

A False Alarm on Intermarriage? • James Baker on Yasser Arafat
Argentina After the Bomb • The Last Word on Pre-marital Sex

THE JEWISH MAGAZINE FOR THE '90S

DECEMBER 1994/TEVET 5755 \$4.50

MOMENT

Israel
Programs
Guide

The Jewish Renewal Movement

*From the Counterculture
to the Mainstream*



MOMENT

The Magazine of Jewish Culture and Opinion

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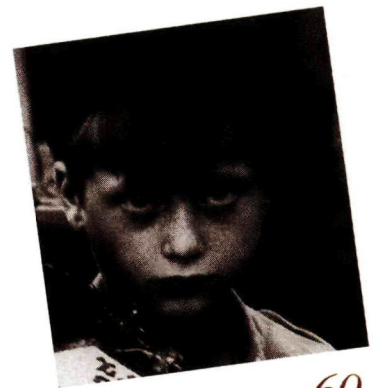
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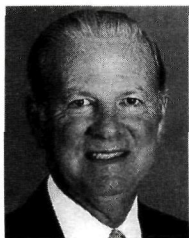
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In the 1970s, young Jews like Levi Kelman combined Jewish tradition with the "do-it-yourself" philosophy of the counter-culture. As Jewish Renewal took hold, many of its leaders found homes in the "establishment" in the U.S. and in Israel, where Rabbi Kelman now leads the Kol Haneshamah Reform congregation. *Photo by Bill Aron*



IN A MOMENT

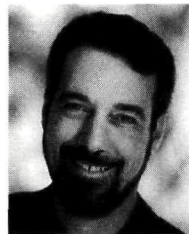


BAKER

One year ago in MOMENT, former Secretary of State **James A. Baker III** warned Yasser Arafat not to squander the promise of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles

by failing either to control terrorism or to encourage the Arab states to make peace with Israel. Baker assesses the PLO chairman's performance since The Handshake on the White House lawn in "The Shake-Out: Does Arafat Have the Courage to Lead?" (p. 40).

Baker served as Secretary of State from 1989-92 and was a chief architect of the Madrid peace process. He is a partner in the law firm of Baker and Botts.



KAMENETZ

Their beards are grayer, their waists thicker, but participants in the loosely defined "Jewish Renewal" movement continue to pursue a spiritual agenda that combines feminism, mysticism, social action and a nonconformist approach to Jewish law and liturgy. A product of the 1960s, Renewal still has much to teach the Jewish establishment about engaging young and disaffected Jews, writes **Rodger Kamenetz** in "Has the Jewish Renewal Movement Made It in the Mainstream?" (p. 42).

Kamenetz is author of *The Jew in the Lotus* (Harper/San Francisco, 1994), an account of a Jewish-Buddhist dialogue between a delegation of American Jews and the Dalai Lama. Kamenetz is a poet and writer living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he directs the Jewish studies program at Louisiana State University. His first book of poetry, *The Missing Jew*, was reissued by Time Being Books in 1992.

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BRIEGER

The terrorist bomb that destroyed their Buenos Aires headquarters and killed 100 people also shattered the complacency of Argentina's 250,000-strong Jewish community.

In "Argentina's Jews After the Bomb: From Scapegoats to Pariahs" (p. 50), **Pedro Brieger** follows the serpentine trails of the criminal investigation, and describes a community that is anguished and angry.

Brieger is a writer, sociologist and journalism instructor in Buenos Aires, where he is a frequent contributor to major Argentinian periodicals. He has reported for *The Miami Herald* and *U.S. News & World Report*, and is the author of three books in Spanish, including *The Middle East, the Gulf War, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (1991).



COHEN

Is the spiraling interfaith marriage rate among American Jews merely a demographic version of "survival of the fittest"? **Steven M. Cohen** makes that provocative assertion, and debunks the commonly held belief that the intermarriage rate is 52 percent, in "Why Intermarriage May Not Threaten Jewish Continuity" (p. 54).

Cohen and his family made aliyah in 1992 to Jerusalem, where he is a professor at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at Hebrew University. He is spending this year and next in New Haven, Connecticut, and teaching at Queens (N.Y.) College. His latest book (with Charles Liebman) is *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and the American Experiences*. He is at work with Arnold Eisen on a book about Jewish belief.



WEINBERG

Alberta Weinberg may never know who or what it was that pointed her to the ruins of an ancient synagogue in Italy, but in "An Angel at Ostia" (p. 58), she leaves no mystery as to why she found the site so heavenly.

