnicity) and a failure of imagination on the part of synagogues and Federations to rethink their respective programs and message. Even the Federations'

emphasis on love of Israel was (and to an alarming extent still is) rooted in fundraising pitches, the "empty generosity" that Heschel warned about in 1965. The result was that by 1990, many young American Jews were connected neither to Jewish life nor to Israel in any serious way.

Now is the time to create a Federation that is focused on change and on a compelling vision of a Jewish future characterized by purpose and spiritual grandeur. It is possible to use the tremendous power of the Federation system as a bully pulpit and as a resource creator to change the zeitgeist of a community and to emphasize the pivotal role Jewish learning must play.

Jewish education of every kind — day schools and afternoon schools, summer camps and pre-schools, formal and informal, for every age — needs to become a higher priority. Synagogues are still the gateway to Jewish life for most young families. They are our natural allies in most of these efforts, and we need to create stronger partnerships if either of us are to succeed.

In Boston we are engaged in a large-scale effort to create a "community of learning" through a massive program of adult Jewish education. Thousands have been attracted to programs aimed at "universal adult Jewish literacy."

According to Pew, only 28 percent of respondents believe that being part of a Jewish community is essential to being Jewish. We believe that communities filled with learning and caring and a commitment to social justice will attract the next generation of Jews and restore the commitment to community that is central to lives of Jewish meaning.

We also have to ensure quality outreach to everyone. The gateways to Jewish learning must open to those with disabilities if we are to become a truly open and inclusive Jewish community. Federations must also make a serious investment in outreach to interfaith families and gay and lesbian families, engaging them through community programs and welcoming them into a supportive, inclusive community.

Right now our greatest challenge is to leverage the most successful Jewish identity enrichment investment the American Jewish community has ever made: Birthright Israel. Connecting the Birthright generation to Jewish learning, meaning and community is now our greatest opportunity. Right now, the door is open.

The Federation movement is at a crossroads. The key will be a commitment to developing a Judaism of meaning, rooted in substance. We must build a community with no barriers to entry, but with a vision of Jewish life as high as Sinai: filled with the beauty and meaning of Judaism, rooted in tradition but focused on the future.

In Exodus, at the burning bush, Moses asks God's name and God responds, "I will be what I will be." Jewish history has always seemed balanced between victory and defeat, celebration and mourning, miracle and catastrophe. But for me, in the background there has always been an unseen hand that guides us to an unknown future but that demands our participation and our individual attention, as if to say, "I will be what I will be ... but you will determine the outcome."

The facts of the Pew study will be what they will be, but we will determine the outcome. ■

Barry Shrage has served as president of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Boston's Jewish Federation, since 1987.

FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS, BUILD BRIDGES

by SARAH BUNIN BENOR

Since the Pew Research Center released “A Portrait of Jewish Americans” in early October, I have read and participated in many discussions about the findings. Several scholars and communal leaders have reacted with alarm, but the responses that have resonated most with me and some of my colleagues have been more optimistic. My take is that the study finds an increasingly diverse Jewish population and points to several opportunities for organizations and funders to foster relationships and build bridges among diverse sectors of the community.

On the one hand, the study finds growth in the percentage of Jews who report little or no connection with Jewish organizations. On the other hand, it finds an increasingly committed and numerous Orthodox population (27 percent of Jewish children live in Orthodox households). Funders should continue to concentrate on programs that will educate Jews and encourage them to “do Jewish with other Jews” (to quote Hillel International’s former mission statement), and they should also strive to build bridges between non-Orthodox and Orthodox Jews.

Individuals’ reactions to the Pew results are necessarily influenced by their values. I personally believe that Jews should marry the people they love, and I believe that our current intermarriage numbers indicate a positive trend: increasing acceptance within American society. Many Jews, especially in the older generation and within Orthodox and immigrant populations, hold a strongly opposing view that intermarriage is bad. I would argue that expressing that value is counterproductive. When young Jews — many of whom are intermarried — get wind of Jewish leaders treating intermarriage as a disease, they may feel rejected and turned off from participation in Jewish communal organizations. When they read about scholars and others calling the results of the Pew study “devastating” and saying that “the sky is falling,” they may feel that their personal decisions are on trial.

In fact, instead of complaining that the intermarriage rate is so high, we should be marveling that it is so low. In this era of

I BELIEVE in *clal yisrael* — a sense of shared community among all Jews — and I believe that individual Jews (and the Jewish collective) benefit from participating in tightly-knit communities.

cross-cultural relationships, especially in metropolitan areas where Jews tend to live, wouldn’t we expect a higher percentage of Jews to marry non-Jews? Why are only 44 percent of Jews married to non-Jews? I think the most important answer to this is that communal organizations — synagogues, schools, youth groups, Hillels and other Jewish organizations — are creating opportunities for Jews to get to know other Jews.

Our Jewish organizations are currently reaching a large percentage of Jews. Sixty-seven percent of Jewish respondents in the Pew study participated in some kind of formal Jewish education. And 58 percent report that they attend Jewish religious services at a synagogue or other place of worship at least a few times a year. But we can’t expect a majority of Jews to participate beyond their bar/bat mitzvah or to attend services more than a few times a year unless they get hooked. How do we encourage Jews to get hooked? As Ron Wolfson argues convincingly in his book *Relational Judaism* (Jewish Lights, 2013), people participate in communal life not because of the quality programs or the impressive buildings but because of their relationships (social, not romantic).

What does the Pew study say about the current state of Jewish relationships? Seventy-nine percent of Jews have at least some close friends who are Jewish, and even among “Jews of no religion,” this statistic is quite high: two-thirds. Clearly there is some informal Jewish network infrastructure in place, and communal professionals and volunteers can tap into it to build more relationships and foster even more dense networks.

Funders can play a central role in this by investing in a Chief Community Builder within every Jewish institution. The CCB would lead a team of relationship builders to foster Jewish social networks. Members of this team would develop strong personal relationships with Jews who have participated in an event and

with others they find through the friend-of-friend approach. They would invite individuals for coffee or dinner and find out what they’re passionate about. Then they would connect them with other Jews who have similar interests and encourage them to participate in activities and create communities that are meaningful to them — at synagogues and other organizations, in public spaces and, perhaps most importantly, in private homes.

This kind of social engineering is already happening in several organizations, including Hillel, Chabad and the Kavana Cooperative in Seattle. And other organizations are building strong Jewish networks. This is especially true among groups that offer intensive experiences away from an individual’s regular life (like summer camps, summer Yiddish programs, farming collectives, service learning trips and year-long cooperatives) and groups that meet regularly (like Torah study groups, artists’ collectives, *minyanim*, social-justice fellowships and giving circles). Funders are in a unique position to incentivize participation in these instances of intensive and sustained Jewish communal engagement — and not just among young adults.

Funders are also in a unique position to build bridges, in the interest of Jewish unity, between Jews who would not normally interact with one another. Organizations like CLAL, the Wexner Foundation, Boards of Rabbis and Boards of Jewish Education have long been convening Jews of diverse denominational orientations, and new groups like Encounter, the Jewish Dialogue Group and Resetting the Table are building bridges among Jews with diverse views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Funders can encourage bridging activities like these as well as others that bring together Jews ranging from secular to *Haredi* (including diverse Hasidic and Yeshivish groups, not only Chabad).

