

On Responding to the Challenge of the Alienated and Indifferent Jew in America*

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Ahad Ha'am, the early twentieth century philosopher of Zionism shows that all minorities in western society have no choice but to imitate the larger environment in which they live. Yet, there are two ways to imitate. He calls them "imitation of absorption" (or absorptive imitation) and "imitation of competition" (or competitive imitation). The first kind of imitation leads to total assimilation.

Introduction

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"A Study of American Jewish Identification," which appeared in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, in 1980, begins with these questions.

"How well are American Jews getting along as Americans?" All we have to do is look around at our Jewish neighbors, friends and family members. While there are some mountains in the American success story that Jews have not yet scaled, we have done very well in the *goldene medina* if socioeconomic status is the barometer of success as Americans.

"How well are American Jews getting along as Jews?" This is another question entirely. To be sure, the profusion of studies, articles, seminars and conferences on this problem during the past decade has been unmatched in any other arena of Jewish concern.

I don't presume to have the answers or the wisdom required to understand and respond to the complex challenge of Jewish alienation. But I do have a Jewish educator's point of view on how well Jews are getting along as Jews.

The best way to begin is by defining a Jewish telegram. Do you know what a Jewish telegram is? It's a five-word message. "Start worrying! Details will follow." This paper is an attempt to provide some of the salient details.

First, a note about what this essay is not. I could have chosen to consider the psychopersonal dimensions of alienation and indifference. This would have required a casework approach which, in essence, would have individualized the treatment of this subject. I chose, instead, to deal with alienation as a social group phenomenon. My discussion, therefore, will use demographic and sociological information about the American Jewish community qua community as its baseline.

The Communal and Historical Context of Alienation

The problem, the challenge and the threat of alienation must be considered in the broad context of Jewish life. That context contains a variety of significant, positive developments in the American Jewish community. According to Rabbi Judah Nadich (who made a point of underscoring progress in American Jewish life at a recent Jewish Welfare Board Task Force meeting) the positive developments are: growth of Jewish day schools; increased Federation support to Jewish education; growing awareness

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by communal leadership of the importance of Jewish education; the growth of Jewish summer camps; the year-round youth and adult tours and visits to Israel; and the growth of Judaica courses, programs and departments on the University campus. Moreover, rabbinical seminaries are producing their own faculties and the American Jewish community is producing its own Judaic scholars.¹ Each of us can add other positive indicators of Jewish life.

Nadich underscored his optimism regarding the future of the American Jewish community by citing from his close to fifty-year rabbinic experience.

In the 1930's, he noted, when a grandfather was called to the Torah in the synagogue, he knew the blessings well, but his sons recited them hesitatingly, and his grandchildren hardly knew them or did not know them at all.

In 1983, the children know the blessings well, but their parents barely make it, and their grandparents cannot recite them at all.²

According to Charles Silberman, it's been hard, but Jews are making it as Jews in America. "What is amazing in an open society," he claims, "is not how many Jews are opting out, but how many are opting in."³ However that may be true, the problem of opting out is growing more serious.

Rabbi Richard Israel, director of the Hillel Foundations of Greater Boston, places the challenge of alienation in a sociohistorical perspective:

"In Vilna at the turn of the century, or in the Warsaw Ghetto in the forties, there was no concern about unaffiliated Jews. In both of these situations, Jews had options about the sort of Jews they wanted to be, but the option *not* to be Jews was hardly available. Our people today have clear options not to be Jewish. Without having to be programmatic assimilationists, they can

drift away quietly as non-Christians, something that could not have happened easily to many generations of the past."⁴

Americanization and Deculturation

This drifting away is our concern today. Fewer than one in five Jews in the United States is foreign-born and most of these are elderly. Fully 40 percent are third-and fourth-generation Americans. Except for a relatively small number of immigrants (including those from the Soviet Union and Israel) the American Jewish community, notwithstanding the impact of Israel, is now left to stand largely on its own for maintenance of both its numbers and vitality.⁵

This seemingly innocent statement has powerful implications for Jewish continuity. It is abundantly clear that Jewish identification declines as the distance from the immigrant generation grows. (The recent growth of a *Baal Tshuvah* movement may appear to contradict this, but the movement has only affected a very small segment of the Jewish population.) As Jews become more Americanized, Jewish involvement decreases, with the exception of two observances that seem to have a strong hold on large numbers of Jews. These are attendance at a Passover seder and lighting of Hanukkah candles. Several reasons have been suggested for this phenomenon. These rituals seem to provide a Jewish alternative to Easter and Christmas; they do not demand social isolation or adoption of a unique Jewish lifestyle, they are child-centered and they are performed infrequently—only once a year.⁶

If the process of diminishing Jewish affiliation with each succeeding generation continues to its logical conclusion, the American Jewish community should be totally de-Judaized in the not-too-distant future. However, even though

our future as a uniquely Jewish community is endangered, the worst-case scenario has not materialized.