Weinberg, a free lance writer, is a former regional director of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization and former principal of the Community High School of Jewish Studies in Seattle. She recently opened Found Objects, an art and artifact store in Seattle.



THE SONNENFELDS

They were the lucky few: the 5,000 European children who trained with Youth Aliyah as farmers and sailed for agricultural settlements in Palestine

on the eve of the Holocaust. Their bittersweet story is told in "Out of the Whirlwind" (p. 60), which features the work of eyewitnesses and photographers **Leni** and **Herbert Sonnenfeld** and a report by **Sandee Brawarsky**.



BRAWARSKY

Colleagues and marriage partners for 41 years, the Sonnenfelds sensitively documented Jewish life in their native Germany, and in Palestine, Israel and the United States. Herbert died

in 1972, but Leni, at 87, continues to work as a photographer from her home in New York City. Sandee Brawarsky writes a book column for the *New York Jewish Week*. Her first book, *How to Meet Men as Smart as You*, was published in October by Fireside/Simon & Schuster.

The interfaith marriage rate is neither as high nor as hazardous as we often believe:

We are losing Jews on the margins, but the center is holding.

**STEVEN
M. COHEN**

Why Intermarriage May ^{Not} Threaten Jewish Continuity

One statistic that has seared the American Jewish consciousness, seemingly threatening their group survival, is the “fact” that over half—52 percent, to be precise—of Jewish young people are marrying out of the faith.

A closer look, however, shows that this figure from the 1991 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) is somewhat inflated. The figure remains high (about 41 percent), but a more in-depth understanding of this and related statistics reveals that intermarriage poses no immediate threat to the continuity or survival of the American Jewish community as a *group*. What we are really witnessing is a transformation to, using the current argot, a “leaner and meaner” American Jewish community, a somewhat pared down version that is, in many ways, stronger, more committed and more observant.

Even with such a high rate of intermarriage, there is a good chance that coming generations will produce almost as many Jews

active in home observance or communal life as there are today. Their absolute number may well hold steady, or decline only slightly. At the same time, if the past is any guide to the future, almost all (over 9 in 10 by my calculations) of the grandchildren of today’s mixed marriages will not identify as Jews. Paradoxically, *because* of the rising rates of intermarriage and the dissipation of individual Jewish identity it eventually produces, the *proportion* of Jews who can be regarded as actively involved is likely to increase. In terms of Jewish continuity, intermarriage is a disaster for individuals; from a group point of view, its impact is more ambiguous.

There is of course no question that Jews today are intermarrying in much higher numbers than their elders did. But what is the impact of this undoubted fact? Let’s compare two groups of American Jews, using the NJPS data: those age 35-44 and their elders age 55-64. No matter how we calculate intermarriage rates, the younger group has clearly married gentiles at a rate two to three times that of the older group. If intermarriage is as destructive to Jewish life as is generally thought, then we would expect far lower rates of Jewish activity among the younger group than among the older group. By and large, however, younger adults as a group are no less ritually active than their elders. Despite their higher rates of intermarriage, those 35-44 are just as likely as those 55-64 to participate in a seder (about 70 percent), light Chanukah candles (also about 70 percent), attend High Holiday services and fast on Yom Kippur (each about 58 percent), light Sabbath candles (20-21 percent), and have kosher dishes (about 15 percent).

On some other measures of affiliation, the younger group is nearly equal to their elders: reading a Jewish newspaper (about two-



REUTERS

Jewish demonstrators march in front of the Supreme Court in Buenos Aires, demanding that the authorities "confront terror" and bring the perpetrators of the AMIA bombing to justice. The demonstration takes place weekly, and is modeled on similar protests calling for the punishment of those who led the oppressive military regime of the 1970s.

of Erich Priebke, a captain in Hitler's SS, given refuge in Argentina since 1948; Priebke was charged with giving the orders in the murders of 335 Italian civilians during the Second World War. At this writing, the extradition case remains unresolved and Priebke is still in Argentina. But his case has once again raised the subject of Argentina's infamous role in harboring Nazis. Coincidentally or not, a Jewish research committee investigating Nazi activities was scheduled to meet in the AMIA building on the day of the bombing; their lives were saved only because the meeting was postponed. The community's own massive documentation of the Nazi period was kept in a separate building, and also survived the attack.

