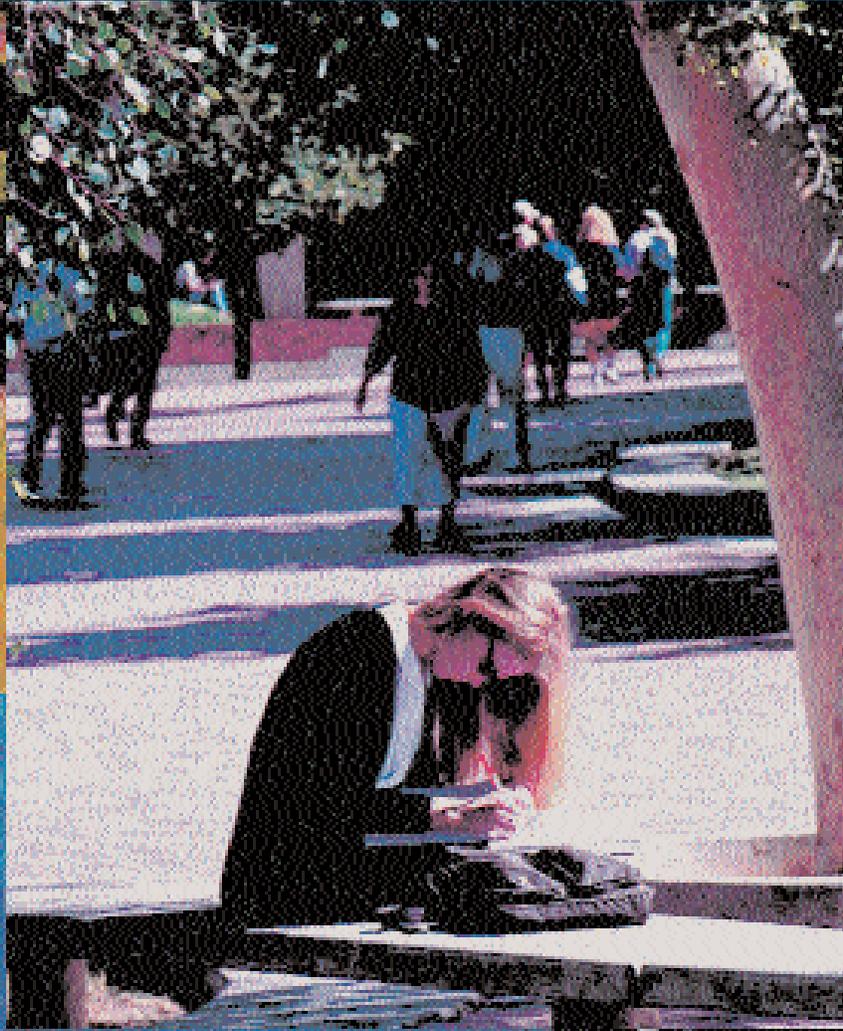


# CONTACT

WINTER 2000 / SHEVAT 5760 VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2

חברים כל ישראל / THE JOURNAL OF JEWISH LIFE NETWORK



## **Jewish Life on Campus**

**An Interview with  
Dr. Jehuda Reinharz**

**The Road to Renaissance**  
by Richard M. Joel

**Plus Essays by Tali Rosenblatt,  
Rabbi Menachem Schmidt, Rabbi  
Howard Alpert and Karen Isley**



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JEWISH LIFE NETWORK / חברים כל ישראל

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Jewish Life Network is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewry to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious 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.

Photography in this issue by Helene Glanzberg and ArtToday.

## F r o m t h e E d i t o r

### *The University and the Jews: An Era of Renaissance or an Age of Darkness?*

**T**here is a great debate taking place within the American Jewish community as to whether we live in a period of decline or of opportunity in terms of Jewish life and identity. Needless to say, and perhaps in sharper and more intensified ways, the same socio-religious dilemmas and struggles at the heart of this internal debate affect the lives of the large number of young Jews on college campuses. This issue of Contact is devoted to exploring the topic.

There seems to be a proliferation of new, dynamic programs today devoted to reaching the Jewish college student. But does this flurry of activity represent a renewal and revitalization of Jewish life at the university, or a desperate last gasp by the Jewish leadership to connect with an increasingly vanishing population—a population that is vital to the survival and growth of our community and that is searching for meaning and identity?

Hillel, the largest and most visible of the various organizations focused on this demographic group, touches 30% of all Jews on college campuses. Several new initiatives, such as Lights in Action, Jewish Heritage Programs, Jewish Campus Service Corps, and others, are working to reach beyond the traditional constituencies that have been served over the past few decades. Despite the success of these programs and initiatives, the vast majority of Jews pass through college without any formal link to Jewish campus institutions.