Several reasons for this have been advanced by Marshal Sklare, who notes that "American ethnic groups move through three stages: (1) self-segregation, (2) acculturation, and (3) assimilation."⁷ According to Sklare, "Jews reached the second stage with great speed. Yet, while almost all Jews have acculturated, the majority have not moved to the final position on the cycle: assimilation."⁸ He suggests that ten factors have kept American Jews from moving beyond the stage of acculturation to that of mass assimilation. In analyzing these factors, we see that five of them have to do with the relationship of the larger gentile society to the Jew. Essentially, the role of the gentile has retarded the movement of assimilation.

Five of the factors are specific to the Jewish community. These are:

1) The size of the American Jewish community has been sufficiently large and concentrated to make Jewish life possible.

2) The new-found secularism of the Jew has retained a religious base.

3) The belief that Jewish culture is supra-social as well as social—that it can retain a hold on individuals for more than sentimental reasons.

4) The widespread belief that to be a Jew is to be a member of an elite people; and

5) The emergence of the State of Israel and the impact which it has had upon Jewish identity.⁹

While these factors are not debatable, they are changeable—thereby leading to the possibility of assimilation. As Jews move to exurbia, concentration of Jewish population becomes weakened. Moreover, the very mobility of young adult Jews has reduced the level of their Jewish affiliation.

Also, as time marches on, the religious

base of Jewish secularism fades away. And, the supra-social nature of Jewish culture cannot endure unless reinforced by positive Jewish experiences. This holds true also for the matter of Jewish pride in and identity with the State of Israel.

While we may only be on the threshold of assimilation, as Sklare maintains, and not assimilated entirely, deculturation of the vast majority of American Jews is an ever-present danger.

What are the characteristics of Jewish alienation with which we should be concerned as Jewish communal workers?

Although sociologists and demographers don't all interpret available Jewish demographic data in the same manner, there is a consensus about the principle, "As goes the larger gentile society, so goes the Jewish minority." The greatest influence on trends in the Jewish community, all demographers concur, is the open American society and its rapidly changing demographic characteristics.

Jewish Family Patterns

According to Urie Bronfenbrenner, "the family is falling apart."¹⁰

Everyone understands that the family is the key to establishing patterns of identity. However, although not all researchers agree about the degree of danger that the Jewish family faces, all feel that we should concentrate our efforts on counteracting the erosion that is taking place in the Jewish family.

That erosion has several dimensions:

Outmarriage increased from three percent in 1930 to 40 percent in 1980, and continues to grow. According to Professors U.O. Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola of the Hebrew University, only 25 percent of children of outmarriages contracted since 1965 are Jewish.¹¹

While there is some evidence, if not

hard data, to substantiate the observation that conversions make up for some or all of the dropouts due to intermarriage, from a Jewish school enrollment point of view, the fallout is significant.

A 1978 study by sociologist Egon Mayer points to the long-range implications of intermarriage. According to Prof. Mayer, "Intermarriage represents a threat to Jewish continuity as evidenced by low conversion rate, the low level of Jewish conduct and practice in mixed marriages, the low proportion of Jews regarded as Jews, and the fact that most of the children are not socialized as Jews."¹²

Prof. Mayer's assessment of the situation received graphic confirmation in two studies conducted by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, in 1978 and 1979. Our studies revealed the extent to which intermarriage affects Jewish belongingness and identity. In each study, one hundred Reform and Conservative congregational schools with a combined enrollment of 12,000 children were surveyed. Based on the intermarriage rate for the Jewish parent cohort involved, we expected to find between 15 and 25 percent of the children coming from intermarried families. We found instead that only three percent of the children enrolled in these schools were offspring of intermarriage.¹³

Not unrelated to the growing phenomenon of intermarriage is the level of interdating—a practice that must be addressed by all Jewish communal agencies.