Another possible Nazi connection involves Alejandro Sucksdorf, a former Argentinian army intelligence service agent and Nazi supporter. A short time before the

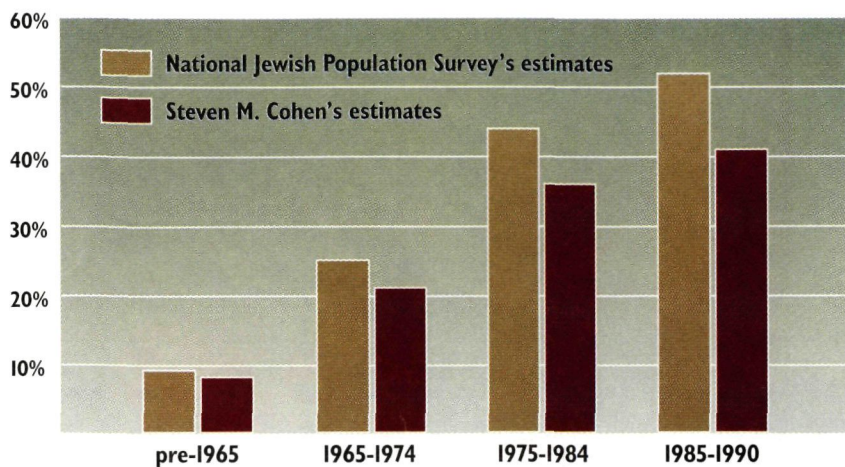
AMIA bombing, he was arrested after his wife accused him of participating in the Israeli embassy attack. Investigators found no evidence linking him to the bombing, but they did find an arsenal in his home. When brought before a judge after his arrest, Sucksdorf declared "I'm a Nazi and the majority of the members of the [Argentinian] army are Nazis."

Yet it is hard to tie all these tenuous connections to the AMIA bombing in any logical way. Close observers of the Nazi contingent in Argentina say it is highly doubtful that they have the means to perpetrate an attack of this magnitude.

What about the Argentinian army itself and its allied intelligence services? Their prestige and standing in Argentinian society have plummeted since the last military government was ousted in 1983, and the army's budget has been drastically reduced.

continued on page 88

INTERMARRIAGE IS CLEARLY ON THE RISE... Mixed Marriages* By Year of Marriage



* Includes previous marriage if not now married.

More and more Jews are marrying out of the faith, but, says the author, earlier analyses of the National Jewish Population Survey misclassified some people as Jews and non-Jews, and used imprecise weighting. Both problems inflated intermarriage estimates.

thirds), currently belonging to a synagogue (almost half do), and regularly performing Jewish volunteer work (about one in six).

Before looking at the implications of these perhaps surprising statistics, let me round out the picture. It is not all good news. The younger group is also much less likely to have mostly Jewish friends (38 percent for the 35-44-year-olds versus 55 percent for the 55-64-year-olds), a key indicator of diluted ethnicity; it is also less likely to belong to a Jewish organization other than a synagogue (31 percent versus 42 percent), and less likely to contribute generously, or at all, to Jewish philanthropies. The younger group is twice as likely to have Christmas trees (37 percent versus 19 percent).

How much of this change can be attributed to increased intermarriage, however? Even younger Jews who marry other Jews are less likely to have mostly Jewish friends, contribute generously to Jewish philanthropies, etc. than an earlier generation. As is universally recognized, major Jewish organizations have been losing membership

for reasons quite apart from growing intermarriage rates. Not every adverse demographic development in the Jewish population is attributable to increased intermarriage.

Overall, then, the picture is somewhat mixed. Yet the figures reflect considerable stability in all forms of ritual practice. How can we explain the Jewish community's apparent resilience in maintaining the level of many forms of Jewish activity in the face of high and rising intermarriage rates?

One factor that accounts for this seeming paradox lies in the character of the intermarriers as a group. As a rule, intermarriers come from less intensive Jewish backgrounds (fewer rituals in the home, less Jewish education, etc.). In short, intermarriage strikes disproportionately at what a biologist might call the weaker members of the species.

Taking this metaphor further, the Jewishly stronger members of the species are more able to resist intermarriage and, in fact, are taking deliberate steps to lessen the chances of intermarriage among their offspring. For example, over

the last two decades, Jewish parents have dramatically increased the enrollment of their youngsters in Jewish day schools. Similarly, enrollment in Jewish studies courses in colleges has climbed sharply.