What can be done? In the essays and interview that follow, some of the most important and innovative figures in Jewish campus life describe their efforts and offer their views on how to stimulate the minds and ignite the souls of young Jewish women and men. What is at stake is nothing less than the future of our people. We know that this is a matter of great interest to all of you, and we strongly encourage you to write us back with your thoughts and opinions.

*Rabbi Niles Goldstein*

# Dr. Jehuda Reinharz *An Interview with*

by RABBI NILES GOLDSTEIN

**NG:** There seems to be a proliferation of new and innovative programs on college campuses being directed toward Jewish students. Do you think this represents a Renaissance of Jewish life at universities or an aggressive attempt to stem an ever-intensifying decline in Jewish life there?

**JR:** My sense of that is true for every aspect of Jewish life, and it is as follows: keep on investing in Jewish life at any stage, at any time, in any place whatsoever where there seems to be any interest. These endless debates in the Jewish community about whether it is better to invest in this cause or in outreach or in high schools or in community centers are sterile debates. Wherever the Jewish community can invest, it should invest. Inevitably, this is going to mean that it's not only a question of money but of putting the best people we have in those contexts. And the best thing would be not to straight-jacket people and tell them, "This is the outcome I want." Say to them, "Let the imagination, let the particular culture of a program or a Hillel or God knows what on campus have its own momentum." And that's the way it's going to work. I would not see this as a last gasp attempt to revive Jewish life.

**NG:** Jewish studies programs have emerged all over the country. What do you think accounts for this, and

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*Dr. Jehuda Reinharz is President and Richard Koret Professor of Modern Jewish History at Brandeis University.*

do you think it has any real impact on the American Jewish community as a whole?

**JR:** I think that Jewish studies programs have already had a long career of having an impact on the community. First of all, I believe good research of any sort is amenable to effective practical implementation, if it's done right. We had this conversation yesterday with the Board of Overseers at the Cohen Center here at Brandeis, which does research on the Jewish community. And there's a debate, as always there's a debate: should we be more practical-oriented, should we be more scholarly, and so on. Good scholarship leads to effective results if there is a will to implement it. We are the People of the Book, which means that we have produced lots of books that are collecting dust on a shelf somewhere.

**NG:** As Kohelet says, "Of the making of many books there is no end."

**JR:** That's right. And not only books. I'd like to have a dollar for every research project, every commissioned study that was done that has never been used. So I think the question then is are you willing to implement the research?

**NG:** How important is Jewish life on campus to the overall survival and future of Jewish life in America? Where on the priority scale of the community is it? Where should it be?

**JR:** I think that college campuses



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can do something that very often is not done in the community. That is the teaching of pluralism. There may be different services on Friday night, but I can tell you that after the services tonight, five or six hundred students are all going to be getting together for a Shabbat dinner, regardless of whether they are on the right wing or the left wing or unaffiliated, and I don't know who is doing the kiddush tonight, but if it happens to be a woman, trust me, everybody there is going to be listening. There are other contexts in which that can happen, but part of what we are about is being a community that is open to everyone. So I think that the universities have an important role here in the teaching of these kinds of values, and in fact forging the kind of friendships between people who would never have gotten together in another context.

**NG:** Do you think pluralism is becoming a higher priority among Jewish leaders?

**JR:** I think more and more, although of course there are also discordant notes here, there's no question. But I was very impressed that at the meeting at which Charles Bronfman introduced the new leadership of the United Jewish Communities, he talked about his interest in minimiz-

ing competition between Jewish organizations, to in effect forge a kind of pluralistic approach within the community. Like any aspect of education, it takes time for this to become the mantra of anything, whether it's a university or a Jewish organization or a foundation. But I think the fact that the leadership at the highest levels seems to think that this is an important aspect—and by the way that's true in Israel too—to me is very encouraging.

**NG:** What are the areas in university life where the community is not adequately dealing with the Jewish needs of students? What kinds of efforts and application of funds are needed to correct the situation?

**JR:** First, no matter how much effort has been put into the issue of pluralism, there needs to be more of it. I think we need to do a much better job on the whole issue of Israel, in which Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt and others are trying to stem the tide [through the Birthright Israel initiative], but a total communal effort is required here. I think Israel is slipping from our consciousness, and I am talking about our collective consciousness. You now have a generation of young people who have no clue what Israel is, and as a matter of fact, some

could care less. We also need to come to the realization that apart from American and Israeli Jewry, there are some other Jews around in the world. We need to think much more internationally than we ever have. I would also say that much more emphasis ought to be placed on film, on the arts, on music, and their impact or potential impact on Jewish identity. We have to rediscover where young people and not so young people are at today and use those vehicles to bring them in.