Another threat to Jewish continuity is the fact that marital rates are lower among Jews than among non-Jewish white population. Jews marry less and later, and the fertility rate is significantly lower than in the non-Jewish white population (8–10 births per 1000 Jews compared to 15 births per 1000 non-Jews).¹⁴ The current estimated average

of 1.4 to 1.6 children per Jewish family is dramatically less than the 2.3 children needed for sheer replenishment.¹⁵

One leading demographer, Calvin Goldscheider of the Hebrew University, is not pessimistic about family size per se. To be sure, Jewish family size in America has always been smaller than virtually all other ethnic groups. Goldscheider has asserted that the low Jewish birthrate is neither new nor surprising "because that fits into the way of life that Jews and other middle-class people are living in contemporary America."¹⁶

Goldscheider's optimism stems from his belief that numbers are less important than strength of commitment. It is the least committed Jews who choose not to reproduce and who marry out of the faith. He even suspects that the intermarriage rate may be stabilizing as "the less committed Jews are being filtered out." The lifestyle of those who live intensely Jewish lives includes a commitment to the traditional values of family and children. Therefore he urges a shift from a concern with the quantity of Jews to one that concentrates on "how to improve the quality of Jewish life, and how to improve the Jewishness of the Jewish community."¹⁷

Other scholars, however, underscore the serious implications of the dropping birthrate on the potential for Jewish group continuity.¹⁸

In addition to marrying later or not marrying at all, and having fewer children, Jews are divorcing more frequently. As a result, the number of single-person households has more than doubled in the last decade. The number of young-adult households without children has also sharply risen. And we may expect Jewish singlehood and divorce rates to increase.¹⁹

Jewishness is inextricably connected with Jewish family life. Jewish identification is closely related to the family life

cycle. Involvement of young people in Jewish affairs and Jewish ritual is greatest when their children become of school age and tends to remain at that higher level thereafter.²⁰

One of the most consistent findings in the research dealing with Jewish identification is the positive relationship between an individual's Jewish identification and that of his parents.²¹ Moreover, the influence of the spouse—particularly the *akeret habayit* (the woman of the house)—is most crucial in identity formation among the members of the family. Indeed, according to Prof. Harold Himmelfarb, of Ohio University, the spouse is "the single most important interpersonal influence upon adult Jewish identification."²²

It follows that the dramatic changes in Jewish family patterns are bound to spell a dangerous decline in Jewish identification during the next several decades. Prof. Steven M. Cohen of Queens College in New York suggests that changing family patterns will significantly diminish Jewish identification in at least three ways:

1) Alternative households—singles, childless couples and divorcees—are less Jewishly oriented. Since the number of these alternative households is growing, overall Jewishness will decline.

2) Singles, childless couples and divorcees have created their own communities, subcultures and counter-norms to support and justify their once-deviant status. As a result, they may have less use for the conventional Jewish community and may well be less likely to undertake Jewish activities, public or private. In short, they may be moving further away from Jewish life.

3) Finally, alternative family growth entails a long-range impact. In the past, the few Jews in alternative family stages decreased their Jewish activities upon leaving their parental homes and then, as married parents, they resumed

higher levels of Jewish activity. But the rapid growth in alternative Jewish households means that many Jews are spending a greater portion of their lives outside of a conventional family, possibly rubbing out eventual resumption of higher levels of Jewishness.²³

Jewish Observance Patterns

Since Jewish continuity is a Jewish communal objective, inevitably the quality of the Jewish dimension of the relationship of Jewish communal workers with clients and agency members is crucial. The nature of the challenge is highlighted by the current observance patterns of Jewish families.

The Gallup Poll in 1979 revealed that 40 percent of Jews belong to a synagogue, compared with 70 percent of non-Jews who belong to a church. Twenty percent of Jews attend synagogue with some regularity. On the other hand, 40 percent of non-Jews attend church regularly.²⁴

The National Survey of Jews in 1981–82 noted that candles are lit on Friday night in 22 percent of Jewish homes. Fifty-four percent of Jews fast on Yom Kippur and a similar percentage attends synagogue on Rosh Hashanah. Fifteen percent have kosher dishes. Fewer than 10 percent observe the Sabbath.²⁵

The Jewish School and the Home

According to the current enrollment trends, only 60 percent of Jewish youth will be exposed to a formal Jewish educational experience during their lifetimes.²⁶

If being alienated from Jewishness means ignoring or negating values important to Jewish continuity, then the trend in Jewish school enrollment is as enlightening as it is disheartening. It reveals a Jewish community becoming

polarized between the Jewish "haves" and Jewish "have nots."