Just as any philanthropist makes funding decisions based on his or her values, I offer these suggestions for funding priorities based on what is important to me. I believe in *clal yisrael* — a sense of shared community among all Jews — and I believe that individual Jews (and the Jewish collective) benefit from participating in tightly-knit communities. The Pew report offers an opportunity to put our values into action. I believe we should seize the moment and work together to create stronger Jewish communities. ■

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WHAT ARE FUNDERS TO DO? IMPLICATIONS OF THE PEW REPORT

by ANDRÉS SPOKOINY

In *The War of the End of the World* (1981), Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa wrote about a peculiar rebellion that took place in Northern Brazil in the 1890s. It was a peasant revolt against the metric system. The insurrection was drowned in blood by the new Brazilian Republic, and the conflict became a metaphor for how useless it is to try to stop time and how futile it is to fight reality.

So it is with Pew. The Pew report is not good or bad. It is what it is. It shows the complexities — some fascinating, some troubling — of living in an era of radical free choice in which the internal and external bounds that have kept us together are being dramatically reformulated. It is a reality that affects not only Jews. Rather, it is both the glory and the malaise of the 21st Century, populated by individual kings who are hyper-empowered, hyper-connected and yet, sometimes, hyper-lonely. Pew shows the triple crisis/opportunity of Judaism in the early 21st Century: a crisis of belonging, a crisis of meaning and a crisis of organizational structures.

So what are the implications of the Pew report for funders? For astute observers of reality — and most funders are — Pew is old news. It just gives figures and numbers to trends that we intuitively knew and that already guided many of our philanthropic priorities. Yet, as somebody who works with funders from all walks of life, I'd like to offer some thoughts on how the philanthropic community should respond to these new realities.

1. NO "EITHER/OR" ZERO-SUM GAME

Some reacted to Pew with "I told you so." They claimed their strategy — for example, invest heavily in Jewish education, or invest heavily in Israeli film festivals — was right. Before we even start, we need to acknowledge that a very complex, fragmented reality cannot be tackled with a single strategy. There are no silver bullets; the right approach is a mix of different strategies. Jewish philanthropy is not a zero-sum game, so we don't need to worry about diluting resources. The Matching Grant Initiative of the Jewish Funders Network shows that a funding field can grow without hurting others. Funders need to look at a portfolio of actions that, in combination, can have a systemic impact.

2. OPENING NEW GATEWAYS TO JEWISH IDENTITY

Some are alarmed by the fact that 30 percent of

Jews have declared themselves "non-religious Jews." For somebody like me, who grew up in a fiercely secular yet strongly Jewish community, this isn't in any way a predictor of doom.

What this and other findings in the study show is that it is critical, even vital, to open new gateways for people to connect with Judaism. Arts, culture and language need to stop being the "poor cousins" of Jewish philanthropy. They are extremely powerful tools to build identity.

In light of Pew, funders need to help open as many gates as possible to Jewish life and, above all, not be judgmental about which ones are more authentic. After all, nobody has ownership of "Jewish Authenticity," because that concept doesn't exist. It is brutally simple: the more gates we open, the more people will come in.

3. FUNDING INCLUSION IS CRITICAL

In an atomized world, everyone is a minority. The mainstream has been redefined to mean a collection of different communities. No Jewish leader runs a majority government anymore. So inclusion of people of different ideologies, of different sexual orientations, of interfaith families and of people with disabilities is critical for every organization.

4. INNOVATION OUTSIDE AND INSIDE

Seeing that many legacy Jewish organizations struggle to adapt to the new realities, funders are tempted to simply write them off and fund new, entrepreneurial, grassroots groups. I'm all for start-ups. However, we also need to acknowledge that legacy organizations provide delivery systems that have unmatched scale and reach. Federations, JCCs, synagogues and other institutions still have the capacity to reach millions of people. It would be cost prohibitive to reinvent those delivery systems. So the challenge is to help drive change inside legacy organizations and foster a healthy ecosystem of innovation both inside and outside the establishment. Funders can play an important role by supporting a balance of external entrepreneurship and "intrapreneurship." Sometimes we need to spawn many new organizations, and sometimes we need intelligent birth control.

5. NETWORKING, PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

This may sound self-serving coming from someone who runs a funders' network, but philanthropic collaborations and partnerships are key to tackling many of the challenges that Pew presents. The issues we face as a community are too big and intractable to be solved by a single funder. Collaboration is not just about

co-funding, it is about learning from one another and creating a brain trust of funders to solve concrete issues in the community. Lack of collaboration and unexploited synergies result in millions if not hundreds of millions wasted every year.

6. SCALE — SIZE DOES MATTER

There are many great ideas out there. Jews are very good at coming up with creative solutions to difficult issues. However, a scant few of those ideas are brought to scale in a way they can affect the entire system. Funders need to realize the importance of helping good projects go to scale and build a capacity that allows them to grow. Identifying those projects that *can* go to scale is close to an art, but one we need to master. There are some good models out there: Birthright Israel, PJ Library, Moishe House, Hebrew language charter schools and others are good examples of funders bringing projects to national and even international scale. We need more of these.

7. FUNDING IDEOLOGICAL INNOVATION

Much of the debate around Pew has to do with what programs work and what don't. But that misses the point, because the biggest crisis of the Jewish people today is a crisis of meaning, not of programs, and that is due to the fact that we are running on ideological fumes.

The ideologies that organize and give meaning to contemporary Jewish life are all products of the 19th Century. They are modern inventions (Reform: 1810; Conservative: 1837; Chabad: 1814; Political Zionism: 1880s; etc.) and in a way, we are all — especially the ultra-Orthodox — reform Jews. None of those ideologies are eternal, but they were responses to a specific set of historical realities. They were useful to tackle the challenges of modernity and they are proving inadequate to respond to the challenges of post-modernity.

Yet I see few ideological innovations: new ways of understanding the Jewish people, God, society and the human condition. Probably the last big ideological innovation dates back to Mordechai Kaplan in the early 20th Century, when he founded Reconstructionist Judaism. In this post-denominational world, we desperately need new ideologies and new ways of making sense of an uncertain world. Why be Jewish? What does it mean to be Jewish in this radical free world of overlapping identities? As humans, we yearn for meaning. As Jews, we have been experts at finding meaning and relevance in different historical circumstances. Our survival depends on that more than anything else.

Walt Whitman once said "I accept reality and dare not question it." Yet, Judaism is about executing a complex dance of acceptance and change. It is about swimming both with and against the current. As in a tango, it's about alternatively leading and being led. It is about rebelling and embracing. As funders, and as concerned Jews, we need to learn how to dance. ■

Andrés Spokoiny is President and CEO of Jewish Funders Network.

CAN THE PEW FINDINGS GUIDE PHILANTHROPIC INVESTMENT IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

by LEONARD SAXE

The 2013 Pew Research Center's "Portrait of Jewish Americans" was like manna from heaven for pundits across the Jewish world. The study unleashed a virtual tsunami of commentary. Most commentators lamented the state of American Jewish life described by Pew and saw the findings as evidence of fuzzy identification with Judaism, growing secularization and lessened Jewish engagement. Pundits typically saw the findings as confirming their respective views of the Jewish community and bolstering their prescriptions for renewal of Jewish life.