**NG:** What is your view of efforts of the smaller, "entrepreneurial" foundations compared to the more traditional, community-wide Jewish philanthropies?

**JR:** The various family foundations and philanthropies are doing great work, but what we do not have is a group of people sitting somewhere that thinks strategically about the whole range of things that can be done in the Jewish community, and how to best deploy our resources. And it is not a matter of not having resources. I hear this mantra very often—"We don't have the money to do everything." We have all the money and then some. It's a question of will. 🌸

# The Road to Renaissance

by RICHARD M. JOEL

Are we on the brink of a Jewish renaissance? Tradition may hold that prophecy has departed from the Jewish people, but those of us who work with college students see the future before us every day. And the future we see is a future of rebirth.

The picture wasn't always so bright. Not too long ago the Jewish community recognized that it had reached a point of diminishing numbers. "Continuity" became the cry of the day as Jewish organizations at the local and national levels struggled to understand and combat this crisis.

Hillel, as the primary organization charged with providing Jewish programs to college students around the country, became one of the leading proponents of continuity. But we quickly learned that we were missing the point and that the continuity agenda was fatally flawed. As Hillel Board of Governors Chairman Edgar Bronfman and I traveled the country speaking with college students, we found that "continuity"—and, by extension, our whole approach to Judaism—did not have resonance for them. Students did not want continuity, that is, more of the same. Students preferred "renaissance," something fresh and new, something that spoke to them, something they could create and own themselves.

We discovered that in our rush toward continuity we had forgotten to get to know the "continuers." To bring about renaissance, we would have to understand the members of this generation and give them the

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**Richard M. Joel** is President and International Director of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

*those of us who work with college students  
see the future before us every day*

Jewish experiences they wanted, needed and deserved—wherever, whenever and however we could. We needed to give them a Judaism that was positive and celebratory and that added value to their lives. Institutionally, that meant beginning our own process of organizational renewal and reinvigoration. We would have to provide the facilities, programs and professionals to offer unprecedented levels of service to this endangered species of young Jews. By finding new resources and making the necessary changes, Hillel's organizational renaissance paralleled and propelled the reshaping of Jewish life on campus.

As we deepened our understanding of today's students it became apparent that we were dealing with two distinct populations. Hillel's core population traditionally has been activists who sought our resources to express their Jewish identity and to become community leaders. We work to empower these students to become leaders of the Jewish community.

The more challenging population was the vast majority of students who would never participate in Hillel activities and who have limited Jewish backgrounds. Renaissance would live or die depending on our ability to engage this group. These young people needed to be reached in their dorms and Greek houses, in student unions and at social events. We created the Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps to address this group. JCSC fellows are recent college graduates who proactively engage students who would not ordinarily participate in Hillel activities.

As these young people engaged students on campus in a variety of

non-traditional activities, the concept of Jewish programs changed radically. Kosher dining and religious services became just two options in a range of creative alternatives for students who wished to “do Jewish.” We believe that as long as our “doing” is passionate and celebratory, constructive and life-affirming, informed by our great history and pointed toward a better future, our doing is *Jewish* doing. Hillel's mission is no longer just servicing activists but “maximizing the number of Jews doing Jewish with other Jews.” This mission statement has become the byword of Jewish renaissance on campus.

National programs, such as our Charlotte and Jack J. Spitzer Forum on Public Policy and our new Tzedek Hillel initiative, were created to provide opportunities for Jewish students to express their activism—whether political, artistic, or athletic—in a Jewish environment. We have actively worked with the Greek system and have created partnerships with the AEPi fraternity and AEPi sorority. Hillel provides grants for student-designed and student-run programs that creatively meet campus needs. Hillel's participation in the Birthright Israel program may be the best engagement opportunity yet, enabling us to bring 3,000 college students for a meaningful encounter with Israel and with their Jewish identity.

In our continuing effort to eliminate obstacles to participation, we undertook a national campaign to modernize Hillel facilities, adapt them to current student needs and move them closer to campus. But in the process of affixing mezuzahs and lowering thresholds, we recognized

that we could risk watering down the Jewish content of our programs. The creation of the Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning was intended to provide an infusion of classical Jewish learning into all of our programs at every level.

No environment is more dynamic than the college campus with its ever-shifting population. It is therefore essential that all participants in Hillel's work on campus have the opportunity to learn, renew and respond to new trends. With the help of the Schusterman Family Foundation, we created annual training programs for students, professionals and lay leaders to enable them to share their experiences on campus and to sharpen their skills.

Renaissance is not about structure and programs but about results. We see renaissance in the flowering of creative programs across the country, in the doubling and tripling of participation in Hillel programs on campus, and, ultimately, in the impact we are having on individual students.