In 1962, the peak year of Jewish school enrollment in America, there were some 600,000 Jewish children attending Jewish schools. Of these, 540,000 were in Jewish supplementary schools (afternoon congregational schools, communal Hebrew schools and one-day-a-week schools); 60,000 were in Jewish all-day schools and yeshivot.²⁷

Now, in 1983, only 340,000 pupils are enrolled in Jewish schools of all types, an overall drop of 45 percent from 600,000. What is critical here is the dual nature of the trend; Jewish supplementary school enrollment decreased dramatically from 540,000 to 220,000 (a 60 percent decline). At the same time, the Jewish day school pupil population almost doubled, from 60,000 to 117,000.²⁸

The decline in supplementary school enrollment is due essentially to three reasons, related in different ways to Jewish family values:

1) The precipitous drop in birthrate has decreased the pool of available children.

2) Intermarriage has diminished the number of enrollees.

3) Apathy to Jewish life (particularly to the synagogue) and to Jewish education viewed as preparation for Jewish synagogue life has reduced the percentage of school age children attending Jewish schools.²⁹

The findings of several recent studies shed light on the last reason for nonenrollment—adult apathy to Jewish life.

Some parents interviewed simply "dislike the temple" or "don't like the rabbi." Moreover, many young adults indicated that they do not see religion playing a role in their modern lifestyle.

Many parents for whom permissiveness is an important dimension of home life, don't feel that Jewish education is

that important to warrant forcing children to "lose their free time after public school hours." This feeling is reinforced by their own unfavorable childhood Jewish school experiences.

The young Jewish adults studied clearly feel comfortable in the process of becoming assimilated and feel no personal or social need for Jewish education.

Finally, by their own admission, many young parents are materialistic. Paying for Jewish schooling makes less money available for social, recreational and other family activities.³⁰

These reasons together present formidable evidence of alienation. The home is crucial to the effectiveness of the Jewish school. Research findings in general education clearly underscore the key role of the family in the effectiveness of the school experience.³¹ Studies in Catholic education have shown vividly that Catholic religious education, by and large, can only affect pupils whose parents are religiously observant.³² Similarly, there is evidence to show that Jewish education has its greatest impact on those who come from highly religious homes.³³

To be sure, Jewish schooling is effective and possible only in the presence of parental commitment.³⁴

This set of findings sends a powerful message to the Jewish community and suggests that new levels of understanding and cooperation ought to be established between schools and communal agencies dealing with Jewish families.

While the family is clearly pivotal, we should not lose sight of the impact that other institutions can have. In an essay on Jewish identity in Australia, Geula Solomon notes that "The social role of the school in fostering friendship groups and discouraging intermarriage is often denigrated and mocked. Yet, schools along with the family, youth movements and other communal orga-

nizations, are socialization agents. They help young people to feel comfortable with other Jews and to form close personal bonds with them."³⁵

Schools and other Jewish communal agencies can help reinforce each other as Jewish socializing agents. Cooperative efforts can help make programs like Jewish family retreats and *shabbatonim* a widespread phenomenon.

The Jewish Community and Jewish Identification

Moving out from the family, the school, and individual communal agencies, it is evident that the community itself has an influence on a person's Jewish identification. Here we are faced with a mixed bag of facts.³⁶

On the one hand, Jewish affiliation rates in small communities are significantly higher than in large urban centers. Toledo and Charleston, South Carolina, boast affiliation rates in excess of 90 percent. On the other hand, smaller communities and suburban communities further away from centers of Jewish concentration seem most in danger of assimilation.

In her candid essay on Jewish identity in Australia, Solomon notes that "a basic factor creating problems of identity and survival is the small size of Jewish communities." She claims that "minority communities need to be of some minimum size in order to be viable and to maintain a distinctive identity."³⁷ Indirectly, this message can be applied to larger Jewish communities in America about the small Jewish satellite communities in their vicinity.