A cross-sectional survey such as the one Pew conducted is not, however, a diagnostic instrument, nor is it a strategic planning document. A host of questions remain about the state of American Jewry and what one might do to address the challenges suggested by the findings. In addition, there are a number of questions about the study itself and whether the interpretation of pundits is accurate.

A threshold question is whether the American Jewish situation is as bleak as commentators believe. It's not. Pew reports that American Jews are an increasingly small portion of the total U.S. population and that the secular population is growing, particularly among young adults. According to the study, the proportion of Americans who claim Judaism as their religion has dropped by nearly half in the last 50 years (from nearly 4 percent to less than 2 percent). More than 20 percent are Jewish, but Judaism is not their religion. These conclusions, however, obscure the most important finding: The U.S. Jewish population has grown over time.

As estimated by Pew, the total Jewish population is now 6.7 million. Not only has the overall population grown, but in contrast to the bleak narratives some have drawn from the report, there has been a substantial increase in the number of Jews by religion — the population most engaged in Jewish religious and cultural life. Thus, compared to 1990, there are today at least 25 percent more adult Jews by religion (a total of 4.2 million). More American Jews engage in Jewish life, including ritual life and support for Israel, than ever before.

Just as there are more Jews by religion, Pew also found that there are more secular Jews ("Jews not by religion"). As Pew

reported the findings, the proportion of the population that is secular has remained relatively stable over time, although these numbers may be even larger than they estimated. Pew also identified nearly 2.4 million adults of Jewish background (i.e., individuals who have Jewish parents or upbringing). Although Pew did not consider them to be Jewish because they are thought to have another religion, most of these individuals *consider themselves* to be all or partly Jewish and many engage regularly in Jewish practices.

What accounts for the population increase identified by Pew? Although some have suggested that the finding is a methodological artifact, this is unlikely. The estimate of the number of nearly seven million Jews by religion comports with findings by my colleagues and me at the Steinhardt Social Research Institute. Our estimates are based on a synthesis of several hundred surveys that ask questions about religion, and it was statistically improbable that their estimate would be very different.

There are several explanations for the population increase, including immigration to the United States, intermarriage, the growth of Orthodoxy and the longevity of the Jewish population. Intermarriage may be the most surprising factor, but it is also the most important. Increasingly, Jewish identification no longer ends when someone marries a non-Jew. Increasingly, it is passed on to the children of intermarried couples. Because intermarriage results in an increase in the Jewish population when the rate of children raised Jewish increases by more than 50 percent, it is likely that the effects of intermarriage rates will have even more significant impact in the future.

One of the most controversial interpretative issues of the Pew study concerns individuals who consider themselves "partly" Jewish. According to Pew, a Jewish child is one who is being "raised Jewish" — either fully or partly. It is not clear, however, how respondents interpreted the question. For some, it may have indicated how much formal Jewish education parents were providing. For those being raised partly Jewish, is it that they are being given no Jewish education, or are they being provided religious training in another faith? Pew's estimate of 1.3 million children excludes .5 million children who live in Jewish households. For many purposes in the Jewish community, such as eligibility for Taglit-Birthright Israel, having a Jewish education is not a prerequisite to participation and, in the Taglit case, more than 20 percent of participants

have had no formal Jewish education.

What do the Pew findings suggest about philanthropic strategy and the use of communal resources? It's crucial to note that the portrait is not of a community in distress or in need of urgent remediation. To the contrary, the picture of American Jewry provided by Pew is of a growing community. American Jews are highly educated and socially successful. But, more importantly, more than 90 percent of American Jews are "proud" to identify as Jews.

Also noteworthy is that although Pew framed the study as an inquiry into a religious group, most respondents did not share Pew's frame of reference. Most respondents — including those who identify as Jews by religion — view being Jewish as primarily a matter of heritage and culture rather than religion. A piece of that identity, almost universally shared, is remembering the Holocaust. In contemporary terms, this may contribute to the sense by a vast majority of Jews that Israel is an important or essential part of their identity.

Thus, the philanthropic need is for the support of efforts that can strengthen and enhance Jewish life. For example, Jewish education is not universal, and approximately one-third of those who identify as Jews have had no formal Jewish education. In addition, much of the Jewish education received is of a poor quality and results in dramatically low levels of facility with Hebrew. Hebrew fluency not only facilitates engagement with Jewish religious institutions, but also with Israel and Israelis. There are tremendous opportunities here for well-considered philanthropic investment.

Specific philanthropic strategy needs to be built on more elaborate data than that which were reported in the Pew study. Philanthropic efforts need to walk a line between supporting the existing institutional structure and disruptive efforts that foster development of new forms of engagement. More specific data about how programs and institutions function for particular populations, as well as data from systems such as JData.com, can help these efforts succeed.

We live in an era in which Judaism continues to provide a framework for relating to the past and providing meaning for the future. In a world that is changing rapidly, the constancy of Jewish culture and tradition is no doubt one of the reasons the Jewish people have survived. But we want to thrive, not just continue to exist, and the Pew findings provide an important starting point for a conversation about how we accomplish that goal. ■

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INVEST IN THE CHILDREN OF INTERMARRIAGE

by THEODORE SASSON

A main focus of demographic concern since the publication of the National Jewish Population Survey of 1990 has been the rate of intermarriage. According to the new Pew Research Center survey, the rate of intermarriage began increasing rapidly in the 1970s, reaching about 55 percent for marriages between 1995 and 1999 and 58 percent for marriages between 2005 and 2013.

All else being equal, the mathematics of intermarriage are fairly simple. When two Jews marry each other they produce a single, inmarried household; when each

households that would raise Jewish children. Surveys asked intermarried parents whether they were raising their minor children as Jews. The National Jewish Population Study of 2000-01 reported that just 33 percent were doing so. Over the past decade, that statistic strongly bolstered the view that intermarriage contributes to population decline.

The Pew research group initially adopted the same general approach, albeit allowing for a greater range of possibilities. According to the survey, 20 percent of intermarried parents are raising their children Jewish by religion; 25 percent are

But the Pew report, administered after the wave of children of intermarriage born in the 1970s and 1980s had reached maturity, afforded the first possibility of an alternative look at the impact of intermarriage. After publication of the report, I asked the Pew research team to look at the rate at which the young-adult children of intermarriage actually identified as Jewish. The results are displayed in **Figure 1**. From the older to younger generation, the proportion of adult children of intermarriage identifying as Jewish steadily increased, reaching 59 percent among Millennials (born after 1980). Twenty-nine percent of the adult children of intermarriage identified as Jews by religion; 30 percent identified as Jews of no religion.

The higher-than-expected level of retention of the adult children of intermarriage has had a number of effects on the demography of the American Jewish community. It enlarged the young-adult age cohort — making it almost as large as the baby-boomer cohort — and skewed the overall Jewish population toward the young. It drove an increase, from older to younger generations, in the proportion of Jews that are the children of intermarriage — among Millennials, half of all Jews are the children of intermarriage (**Figure 2**). And, along with other factors, including immigration and the increase in the Orthodox population, it contributed to overall Jewish population growth.