We know that renaissance is real when we hear from students such as Erin Slaten, a sophomore at the University of California, San Diego. “Coming to college, I had no desire to include myself in Jewish activities,” she wrote recently. “But the Jewish community on campus really opened me up to my Jewishness. They are some of the most caring, open, hard-working and dedicated people I have ever met. They are the reason I started to come to Hillel events and keep coming.”

Renaissance is about multiplying this experience thousands of times over on campus and beyond. 🌸

**J**ewish communal professionals, funders, family friends and peers suddenly turn to me to get a sense of what Jewish life is like these days on campus. My involvement in collegiate Jewish life has forced me to become an expert. While I answer that I believe Jewish life is growing and improving, I recognize that my experience as a Jewish student on campus is definitely not typical. I attended Barnard College, where Jewish life thrives famously. I majored in Jewish studies. After graduation I became the co-director of Lights in Action (LIA), an educational organization for Jewish college students. Still, I see my desire to enhance my own Jewish experience as part of this larger trend of progress.

It seems students are taking ownership of their Jewish identities in practical, meaningful ways. At Columbia-Barnard, students spearheaded numerous initiatives: an academic journal of Jewish scholarship, a pluralism group, and the first daily women's tefillah group. I proposed my major in Jewish studies as a special major. This year it is a formal option in the course catalogue.

Lights in Action as an organization reflects this trend of students taking responsibility for creating their own meaningful connections to Judaism. LIA began eight years ago when a group of students felt compelled to infuse their peers with the excitement and enrichment they felt was lacking in the lives of Jewish college students. They planned a night of bonfires and singing and inspired others to recognize the power of students to transform Jewish life. The energy from that night transformed the students into an organized body of activists who reach 85,000 students twice a year with an educational mailing and continue to empower students to plan both local and national conferences on themes of particular interest to college students.

Through Lights in Action, I have the opportunity to speak with students on many campuses. I recently met a student who told me he was reading the Bible. He said he had been interested in a girl who was not Jewish and felt frustrated that he couldn't answer her questions about his own religion. So he surfed the web for answers and settled down to read the Bible. Another student called our office requesting help to make her Jewish sorority more Jewish. She complained that joining her sorority was her way of mak-

ing Jewish friends and proposed that Friday night dinner be a part of her sorority house's week. When her suggestion received a lukewarm reception, she felt it was due to students' ignorance relating to Jewish ritual. Still a third student received the Lights in Action CD-ROM with its section on spirituality and Jewish meditation and bemoaned the fact that there is no outlet for his spiritual inclinations on his campus.

These are students who are searching to make their Jewish identities more meaningful and to relate Judaism to their everyday lives. Lights in Action merely picks up on these appeals for Jewish outlets. Student activists like the above-mentioned students are involved in planning general educational seminars, a conference for Jewish students involved in Greek life, and a retreat for students interested in God and spirituality.

Jewish student movements such as Lights in Action have probably benefitted from a recent tendency toward multiculturalism. Our collective American fascination with our individual pasts and traditions has now been incorporated into the college experience. The phenomenon of burgeoning ethnic studies departments in general, and Jewish studies classes and departments in particular, points to students' interest in exploring their own heritage. Certainly, the students who organized and participated in LIA conferences for Jewish-Latino students as well as for children of interfaith families were attracted by the opportunity to delve into questions of their own identities.

Of course, there are students without any interest in making Judaism a part of their lives, and there are campuses without formal outlets for Jewish living such as Hillel. But when I look at the larger picture, I see students who are curious to examine how their roots and traditions speak to their contemporary concerns.

While at Columbia-Barnard, I was surrounded by students who had opportunities for Jewish involvement all around them and yet continued to create more of them. Working at Lights in Action, I meet students who also strive to spread Judaism as it relates to the particular interests of North American college students. I see the profusion of Jewish outlets as indicative of the emergence of an on-campus culture where students feel invested in the project of renewing Jewish life for themselves. ❁

## Changing with the Times:

# Students Connect with Judaism in their Own Ways

by TALI ROSENBLATT

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*Tali Rosenblatt is the Educational Director for Lights in Action. She graduated from Barnard College in May '99 with a BA in Jewish studies and was editor of Columbia University's Journal of Jewish Scholarship.*

**H**aving been involved in campus work for approximately 20 years, and having started the Chabad House at the University of Pennsylvania, there is one story I always tell about the origins of the Steinhardt Jewish Heritage Programs:

# Reaching the “Unreachable” A Peer to Peer Approach

by **RABBI MENACHEM SCHMIDT**

Every Friday night we would have a Shabbos dinner in the Chabad House at Penn with 60 students singing, carrying on, and telling stories. For a few years the Hillel director, Michael Kaplowitz, would come over after the meal, and we would all go out to the porch to say good Shabbos and good night. Across the street would be the SDT sorority, with 800 Jewish kids drinking beer on their porch. It was Friday night, but they were oblivious. The problem was obvious: How do we reach those kids?