Another finding about the Australian Jewish community has interesting implications for American Jewry. According to Solomon, "One of the major reasons for the difficulty of developing a Jewish identity in Australia is that we are a

Jewishly ignorant community . . . The mass of Australian Jews," she says, "do not know the content of Judaism, nor the values, attitudes and behavior appropriate to Jews" . . .³⁸

Echoing this point of view, Jonathan Omer-Man, director of religious outreach of the Los Angeles Hillel Council, claims that *all* of the people, 20-55 years of age, he has counseled were "individuals whose Jewish knowledge was so limited that they were unable to find access to the sources and resources of Jewish wisdom when they needed it."³⁹

According to Solomon, "One practical consequence of this mass ignorance is that the Jewish family can no longer fulfill its traditional role as the primary Jewish socialization agent. This role has been relegated to the Jewish school, the institution which is now expected to make the child *into a Jew*, rather than to educate him *as a Jew*. Whether Jewish schools can, in fact, provide a sense of Jewish identity is problematic. "Jewish schools in Australia," Solomon emphasizes, "are themselves adaptations to the values and institutions of the dominant Australian ethos. Far from conflicting with the home influence, they reinforce it."⁴⁰

Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets. That is why the quality of Jewish supplementary school programs, reflecting, as they do, the level of parental commitment to Jewishness and Jewish education, can do little to counteract the influences of the environment and the homes from which pupils come.

Before tackling another dimension of alienation, it might be in order to indicate that Geula Solomon's prognosis for Jewish survival in Australia is negative. She believes that "it is only a question of how long before the Jewish identity of Jews in Australia disappears. Generally," she says, "the long-term prospects for the development of viable Jewish identity when Jews are a minority in an

open Christian society appear minimal."⁴¹

She stresses that "only where Jews are themselves the dominant majority and only when the dominant culture of their environment is Jewish, can they live in circumstances favorable to the development of a meaningful and creative Jewish identity."⁴²

For Geula Solomon, the answer is *Aliyah*.

While this is not, by any means, a realistic solution for most American Jews, Solomon's analysis underscores the need for a Jewish environment, the creation of which is a major challenge to each Jewish community.

Upsurge of Orthodox Jewry

The Orthodox Jewish community has understood the significance of creating or maintaining a communal environment conducive to continuity.

Recently, front-page headlines in the *New York Times* declared, "Orthodox Judaism is Buoyed by a Resurgence in New York." In the rather long, well documented article, Kenneth Briggs, the *Times* religion editor, notes:

"Earlier in this century, many students of Jewish life looked on the small remnant of Orthodox Judaism as an anachronism that would soon fade away. They said Orthodoxy, with its strict rules for much of daily life and its attitudes toward women, would be left behind as Jews were attracted to more liberal branches of Judaism, which seemed better attuned to the modern world.

"On the contrary, Jewish leaders from all branches, including Reform and Conservative, say that in the last two decades Orthodoxy has shown the greatest vitality among the major branches of Judaism, growing from within and attracting Jews seeking a

clear spiritual philosophy and a total religious commitment.

"Both cultural and religious factors, religion experts say, have contributed to the rise of Orthodoxy. Among the most prominent trends has been a shift to the right across a broad spectrum of American religion. The chief beneficiaries have been the most conservative Christian and Jewish groups such as Orthodoxy.

"Another reason experts cite for the surge is a search for a clear set of religious and philosophical beliefs by those who feel adrift in a culture of widespread uncertainty. Orthodox Judaism is seen as a sharp alternative to this climate, offering solid meaning in an age of ambiguity.

"Gone are the predictions of the inevitable demise of what was widely dismissed as an obsolete movement that could not cope with the challenges of an 'open society.'"⁴³

To add several other reasons for the Orthodox resurgence. Orthodox Jews have succeeded in forming their own subcommunities. More Orthodox Jews, particularly the sectarian Orthodox, marry; they marry *younger* and have *more* children, assert their right to be Jewish in a pluralistic society, and have succeeded in making Judaism an intrinsic part of the home and community.

In contrast to the *New York Times* essay on Orthodoxy I just cited, which bespeaks continuity, the very same issue of that newspaper highlights the opposite phenomenon as well. The obituary section lists 17 obituaries with Jewish-sounding names. Of these, one had a non-Jewish wife; at least four had intermarried children, and six had non-Jewish burials.⁴⁴

It is clear that the Jewish continuity of the offspring of a substantial number of the deceased is very much in question.