The retention of the children of intermarriage has also driven an increase, from the older to younger generation, in the share of the population classified by Pew as “Jews of no religion” (**Figure 3**). When asked in the survey screener about their religion, these are people who responded “none” but then, in response to further questions, indicated that they have a Jewish parent and consider themselves to be Jewish or partly Jewish “aside from religion.” Most Jews of no religion are the adult children of intermarriage, and the increasing rate of intermarriage during the 1970s and 1980s fully explains the increase in the no-religion portion of the

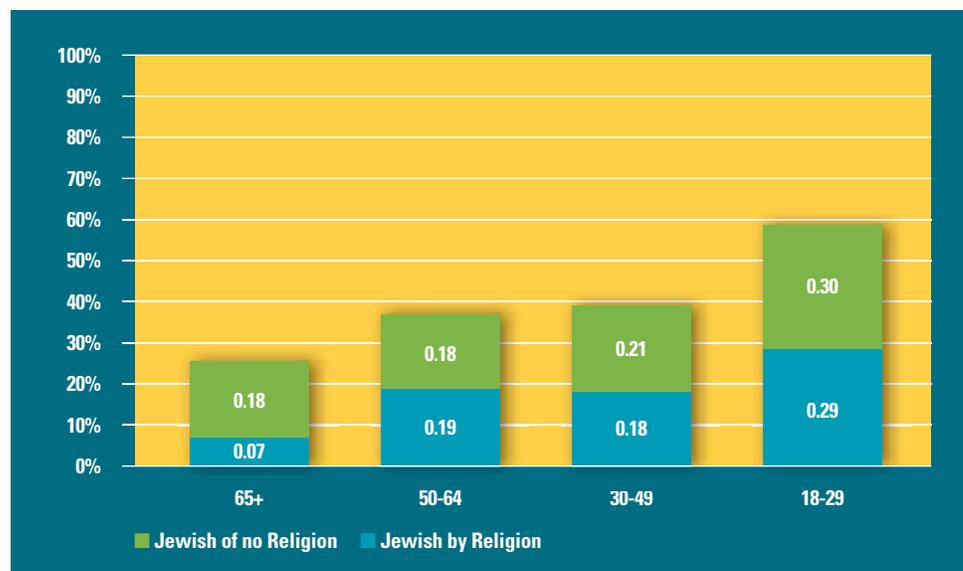


FIGURE 1: Percent of Adults with Intermarried Parent who Identify as Jewish (by Age Groups)

marries a non-Jew, they establish two intermarried households. Because intermarriage produces twice the number of households, the result is a net population loss only if fewer than half of intermarried households produce Jewish offspring.

Until the release of the Pew report, social scientists had only one method of predicting the proportion of intermarried

raising them partly Jewish by religion; 16 percent are raising them Jewish not-by-religion; and 37 percent are raising them not Jewish.

The first wave of commentaries on the Pew report emphasized either the glass half-full or glass half-empty implications of these numbers. On the one hand, just one-fifth are raising children Jewish by religion — by implication, with some form of Jewish education and household observance. On the other, 61 percent are raising children with a Jewish identity of one sort or another.

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population from the oldest to youngest generation.

In terms of their socio-demographic profile, the Jews of no religion look much like other non-Orthodox American Jews: They tend to be politically liberal, college educated and avoid non-Jewish worship services. However, their level of engagement in all aspects of Jewish life — secular as well as religious — is substantially lower.

If not a demographic guarantee, the higher-than-expected rate of Jewish identification among the adult children of intermarriage is nonetheless a significant milestone. The rate at which young-adult children of intermarriage identify as Jewish exceeds the rate at which their parents

claimed to be raising them as Jewish in the NJPS 2000-01 survey. This fact likely reflects a variety of dynamics including the increasing social prestige associated with being Jewish in America and the increasing reach of young-adult engagement initiatives.

Looking ahead, the philanthropic priority should be to maximize the proportion of children of intermarriage who are raised as Jews and then to keep the door open for young adults not raised as Jews to find their way into Jewish life as adults. The programmatic vehicles for accomplishing these goals are largely known. The critical programs are not the ones geared to the intermarried and their chil-

dren; rather, they are the programs that engage a broad range of Jews of all backgrounds: Jewish preschools, summer camps, youth groups, Hillels and Israel trips. And in addition to these programs, there is a great need to expand innovative cultural, social and educational initiatives geared to young adults and situated in the neighborhoods where they work and live.

Failure to draw intermarried families and their children into the heart of American Jewish life will ensure that the prognostications of the demographic pessimists will eventually come true. Success, however, will ensure the opposite result: a flourishing and vital Jewish community in the next generation and beyond. ■

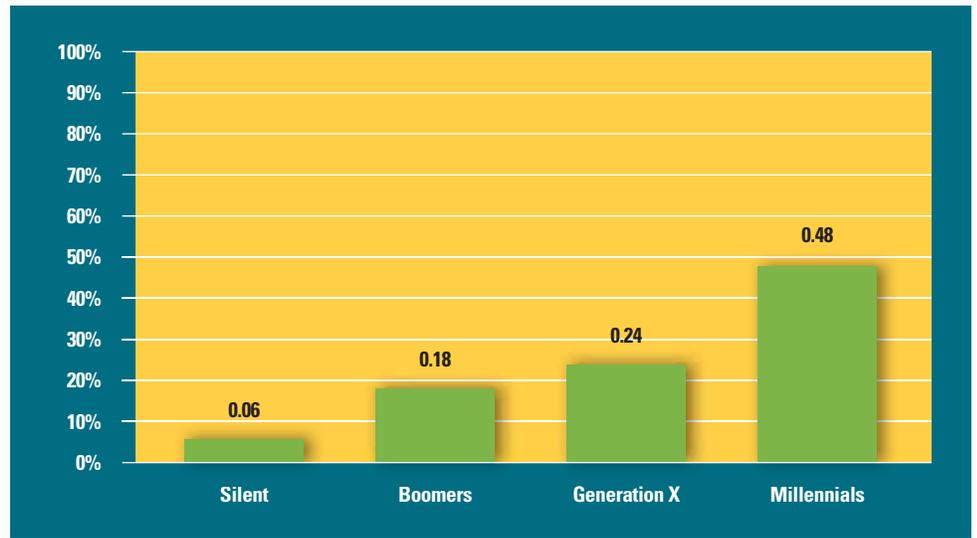


FIGURE 2. Percent of All Adult Jews with Intermarried Parents (by Generation)