Quite apart from the undoubted losses to the population from intermarriage and assimilation, a few other factors are independently strengthening the American Jewish community, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Losses due to intermarriage and assimilation are being partially offset by immigration from the former Soviet Union (about 40,000 per year) and from Israel (a net balance of about 8,000 a year in favor of the United States). The "Russians" seem eventually to adopt American Jewish patterns of ritual observance, while the Israelis tend to score well above the American Jewish average on many other measures of Jewish involvement. Both immigrant groups will produce children who, in all likelihood, will intermarry much less frequently than the American Jewish average.

Another factor to be considered is the differential birthrates of the more involved versus the less involved. Both the Orthodox and the more observant non-Orthodox exhibit what demographers call "above-replacement fertility levels." Intermarriers, by contrast, have very low birth-rates, with non-observant in-married Jews in between. Because of these differential birthrates we find a substantial increase in the proportion of Orthodox among younger Jews: Approximately 6 percent of American Jews in their fifties are identified as Orthodox; the percentage among children under 10 is about twice that.

Moreover, there appears to be a significant increase in very traditional observance among younger versus older Jewish adults. Again, comparing the 35-to-44 age group

with the 55-to-64 age group, we find that the younger group is more likely to refrain from handling money on the Sabbath (14 percent versus 9 percent), and far more likely to fast on the Fast of Esther (6 percent versus 1 percent). This suggests a significant growth in Orthodoxy, even amidst a simultaneous increase in intermarriage.

Not only will these "pluses" strengthen the Jewish community in the future, the "minuses" reported in the Council of Jewish Federation (CJF) document known as Highlights, containing the official report of the NJPS, are often inaccurate. The actual rates of assimilation, out-conversion, and intermarriage are all lower than reported in Highlights.

Take a critical finding on assimilation: Highlights makes the stunning claim that over 400,000 "Adults of Jewish Parentage" practice another religion and no longer identify as Jews. This would seem to indicate that in just the last generation nearly half a million erstwhile Jews have abandoned Judaism. In point of fact, however, none of the respondents representing the 400,000 alleged drop-outs reported having a Jewish parent. In the preliminary stages of the interviewing, these respondents reported that somebody in their households is now Jewish, or considers themselves Jewish, or was raised Jewish, or had a Jewish parent. When asked afterwards if they themselves had a Jewish parent. When asked afterwards if they themselves had a Jewish mother or father, none - absolutely none - responded affirmatively. To correct the mis-labeling of these respondents, the Highlights authors distributed an errata sheet that advises researchers to replace the term "Adults of Jewish Parentage" with the less demanding terms, "Adults of Jewish Background." Why these respondents qualify as even having a "Jewish background" - whatever that may mean - is not clear. What is clear is that there are nowhere near 400,000-plus grown children of Jewish parents who now practice a religion other than Judaism.

Another key finding in Highlights relates to conversion - conversion out of Judaism. Highlights suggests that the number of converts out of Judaism is slightly greater than "Jews-by-choice" (born-gentiles who convert to Judaism). According to Highlights, Jews have lost 210,000 and gained 185,000, for a cumulative net loss of about 25,000.

The definition of "Jews-by-choice" is, as we might expect, people who were raised Christian and then converted to Judaism. But the definition of out-converts is not parallel. Nearly two-thirds of the supposed out-converts were raised as Christians, not as Jews, although they had one Jewish parent. Thus, the Catholic-raised child of a Jewish father and Catholic mother who remains Catholic is regarded by Highlights as someone who "converted out" of Judaism. Moreover, as we shall see, if this person marries a Catholic, the authors regard this an intermarriage, contributing to the 52 percent intermarriage rate.

The effect of these inconsistent definitions - the definition of out-converts is far broader than that of in-converts - is to tip the numerical balance drastically and artificially in the direction of out-converts. If we use parallel definitions of converts in both directions, the conversion ratio approximates almost three to one in favor of the Jewish population. In other words, as result of conversion, American Jews have gained nearly three times as many people as they have lost.

This kind of inaccuracy also affects the key figure that can probably never be eradicated from our communal mind: that 52 percent of those who were born or raised as Jews and who married in 1985-1990 are said to have married non-Jews who never converted to Judaism.

What's wrong with this statistic?

As already noted, people who were raised as gentiles, provided they had one Jewish parent, are counted as Jews and their parent, are counted as Jews and their marriage to (another) gentile is counted as a Jewish-gentile intermarriage. As might be expected, given their non-Jewish upbringing, they all married gentiles. This inflates the intermarriage figure by about two points.