Fortunately, in the fall of 1993,

and retreats, and visit with mentors—Jews who were outstanding in their chosen fields—who would inspire them Jewishly and professionally. Michael graciously gave the funds and came down to Penn to launch the program in the Houston Hall Student Center. It was immensely exciting and soon other organizations began to use this “peer to peer” approach at Michael’s encouragement.

Now, JHP has grown from 12 students reaching out to their friends at Penn to hundreds of students working on 12 campuses, our newest being the University of Virginia.

Historically, in 20th-Century America, if one wanted to make a Jewish contribution, it would be done by supporting a Jewish institution. But by 1990, the National Jewish Population Study had revealed that most Jews no longer felt this sort of institutional connection. The study served as a wake-up call to Jewish institutions, highlighting the problems of assimila-

tion and retreats, and visit with mentors—Jews who were outstanding in their chosen fields—who would inspire them Jewishly and professionally. Michael graciously gave the funds and came down to Penn to launch the program in the Houston Hall Student Center. It was immensely exciting and soon other organizations began to use this “peer to peer” approach at Michael’s encouragement.

not a person affiliates with an institution or organization is of minimal importance. They must realize and celebrate their membership in the most important group—the Jewish people. With such large numbers of Jews being “lost” to assimilation everyday, the typical outreach technique of reaching one person at a time is insufficient. By seeking out Jewish individuals who already are leaders in their social circles, a new network of Jewish communities can be established through groups of already existing friends. When the “right” individuals are motivated, they, in turn, reach out to their own peer groups. By turning on an entire social circle to Judaism, thousands are being reached through the leadership of a relative few. Through this process, we normally reach 25% of the unaffiliated Jewish students on fully functioning campuses. This is, by all estimations, great results. It is the cornerstone of JHP. Friends reaching out to friends to foster and celebrate their active “membership” in the Jewish people.

All of us doing work on campus are having a major impact in the current “Renaissance” in Jewish student life. But my greatest concern is that, as

buildings are going up, trips are being planned, and programs are being funded, we must not be swept away by the excitement of our successes. We must never lose sight of the need to create an inspiring experience for these students, one that continues to invigorate them

***Inspiration comes more from a person speaking from his or her heart... than from any specific “activity”***

later on in their lives. In each case, inspiration comes more from a person speaking from his or her heart, regardless of religious orientation, than from any specific “activity.” We have made enormous strides, but we must be sure that each experience carries a personal touch and real enthusiasm. ✨



Michael Steinhardt offered to help us implement our dream of “peer to peer” outreach. We would start Steinhardt Jewish Heritage Programs. Students would become interns, go to meetings

and the status quo. It became clear that a new paradigm for reaching Jews had to be established. The strength or benefits of an institution could no longer be the appeal of Judaism—a personal spark must touch the individual, creating a sense of spirituality, in order for that person to choose to let Judaism into his/her life. Whether or

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**Rabbi Menachem Schmidt** is Executive Director of the Jewish Heritage Programs.

One might think that with all the stresses and pressures of college, there is enough to do without the additional commitment of a sorority. At least that is what I thought when I began my studies at the University of Kansas. I thought that I would be able to meet Jewish students through other outlets and that I could receive a Jewish college experience through Hillel and other Jewish organizations. I was unsure of what a Jewish sorority, let alone any sorority, would offer me, and so I decided not to go through sorority rush.

One day, a classmate began talking to me about her sorority, Sigma Delta Tau. She asked me to go with her to a meeting and I agreed, believing she would never call. She did, however, and I reluctantly went to the meeting. Her action was simple, yet with that phone call, she gave me the opportunity of a lifetime. As soon as I arrived at the sorority house I felt the warmth I had been missing. It was then that it occurred to me exactly what a Jewish sorority could offer. Not only was I given the opportunity to live with other women who shared similar religious and cultural backgrounds, I also was given the chance to explore my Jewish heritage with other Jewish women, learning and growing with them.

More and more women are realizing the impact that being in a Jewish sorority can have on one's college experience. There is nothing like celebrating Hanukkah with all of your sorority sisters... and there is nothing more exciting than knowing that no matter where you go or what you do, your sorority sisters will share a similar bond that was manifested during your initiation. Being a member of SDT made college more comfortable for me. My sisters gave me the self-confidence and motivation I needed to make an impact in the sorority and on my campus.