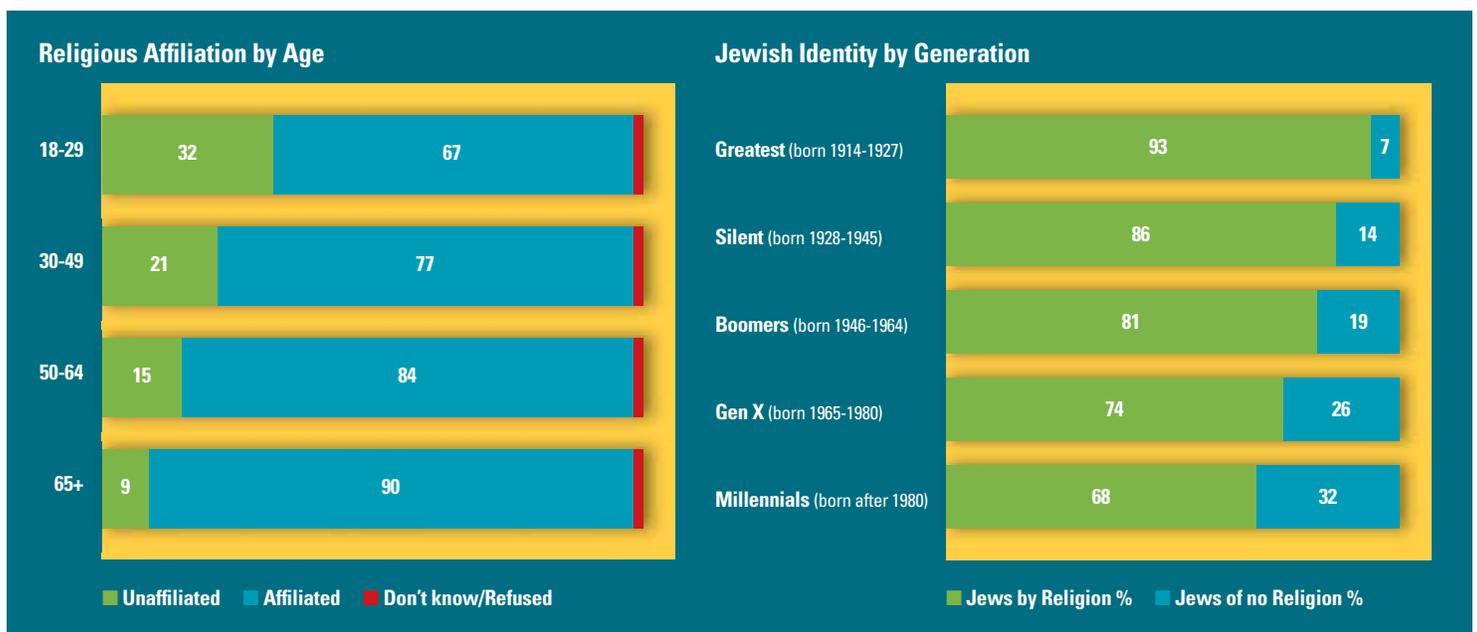


FIGURE 3. Jewish Identity by Generation

During my early and mid-20s, I embodied the attrition phenomenon in organized Jewish life. My growing disinterest was the very kind that the recent Pew study, subject of so much attention in both religious and secular media, captures. I dropped into free services at the theological school near my apartment and had holiday dinners with my family, but that was pretty much it. I joked that my first Hillel Shabbat dinner at college was also my last. I was, and am, just too skeptical for that kind of organized religious enthusiasm.

This, strangely, is partly a product of my first decade of education at a progressive Jewish day school. Although I'm glad I attained the basics of Hebrew and Jewish history there, I also gained deep familiarity with many aspects of organized religion that I decided I didn't want in my future life. I knew from an early age that I wasn't going to be a regular synagogue attendee, or probably even a member.

Despite the fact that I was a very spiritual person who loved ritual and singing, I bristled at what I saw as competition and sanctimoniousness in the religious aspects of synagogue and day-school experiences. I found the organized and, specifically, the hierarchical aspects of organized religion antithetical to my own deep spiritual sensibility. We studied the hierarchy of the medieval church in school and I rejected its centuries-old schematic take on sacredness. But even in my liberal *shul*, I saw schema that I didn't like.

Yes, I loved being a Jew, reading Jewish YA fiction and singing Jewish songs, but I did not love listening to people brag about having the rabbi over for Shabbat or about being more Jewish than thou. I didn't love the fact that the most expensive High Holiday tickets got congregants access to the nicer chapel — or the fact that High-Holiday tickets cost money at all.

Over time in college, I began to change my identification from a spiritual agnostic to an atheist. This was the post-9/11 Bush era, in which religious fervor, arising from both Islamist and Christianist sources, turned me off from religion even further. But I would argue that my nonbelief alone wouldn't have kept me from practicing my own religion — what I disliked was the

WE ARE SO JEWISH IT'S RIDICULOUS: STOP WORRYING ABOUT PEW

by SARAH SELTZER

condescension that the allegedly more pious so often offered towards the less.

If you ask for an example of that condescension, I would point to what happened to my friends when they went to Hillel to *daven* on the High Holidays. My joyous, riotous college friends would assume false levels of seriousness and grown-upness that I found put-on. I don't reject serious spirituality — in fact, as a lifelong social-justice advocate there are many things I take quite seriously — but rather that the veneer of religion somehow meant our Jewish selves were separate from our everyday selves. To me, my Jewish self was my everyday self: inquisitive, questioning, funny, melancholy, seeking and obsessed with rectifying injustice.

I finished college, became a teacher and a writer in New York, and didn't do much in the way of Judaism or Jewishness in the formal sense. And then Gabi Birkner, a neighbor of mine who was soon to be a friend and mentor, told me she was founding the Sisterhood Blog at the *Jewish Daily Forward*. Gabi suggested I could expand my writing repertoire to encompass Jewish topics and I agreed, but I was skeptical that I'd find material for more than a few posts.

Five years later, I write for three Jewish publications — the *Forward*, *Lilith* and *ZEEK* — and I just completed my first-ever organized Jewish outing (I skipped every single *Shabbaton* in elementary school) with the TENT: Creative Writing program at the Yiddish Book Center. I've also received fellowships from LABA: A Laboratory for Jewish Culture at the 14th Street Y in New York City and the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, while I work part time at the National Council for Jewish Women and help communicate its social-justice mission.

Essentially, I have gone from being disaffected to totally invested in organized

Jewish institutions. It's a small world, and one opportunity has led to another. But also, these organizations found me where my interests lie and where my Jewish identity was: in art, in social justice, in journalism. My editors and the staff at these programs understood that Jewish identity was my identity, period. There was no facade of piety assumed on Saturdays, but rather a Jewish core that informed all my life choices every day. These publications and fellowships have helped support my pursuit of

lifelong dreams that are intrinsically connected to my Jewish self: to create art, to consider current affairs and to try to repair the world.

A great deal of public worrying accompanied this season's Pew poll, which revealed younger Jews becoming less religiously invested and more willing to criticize Israel. The statistics were called "grim" while intermarriage and assimilation, familiar bogeymen, were made scapegoats for the imminent destruction of our people.

But I urge deep breaths. My case demonstrates a great deal of reason to be hopeful. The Pew poll captured an exciting trend: the secularizing of a younger generation of Jews that encompasses my entire social circle and me. We are so Jewish it's ridiculous. Like many of the Pew respondents, we have a "strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people." My friends and I in all sectors of life joke that our brains are wired in a Jewish way. I'd guess that my non-Jewish friends are probably tired of the number of times the Jews they know attribute characteristics — such as our bookishness, our neuroses, our health issues, our preference for events with lots of food — to our cultural and ethnic identity. Pew tells us that 94 percent of American Jews are proud of this identity. Where is the cause for alarm?