Next: To determine whether a Jewish respondent's spouse was Jewish, the NJPS interview did not simply ask, "Is your husband/wife Jewish?" or words to that effect. Instead, it asked three separate questions: (1) What was your spouse's religion at birth; (2) in what religion was your spouse raised; (3) what religion is your spouse now? To each of these questions, the questionnaire provided five possible answers: Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Other, and None. Over 20 percent of the recently married (the group included in the 52 percent intermarriage rate) answered "other" or "none" to all three questions on the religion of their spouse, making it difficult to determine whether their spouses are really Jewish or gentile. Highlights arbitrarily treated almost all spouses described as having "other" religion as gentiles and almost all those with "none" as Jews. Truth to tell, the identities of some marginal Jews are so murky and the NJPS evidence is so inconclusive that it is extremely difficult to decide who is a Jew; different researchers can easily come to different conclusions. I searched the data myself for other clues such as holiday observance, organizational affiliation, etc. as to whether marginal spouses (those characterized as "Other" or "None") were Jews. In almost four percent of cases, my judgment was different from the Highlights researchers.'

A more important deficiency involves the "weighting" procedure used by the Highlights researchers. Weighting is a technique researchers use when certain types of people (for example, those with less schooling) respond to a request to be interviewed, say, less frequently than people with more schooling. If we know that a sample should contain a certain percent of people with little schooling, we can "correct" for this imbalance by giving greater weight, statistically, to the responses of those with less education.

The NJPS study of 2,441 Jews was drawn from a larger sample of 125,000 Americans. The "weights" that the Highlights researchers used were developed from the proportions in the larger study, composed almost exclusively of gentile households. The Highlights researchers then applied these weights to the comparatively tiny Jewish sub-sample. In so doing, they made the reasonable - but untested - assumption the Jews responded to the interviewers with roughly the same frequency and pattern as gentiles. It now appears this assumption is faulty.

In 1991, the same research company that conducted the NJPS a year earlier surveyed over 2,000 respondents living in the eight-county New York downstate metropolitan area. All would agree that the distributions in this sample of more than 2,000 would be far more accurate than the sub-sample of just over 400 cases drawn from the larger national study on which the NJPS was based.

When we compare the results of the two samples, however, taken just a year apart, we find two somewhat startling differences. First, the New York study projects almost a quarter million more Jews living in the area than the NJPS data. Second, the New York study found its Jews to be more Jewishly involved than the New York sub-sample in the NJPS data.

If we simply remove the "weights" used by the NJPS researchers and count each household in the NJPS equally - one respondent, one vote - we find that the differences in the two studies relating to the number of Jews in the area and the extent of their Jewish involvement almost completely disappear. This suggests that the weights used by the NJPS researchers are distorting the data rather than improving their accuracy.

When these "weights" are removed, the 1985-1990 intermarriage rate drops another five points.

For these reasons (and a few more) I arrive at an intermarriage rate of 41 percent rather than 52 percent.

While the trends I have outlined do not indicate an utter disaster for the quality of Jewish life on the group level, neither do they foretell a resurgence. Moreover, on the family level, for the vast majority of families, intermarriage eventually severs the link of future generations with the Jewish people.

The number of ritually active Jews, however, will probably hold steady. The population losses will begin in about 30 or 40 years when the children and grandchildren of the recent wave of intermarriages become adults. The dropouts will be drawn largely from families who are currently relatively peripheral to the Jewish community and less ritually active.

As people with partial Jewish ancestry drop out, they will leave behind a slightly smaller population, but with a proportionally larger percentage of committed Jews. Stated differently, by the year 2050, the American Jewish community may shrink numerically but be stronger qualitatively.

Nearly 50 years ago Rabbi Milton Steinberg wrote words that are still pertinent to the current debate:

In every generation, some Jews have dropped out of the ranks, and Jewry has not only survived the loss, it has probably been the better for it... I do not see why there must be between 4,000,000 and 5,000,000 Jews in America. Neither in Scripture nor in Rabbinic literature is such a number ordained, certainly not in logic. I would then far rather have an American Jewry of 2,000,000 persons who really want to be Jews, who are excited and stimulated by the prospect, than a community twice as large, but half of which is either cold or hostile to its density.

The loss will be nowhere near as large as Rabbi Steinberg's hypothetical comment suggests. While thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of mixed ancestry Jews will be lost to Judaism, there will still be millions of American Jews around, and a large - if not growing - fraction of this community will, relatively speaking, be highly involved in Jewish life. Thus while the

continuity of many Jewish families may be at risk, the continuity of an an active American Jewish community is not.