I often think of how different I would be had this member not reached out to me. Without her

encouragement, I would never have joined Sigma Delta Tau. Most importantly, through the members of my sorority, I was given the Jewish experience I never received through other activities at my university. My membership in the chapter was more than simply another club to add to my resume. Through community service, scholastic achievements, and social action, I realized that being in a sorority is more than just a social commitment. Sororities offer women leadership, service opportunities, friendships, and career assistance for a lifetime. In addition to all of these opportunities, Sigma Delta Tau enabled me to meet other Jewish men and women, and to strengthen my identity as a Jewish woman.

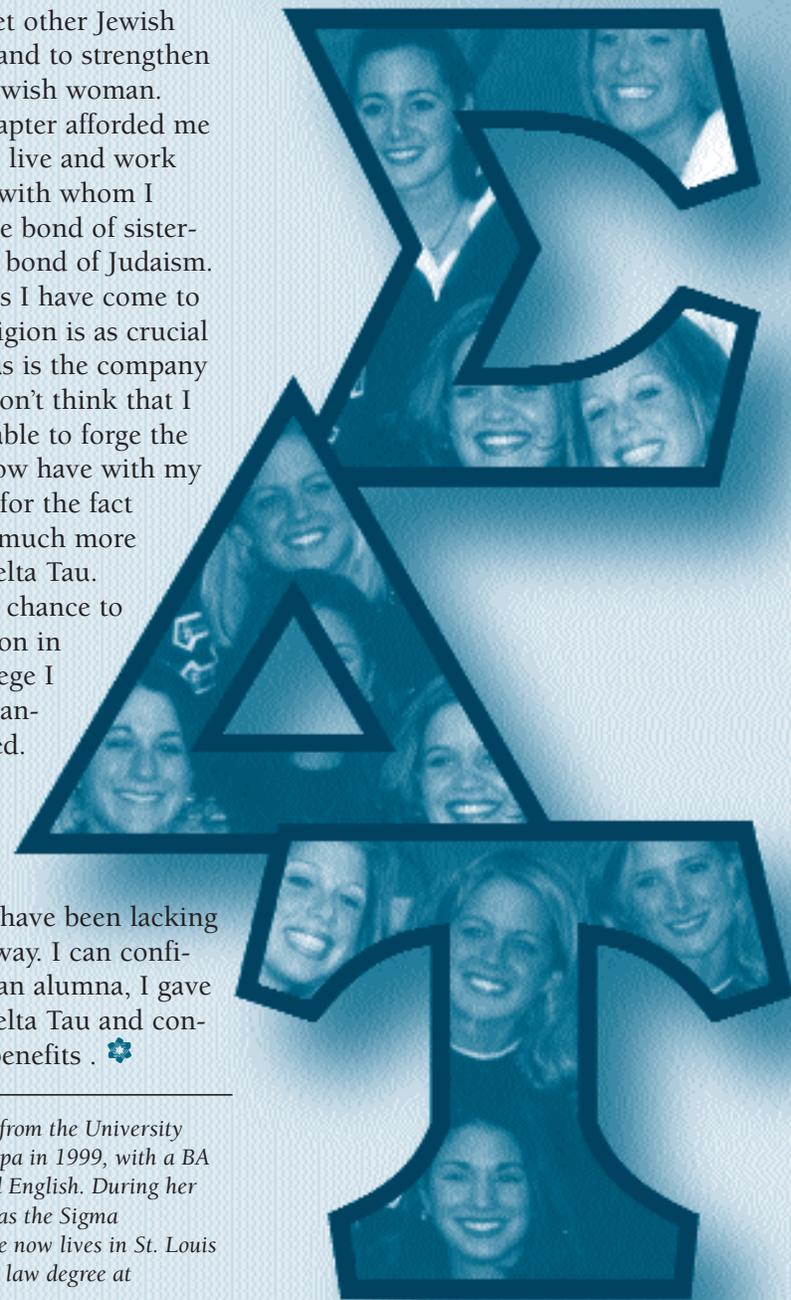
Joining the chapter afforded me the opportunity to live and work alongside women with whom I shared not only the bond of sisterhood, but also the bond of Judaism. Through my sisters I have come to realize that my religion is as crucial to my well-being as is the company of those I love. I don't think that I would have been able to forge the lifelong bonds I now have with my sisters were it not for the fact that we shared so much more than just Sigma Delta Tau. Being afforded the chance to solidify a foundation in Judaism is a privilege I now know that I cannot take for granted. If not for my involvement in a Jewish sorority, my college experience would have been lacking in a fundamental way. I can confidently say that as an alumna, I gave my all to Sigma Delta Tau and continue to reap the benefits. ❁

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*Karen Isley graduated from the University of Kansas Phi Beta Kappa in 1999, with a BA in Communications and English. During her time at KU, she served as the Sigma Delta Tau President. She now lives in St. Louis where she is pursuing a law degree at Washington University.*

# The Jewish Sorority Experience

by KAREN ISLEY



# Jewish Renaissance: A New Model for Campus Life

by RABBI HOWARD ALPERT



**O**n a recent Friday evening at the University of Pennsylvania, the myth that engagement activities (“outreach”) cannot be Jewishly substantive or spiritually compelling was shattered once again. On that evening, dinners organized by student interns from Hillel’s Jewish Renaissance Project (JRP) were held in locations all around campus. It was a Jewish Renaissance Shabbat.