I have never been more actively Jewish, yet I am probably more distanced from Israel and less religious than I've ever been. But I'm actively Jewish because I feel supported and nourished by Jewish groups that have given me chances I might not have received elsewhere, and that are helping me to grow professionally, artistically and personally. The binary of religious vs. secular is old and out of date. To reach young Jews, find them where they are. ■

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THE REFORM TENT: HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?

by FERN CHERTOK

The Reform Movement stands at a crossroads. The current moment is rife with challenges to traditional religious institutions, and the movement faces a set of critical decisions about how to adapt in order to engage and serve the next generation of American Jews. The ability of the movement's umbrella organization, the Union for Reform Jewry (URJ), its rabbinic organization, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), and its seminary, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute for Religion (HUC-JIR) to adapt to the evolving nature of American Jewish life rests, in part, on its capacity to develop and use knowledge about the attitudes and practices of those who currently identify with the movement. The recent release of the Pew Research Center's "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" paints a complicated picture of Reform Jewry. Some findings should be cause for optimism, but some are troubling and should be of deep concern to the movement.

The positive news is that Reform Jews comprise the largest denominational group of American Jewry. Thirty-five percent of those considered to be Jewish by Pew identify as Reform. These Jews are near-universal in their pride in being Jewish, and the vast majority have a strong "sense of belonging to the Jewish People." For many Reform Jews, leading an ethical life and working for justice are the essential components of their Jewishness.

Another cause for celebration is that the Reform Movement has made Judaism relevant for the 50 percent of its community who are part of intermarried families. *Midrash* tells us that Abraham and Sarah's tent was a structure with numerous entrances so that travelers approaching from any direction could easily find their way inside. Landmark policy changes in the late 20th Century opened the Reform tent to many children of intermarriage. In the mid-1980s, the Reform Movement accepted patrilineal descent. At the same time, the movement's prevailing approach to intermarriage shifted to creating a welcoming and supportive environment for interfaith families. The news from Pew is

that these policy decisions have succeeded. Intermarried households identify with the movement, and the vast majority of these families are raising their children Jewishly.

The Pew findings, however, also suggest a host of concerns for the Reform Movement. Thirty-five percent of those raised in the movement no longer identify as Reform. Perhaps the finding that should give the movement greatest pause is that synagogues are not central to the vast majority of American Reform Jews. Only 34 percent of Jews who identify as Reform currently belong to a synagogue, and less than one-fifth attend religious services at a synagogue even once a month. Many Reform Jews interact with their synagogues only sporadically, when they have a particular need such as a life-cycle event. The Pew data suggest that Reform Jews do not view being Jewish as mainly a matter of religion, but rather of ancestry and culture. It should not be surprising, therefore, that membership and engagement with a synagogue — the home of ritual practice — is not a priority.

The disengagement of so many Reform Jews from synagogue life is a significant concern in a movement where the organizational building block and the primary conduit of education, engagement and influence is the congregation. Synagogues, not individuals or households, join the URJ. In other words, if you are not a member of an affiliated congregation, you are not a member of the URJ — and in many ways you are outside its reach.

How can the Reform Movement respond to these concerns? The place to start the process of informed decision making and planning for the future of the movement is by better understanding the lives, attitudes and needs of those who identify as Reform. For example, who currently identifies as a Reform Jew — both those who are and are not affiliated with congregations? Where do they live, what do their families look like and what are they seeking from the Jewish community? What are the attitudes and commitments — toward religiosity, Israel, social justice, philanthropy — of those who currently identify as Reform or were raised in the movement? What are the changing needs of Reform Jews as they transition through different life stages including marriage, family formation, empty-nesting,

THE DISENGAGEMENT of so many Reform Jews from synagogue life is a significant concern in a movement where the organizational building block and the primary conduit of education, engagement and influence is the congregation.

retirement and senior citizenship? Where and who are the young adults (18-35 years old) who grew up in Reform congregations, and how might the movement help them to enact their Jewish identities during the extended period between their departure for college and the enrollment of their own children in supplementary schools? The answers to some but not most of these questions can be found in the Pew study. There is a clear need for additional information to support the policy planning of the Reform Movement.

Armed with a greater understanding of those who identify as Reform, the Reform Movement and its philanthropic partners need to develop opportunities outside the synagogue for emotional, behavioral and intellectual engagement with Jewish life, Jewish community and the Reform Movement. This might take the form of campus-based Reform clergy to engage college students who were raised in the movement. Perhaps it will entail developing the role of community rabbis to reach out to young adults, empty nesters and seniors living in metropolitan areas. One could also envision short-term, immersive programs to make Shabbat a joyous and meaningful experience and to help individuals and families experience Jewish life and community. Although synagogue membership may be the byproduct of these efforts toward engagement, it should not be the focus.

The Pew data presents the challenges of the changing landscape of Reform Jewry. At the same time, the overall trends reported also create opportunities for growth in the Reform Movement. Pew will hopefully prompt the movement's lay and professional leaders to think about new ways to create vibrant and engaging tents for Reform Jews throughout their Jewish journeys. ■

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ORTHODOX “RETENTION” AND KIRUV: THE BAD NEWS AND THE GOOD NEWS

by JEROME A. CHANES

We are swimming — indeed drowning — in the ink spilled on the data from the Pew Research Center’s 2013 study of American Jewry. Early reactions from the religious movements have been, predictably, along the lines of the Talmudic “*Kol ha-doresh, doresh l’atzmo*” — “The one who analyzes, analyzes in his own interest.” There have been a number of analyses of the data, but to date we have seen mostly reflexive, defensive responses from the movements. Thus, to paraphrase Chabad: “We were undercounted!” The Conservative (in effect): “We are interested in quality, not quantity.” And the Orthodox, triumphantly responding with no small measure of *schadenfreude* to the Conservative decline: “We told you so!”

But Orthodox reaction is a tad puzzling, especially in light of the “retention” numbers:

THE NUMBERS on *kiruv*, in terms of drop-out rates, are not good; some estimates are that up to 80 to 90 percent of participants in *kiruv* programs do not stay the course.

how many people have chosen to remain Orthodox — and how many have not?

First, there is the basic question, sadly not addressed by Pew: What is “Orthodox”? There are at least six Orthodox groups: the Modern Orthodox, which is beleaguered by religious and social forces from the right; the Centrist Orthodox, occupying most of the middle ground, increasingly conservative in its politics and its religion; the Hasidic communities; the sectarian world of the non-Hasidic yeshivas (“*yeshivish*,” in contemporary parlance); Chabad, a discrete group, not part of the Hasidic community; and Satmar, a sectarian group, also not Hasidic (contrary to conventional wisdom), with its own distinct character.

On retention rates for the Orthodox, there’s bad news and good news. The bad news is that among those who were raised as Orthodox, only 48 percent are currently Orthodox; the rest are now affiliated with less traditional movements. (The retention numbers for the Conservative are bleaker: only 36 percent of those who were raised Conservative are currently Conservative.)

The good news: among Orthodox Jews

under 30, the retention rate is 83 percent. Noteworthy is that Orthodox retention rates are vastly lower among older people who were brought up Orthodox than they are among younger people. A mere 22 percent of Jews 65 and older who were raised Orthodox are still Orthodox, while 57 percent of people aged 30–49 who were raised Orthodox are still Orthodox — and the percentage rises as the group gets younger.

This relatively high percentage — 83 percent — among younger Orthodox, as compared with the overall 48 percent Orthodox retention rate, is more reflective of history than of sociology. Analysts suggest that the fact that the Orthodox Movement retains fewer than half its adherents reflects trends of yesteryear, and that Orthodox retention will become healthier as today’s younger members — who according to Pew are remaining Orthodox — grow older. What is the explanation for this phenomenon? My sense is that the varied options for Orthodox youth — especially the more conservative Centrist Orthodox — may be compelling and therefore lead to greater cohesion, which was not the case in previous generations.