If Orthodoxy is flourishing, it means that the Jewish future of this population

is assured. But Orthodox Jewry represents only 10 percent of the American Jewish population. Our concern here is with the majority of the other 90 percent who have no Jewish affiliation—neither Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform or Zionist.

Needed Models of Identification That Work

What works for Orthodoxy will not necessarily be applicable to the other denominations and all the nondenominational Jews. Needed are a variety of models that can work for the rest of the Jewish population and that can stem erosion of Jewish identification.

Where does one begin in developing the response? How does one go about responding? Fortunately, providing the response has not been my charge in this essay.

However, I shall conclude with several possible approaches or guidelines.

1. First, in dealing with alienation and indifference we should use a preventive approach and begin with marginally affiliated families. This means working with parents of supplementary school children and nursery school pupils. Doing this requires skills that educators do not always have. Responding to the challenge therefore, provides a unique opportunity for an interdisciplinary approach—utilizing the skills of a variety of Jewish communal workers. This also means concentrating, at first, on member or client Jews who are the best potential for increased Jewish identification, and leaving the harder-to-reach Jews for a later time.

Here, the value of Jewish family life education looms large. It is another opportunity for an interdisciplinary approach whereby Jewish educators can be helpful to other workers who lack the necessary Judaic knowledge and skills to

vitalize the Jewish dimension of family life education.

2. There are degrees of alienation and indifference. The target population must be viewed as a varied group of potential involvees or returnees.

Some alienated Jews may have indeed left the fold, have been “turned off”; yet they may retain some nostalgia. Others never were part of a Jewish experience, having themselves grown up in an indifferent or alienated environment. They have no memory of Jewish affiliation or activity and no Jewish nostalgia.

The week my wife and I spent as infiltrators in the Hebrew-Christian movement some years ago revealed that a large portion of the young Jews who were searching for a value system were never exposed to any Jewish experience or study. In fact, many of the young Jews who joined the Hebrew-Christians had just had their first exposure to Sukkot as Hebrew-Christians. With few exceptions, none of them had been in a Sukkan as Jewish children or young adults and were thrilled to have a Sukkan experience.

3. Further study and experimentation is needed to determine the baseline indicators of Jewish identification. When this is done I'm ready to wager they'll include *Kashrut*; some form of Sabbath home observance; (Ahad Ha'am: “More than the Jews kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept the Jews”); regular synagogue attendance; and some form of organizational relationship with Israel.

4. The development of alternative environments emphasizing the experiential aspect of Jewish life (Havurot and leisure-time fellowship) needs to be seriously explored.

5. Innovative approaches and creative Jewish programming must be developed to respond to the unique needs of the growing single, divorced and intermarried populations.

6. Intergenerational activity should be

considered. As Jews have less intergenerational contact, they demonstrate more alienation from their past.

7. Finally, staff training and continuing education are essential. Here, Jewish educators and rabbis can be valuable assets to communal agency programs. Staff must show a willingness to learn more and "do" more Jewish.

In Conclusion

How well are American Jews getting along as Jews?

Poorly, at best. Dangerously, at worst.

Unquestionably, American Jews have acculturated rapidly. Whether their continued Americanization will be accompanied by increasing de-culturation remains to be seen.

In his penetrating essay "Imitation and Assimilation," Ahad Ha'am, the early twentieth century philosopher of Zionism shows that all minorities in western society have no choice but to imitate the larger environment in which they live. Yet, there are two ways to imitate. He calls them "imitation of absorption" (or absorptive imitation) and "Imitation of competition" (or competitive imitation). The first kind of imitation leads to total assimilation. Via the second form of emulation, the minority group—in this case, the Jews—becomes stronger and competes with the majority culture as it learns to use the technical skills and know-how of the larger society in order to communicate and reinforce its own values. "Competitive imitation" is also a philosophy for our times.

The challenge here is two-fold: 1) to counteract the forces that are eroding Jewish family life; and 2) to respond creatively to new demographic realities, particularly to the unique Jewish needs of growing numbers of unaffiliated Jews.

What can accomplish this better than the cooperative interdisciplinary efforts

of Jewish communal agencies! Who can do this better than Jewish communal workers and educators especially prepared for this awesome challenge!

The time is now!

To paraphrase the Almighty's charge to Gideon, some 3,000 years ago, when the survival of the Israelites was endangered: "Go forward with your special skills and commitment and insure the continuity of the Jewish people!"

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