The dinners offered more than kiddush and kugel. One was publicized as a “Learners’ Shabbat” for students with little or no familiarity with Shabbat practices. Thirty-five students shared a Shabbat dinner—some for the first time—and explored how different Jews can experience Shabbat in different ways. Students who chose a second dinner came prepared to discuss a lecture delivered at Penn by Benjamin Netanyahu earlier in the week. Like many families at the Shabbat table, they argued about Israel, politics, and Judaism, and found that though they have many opinions, they are a single People. A third dinner included students from Orthodox, Conservative and Reform families. They shared their own Shabbat observances and talked about an essay by Arthur Hertzberg on pluralism in the Jewish community. A fourth Shabbat dinner was held at a sorority house, where students discussed their personal experiences of being Jewish in a non-Jewish world.

Approximately 100 students participated in this Shabbat. The dinners were all different, yet they shared the qualities that are the hallmark of Jewish Renaissance programming. Each one engaged students in the substance of Jewish life, thereby drawing them into the Jewish community; each presented a variety of perspectives and encouraged students to find paths to their own Judaism; each was held in a venue in which students live, learn, and play, allowing them to experience Judaism as a natural part of everyday life; and each was peer-led.

The JRP is premised on the notion that serious students are intellectually active and spiritually seeking, and that programming for them can provide more than “lowest common denomination Judaism.” This, and its focus on guiding students as they integrate their Jewish activities into their overall university experience, sets JRP apart from the many outreach programs of an earlier era.

The principles of Jewish Renaissance programming have been successfully applied in a variety of settings. When Hillel extended its engagement activities into the university’s residence halls (known at the University of Pennsylvania as “college houses”), student interns were recruited from each college house and given the resources to make exploring and celebrating Jewish life an integral part of the college house experience. Working with other residents, these interns organize study groups, plan Shabbat and holiday dinners for all residents of the college house, and create projects that grow from the character of each house. Some projects, such as one organized to study Jewish feminism, have evolved into ongoing learning communities. Others have emerged from their college houses to become part of the mainstream Hillel program, bridging the gap between “engagement” and affiliation with the structured Jewish community.

In the same spirit, Jewish students in fraternities integrate Jewish and “Greek” values, through the activities of the Jewish Greek Council. Fraternity and sorority philanthropy becomes Tzedakah; Friday night meals become Shabbat celebrations for the entire House; and fraternity and sorority members participate in Birthright Israel, Holocaust education, and social action initiatives.

Student-led Jewish learning and community building are at the heart of Jewish Renaissance programming. Student interns work with their peers to develop educational resources, plan

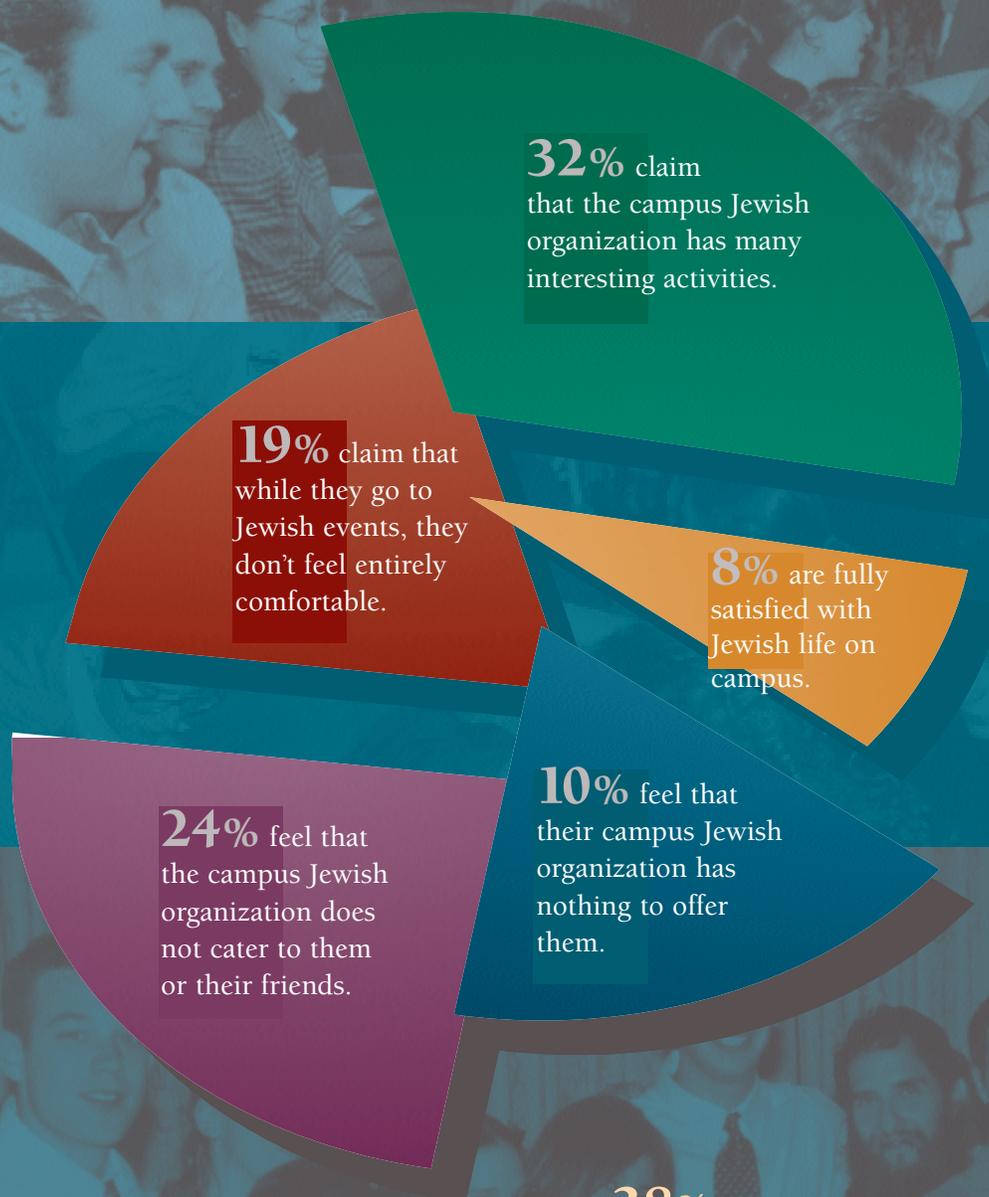
# Jewish Students on Campus

programs, and build learning communities. The Jewish Renaissance Web Page provides a forum for discussion of Jewish issues, and Jewish Renaissance versions of “Cliffs Notes” provide background on Jewish celebrations. Popular Jewish faculty members are recruited for mini-courses in areas of their personal interest, and campus-wide symposia bring attention to Jewish issues while providing material for follow-up discussions. In one instance, a roundtable discussion with Alan Dershowitz, Eliot Abrams, and Shoshana Cardin on the future of the Jewish community drew more than 700 students and led to five Shabbat dinner/ discussions across campus.

The results of these efforts support the premise that Jewish engagement succeeds when it is substantive and when it allows students to find their own paths to Judaism in a manner that is seamlessly integrated into other areas of their lives. The Jewish Renaissance Project engaged more than 1300 students in Jewish life during the 1998-99 academic year. It is on its way towards engaging many more than that by the end of the current academic year.

The Jewish Renaissance Project and the Center for Jewish Engagement are supported by Jewish Life Network, a Judy and Michael Steinhardt Foundation. ❁

**Rabbi Howard Alpert** is Executive Director of Hillel of Greater Philadelphia, a regional center of Hillel International. He has served as Hillel Director at Ohio State University and University of Illinois, and as Assistant Hillel Director at Queens College.



**a** recent survey conducted for *Lights in Action* showed that most Jewish students, many of whom have some Jewish background, are not very involved in Jewish life on campus, if at all. Names for this survey were gleaned from lists of Hillel members and from university registrars and traditionally Jewish fraternities and sororities. Survey conducted by Market Strategies.

- 73% rate their Jewish campus activity as minimal
- 33% rate their Jewish campus activity as zero
- 29% attended some Jewish day school
- 75% attended a Jewish camp or belonged to a youth group



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*“At this moment, American Jewry  
is engaged in a race between  
rebuilding and disintegration.*

*I believe we are at grave risk as  
a community. Yes, I know the story  
about the ever-dying Jewish world.*

*But today, alas, seems different.*

*Continuation of the status quo is  
the road to oblivion. So I ask:*

*When you are playing a losing  
game-what do you do?*

*The answer I propose is:*

*Change the game. Rewrite the rules.*

*Do not accept the comfortable status quo.*

*I am committed to innovation*

*as my philanthropic priority.”*

MICHAEL STEINHARDT