More to the point is that the Orthodox community is retaining its young people through the “odyssey years,” those high-school and post-high-school years that are crucial to religious identification and loyalty. It may be almost clichéd to point this out, but attending day schools through the high school years largely works. Furthermore, we ought not to discount the “gap-year” phenomenon. Unknown 50 years ago and rare 40 years ago, the post-high-school gap year, often spent in a yeshiva in Israel, has become standard for Orthodox youth. The gap year in Israel is a powerful factor cementing adherence of youth to some flavor of Modern, Centrist, or even sectarian (*yeshivish*) Orthodoxy.

What about remedies? The most popular flavor over the past three decades and more has been “*kiruv*” — “bringing close” — outreach to the non-observant. But what is clear from the Pew data is that any growth in Orthodoxy will come from inside the movement. Despite massive outreach efforts on the part of Orthodox groups to non-Orthodox Jews over many decades, the Pew data show that a mere 4 percent of Jews brought up Conservative, and perhaps 1 percent of Jews brought up Reform, are currently Orthodox.

The obverse side of the *kiruv* coin is the numbers. Indeed, the numbers on *kiruv*, in terms of drop-out rates, are not good; some estimates are that up to 80 to 90 percent of participants in *kiruv* programs do not stay the

course. The astronomical sums put into the range of *kiruv* programs over the decades are not reflected in the returns — in the view of its proponents, “returns,” literally, to Judaism. In a word, Orthodox *kiruv* does not work. Some place the blame on the shrinking of the Conservative Movement, which provided *kiruv* programs with many young Jews who had at least a minimal familiarity with Jewish tradition and ritual, enough to be comfortable with Orthodox outreach. In 2013 there are simply not enough young Conservative Jews out there as potential targets for outreach professionals. Others blame the *kiruv* programs themselves, which often are heavy-handed, indeed crude.

But it’s not all about the numbers. The question for *kiruv* is not how many potential adherents become Orthodox, but whether these programs are lighting a spark to deepen and enhance Jewish involvement — whatever that involvement may ultimately be. It’s highly nuanced. I asked Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee about the issue. He suggested, “People who are touched by the National Council of Synagogue Youth, Chabad and other programs and do not become Orthodox, or who try Orthodoxy out for only a brief period, may well become more active Jewishly within the Conservative and Reform Movements, or they may try out a ‘congregation of renewal’ such as New York’s Romemu.”

Unfortunately, the Pew data have nothing to say about this hypothesis. But if it is indeed the case that potential subjects for *kiruv* go in a number of directions — not necessarily Orthodox — it is positive. “It is to the collective good of the Jewish people,” Bayme asserted.

There are data that suggest that a substantial percentage of the Orthodox community — as much as 25 percent, according to some estimates — are “*baalei t’shuvah*,” so-called “returnees to observance” from other movements. Even if that number is accurate, we need to remember that the Orthodox population remains small compared to the non-Orthodox population. The percentage of non-Orthodox who have become Orthodox, therefore, represents a very small percentage of the larger religious community, and raises critical questions as to whether money invested in *kiruv* has been well spent.

So *kiruv* is a mixed bag — but outreach certainly does not represent a congeries of initiatives designed to reverse the bleak Orthodox retention numbers. What are the implications of this verity for philanthropy? Limited, for Orthodox retention. Potentially substantial, for the fiber of Jewish life. Jewish funders are, as always, facing hard choices. ■

Jerome A. Chanes, a fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center, is the author of four books on Jewish history and communal affairs.



READY TO PROVE A PREDICTION WRONG?

by RABBI HAYIM HERRING

“The Reform and Conservative Movements are accidents of history and will disappear within 50 years.” Michael Steinhardt delivered that death sentence on September 6, 2000, before a group of about 150 people, mostly rabbis, at the formal launch of STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal). Thirteen years later, I want to assess Michael’s prediction within the shadow of the Pew study.

Individual Conservative leaders correctly note that “there are no surprises” in the Pew report. But where are their collective statements of immediate action to reverse the decline? They did not create most of the problems, but they are responsible for them. As a proud product of the Conservative Movement, I urge them to decisively resolve four existential questions:

Who can turn around the Conservative Movement?

What is its mission?

What is its vision of the ideal world that it hopes to shape?

How will it add value to constituents and to the broader Jewish world?

A LEADERSHIP TURNAROUND

When an organization that still has value teeters at a precipice, its board often installs an emergency turnaround team. Within three to six months, its task is to develop a unifying strategic vision with prioritized actions.

For the movement, I can envision a temporary, two-part structure: the first, a task force of leaders from major centers of Conservative Jewish life around the world, with at least a third of its members from the Millennial and Gen X cohort. This group would inventory Conservative Judaism’s global assets, crowd source ideas worldwide, prioritize evidence-based recommendations and build support for change. The second part would consist of a smaller action team, determined by talent and not title, to implement prioritized recommendations.

AN AFFIRMATIVE MISSION AND VISION

The general perception of the Jewish public continues to be that Conservative Judaism is a movement of “nots” — not Orthodox, not Reform and not clear. It needs to become a movement of affirmation and advance a single, clear mission that states why it exists and what is its desired impact on the world. The old slogan of “Tradition and Change” reflected where we came from, but was not a mission guiding us to where we needed to go.

Recently, at the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism’s Centennial Conference, I heard Rabbi Harold Kushner offer a simple formulation of Judaism’s essence: “Make us holy through Your commandments” (*kadshenu b’mitzvotcha*). This simple statement is valuable because it:

- reminds us that personal pleasure is not the ultimate reason for being,
- challenges us to realize our potential as individuals and as a Jewish community within the human family, and
- decelerates our frenzied pace.

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It is a call to be a part of and apart from this world, to live within it and critique it from the outside. Rather than making its primary enterprise about setting boundaries, such a mission would enable the movement to invite people into its communities, regardless of personal or familial status, for an ongoing exploration of how to transform their lives.

So what does a more perfect Jewish

will broaden its potential audience within and outside the Jewish world.

ONLY THEN, MONEY MATTERS

Once these issues are resolved, then financial cuts and long-term investments must be made by decreasing duplications of service, creating efficiencies of greater scale, improving and expanding offerings and extending the movement's reach through the smart use of technology.

THE GENERAL PERCEPTION of the Jewish public continues to be that Conservative Judaism is a movement of “nots” — not Orthodox, not Reform and not clear. It needs to become a movement of affirmation and advance a single, clear mission that states why it exists and what is its desired impact on the world.

world look like in the eyes of the Conservative Movement? And how does that world intersect with and influence the broader world? These are critically-needed discussions about vision.

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM'S VALUE

The Pew report confirms the findings of many earlier studies: that most self-identified Conservative Jews do not want to inhabit a full-time Conservative *halachic* world. Therefore, we need to raise our expectations about increasing the pool of individuals who feel a deep emotional attachment to Conservative Judaism, while tempering our expectations about the number of Jews who will embrace a total Conservative *halachic* lifestyle.

In a relationship, some magical transformations happen when you let go of unrealistic expectations and embrace people as they are. The majority of people who become involved with the Conservative Movement may never fully accept its demanding orientation, but they have shown a willingness to support Conservative causes with volunteerism, passion and money. When leaders accept this reality, I believe that the movement

Following are some suggestions to consider after a turnaround team stabilizes the movement and charts a path for growth, grouped according to the four core issues that will likely determine the destiny of the Conservative Movement.

1. CREATE LEADERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE

- Expand avenues for engagement of Jewish teens and college-age young adults through mentorships, paid internships and social networking.
- Cultivate a global leadership network of high-performing adolescents from post-*b'nai mitzvah* through college.

2. SPREAD THE MISSION

- Provide Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) taught by exceptional faculty.
- Create apps that provide value to Conservative Jews, such as finding *minyanim*, using location-based services to receive invitations to Shabbat meals when traveling, and finding talks by engaging Conservative scholars.
- Develop iPad-based Jewish educational curricula for anyone, anytime, anywhere.

- Offer free preschool education and create a pipeline between Conservative preschools, congregations, camps and day schools.
- Fund rabbis to work exclusively on college campuses and in the broader community.

3. EASE ACCESS

- Eliminate duplication and offer a more diverse array of teen experiences.
- Create a single point of access for those interested in Conservative Jewish learning opportunities.
- Provide congregations with know-how and funding to create a “one pass” membership, so that a member of one Conservative congregation can access most of the services offered by another.
- Pilot a large number of congregations that move from mandatory dues models to other alternatives (e.g., voluntary, fee for service).
- Re-conceptualize Jewish complementary education as afterschool care and programming.

4. REFRESH AND ANCHOR THE VISION

- Develop a series of incubator sites in North America, Israel, Europe and South America and provide seed funding for new ideas and approaches to Jewish living.
- Partner with organizations and networks like Mechon Hadar, the ROI Community, Moishe House, Taglit-Birthright Israel's NEXT and Kevah.
- Fund experts in planned giving to persuade Boomer members to include Conservative causes in their testamentary gifts.
- Develop and sell educational products with broad appeal.

It is now six months since the release of the Pew study. If there is not a plan to mobilize and unify the disparate and often competing arms of the Conservative Movement within another six months at the latest, it's likely that Michael Steinhart's prediction will be proven true. But it won't be because of an absence of individual talent and spiritual relevance. It will be because of the failure of the demands of great leadership. ■

GIVE A BOY A HAMMER

by AMY L. SALES

The public reaction to the Pew report has been extraordinary. There has been a sustained, high level of communal conversation that far exceeds anything we've experienced in the past. Results have been discussed not only on academic list serves but also in Jewish sanctuaries and boardrooms, and in gatherings hosted by every type of local and national Jewish organization and movement. Meetings that would usually attract 50 people bring in 150 when "Pew" is included in the title. The phenomenon appears to have extended to Canada and other Jewish communities as well. Perhaps they are concerned that the Pew study reveals something about their own future. Or perhaps, like everyone else, they do not want to be excluded from the big conversation.

The National Jewish Population Survey, by contrast, was an insiders' game. After the release of the 1990 NJPS, the research community gathered at Brandeis University to discuss how Jews are counted and to debate who is a Jew. The Federation world galvanized around the 52 percent intermarriage figure. It adopted the language of "Jewish continuity" and quickly followed with multi-million dollar investments in Jewish continuity initiatives. These methodological and policy conversations were largely limited to scholars and to volunteer and professional leadership in the Federation system. NJPS 2000 also had a limited audience. It was undermined by methodological controversy (a specialty of researchers) and failed to generate a compelling narrative (the driving force of policy). With Pew, however, everyone is in the loop. Even the Pew researchers have expressed amazement at the involvement of the Jewish community writ large, which they say has been unparalleled compared to their other studies of religious groups in America.

Why is this? One explanation is the Pew Research Center's orientation. It aims to inject timely, reliable information into the public discourse, and it explicitly welcomes debate. Although it assumes that debate will

lead to better policy, it defers to others on policy analysis and on all other matters related to the application of the data.

In addition, Pew was not interested in conducting the new NJPS, but rather it was pursuing the next frame for its ongoing research into religion in America. The Jewish community was not its primary audience and the Jewish press was not its first line of dissemination. Its audience was an informed American public and its target was *The New York Times*.

As a result of this stance, the findings were cast in terms of religion in America. In most regards, the Pew data are not comparable to NJPS numbers. To the extent knowledge advances by comparison, the comparison in this case will be to other religious groups in the United States and not to previous studies of Jews. The headline has thus been the secularization of American Jewry. The evidence has been the number and percentage of those who are Jewish but not by religion.

This narrative has captured the attention of the Jewish public and provoked and dominated public discourse. It is clear that people, Jews included, do care about research. It provokes their thinking and reflection. It can ignite a conversation in which they have a stake and on which they have opinions. They want to be informed and believe that having the data makes them so. They want to be part of the broader conversation — not the contentious one about Israel but the one about who they are, what they care about and what is happening to the American Jewish community. This is very good news for the research community and a game-changer for Jewish social science.

Asking a researcher to list philanthropic priorities in light of Pew is like giving a small boy a hammer. The boy sees that everything needs hammering and the researcher understands that more research and research education is needed.

Pew has given us descriptive data. The study was not designed with an eye toward the needs of Jews, the capacity of the community to respond to those needs, or potential interventions that might strengthen

ASKING A RESEARCHER to list philanthropic priorities in light of Pew is like giving a small boy a hammer. The boy sees that everything needs hammering and the researcher understands that more research and research education is needed.

Jewish life and community. Large swaths of Jewish life are not included in the study (e.g., volunteerism, cultural arts, social networks) and there are no data from potentially important subgroups (e.g., Jews with mixed religious identities or Jews who have found a home in Chabad or with other Orthodox outreach groups).

The Pew data are best seen as a starting point for future research, as they raise a host of interesting questions. Answering these questions could help determine priorities for philanthropic investment. For example, when Jewish parents say they are not raising their children as Jews, what do they mean? Is this a comment on Jewish education, home life or something else? How do their children see themselves? And what implications do the answers to these questions have for families? Are those who consider themselves Jews Not By Religion (JNBR) similar to teens who refer to themselves as "just Jewish" as a way of eschewing denominational identification? How did the JNBR come to identify in this way? And what does it mean to them? Note that these questions cannot be answered with a socio-demographic survey. Rather, they need a qualitative approach that invites people to express personal meaning.

Another valuable form of research is the systematic testing of different policy options. Suggested interventions and policy prescriptions should be implemented as social experiments with built-in research components. This approach, known as action research, is based on the premise that the best way to understand a system is to try to change it. Results from these studies will deepen our understanding of the varieties of ways that Jews experience their Jewishness, the reactions they have to Jewish-related opportunities and the relative strengths (and weaknesses) of different interventions.

The investment in research should also include support for public education on how to assess, analyze, interpret and apply data responsibly. The level of engagement, conversation, debate and concern raised by the Pew research makes this a particularly propitious time to create a more data savvy Jewish polity. ■

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“ At this point in our history and culture, we have pride but not enough knowledge to back it up. It’s inchoate; it needs to be equipped with articulation. We must start focusing on educational models that bring the knowledge and content of secular achievement to young Jews, and that help explain what historic Jewish values and ideas contribute to that achievement. ”

— MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT